

## Overthrowing the Money-changers; The Curse of the Fig Tree

Matt 21:12-14,

The story of Jesus overturning the tables of the money-changers occurs in all four gospels. In the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) it is near the end of the Gospels. In John it is near the beginning. Because of the placement of the story, some scholars believe that there might have been two instances of Jesus overturning the tables.

*One can imagine what the scene was like during the Passover Week with thousands of Jewish pilgrims making their way into the Temple to make ritualistic sacrifices of animals. The courtyard was filled with livestock, pigeons, lambs, oxen, etc., and many more banking tables than usual because of the huge crowds.*

*It was necessary to exchange their money from their home countries (Roman and Greek coins) into the Jewish Temple Shekel or Tyrian money, so that they could purchase the sacrificial animals. In that exchange an extra cost was involved, and the money-changers made quite a bit of extra profit. Jesus made a huge demonstration of his displeasure at the commercialization of '[his] Father's house,' and as a result of that, earned the anger of the scribes and Pharisees.*

“Matthew gives the account of the cleansing of the Temple before the cursing of the fig-tree; Mark reverses this order. The selling of doves and the exchanging of money was permissible in the outer courts of the Temple; the reason why Jesus protested was because the traders were in the habit of defrauding the pilgrims who came to the city from all lands. . . Nothing so lowers Christianity in the thoughts of men like using it as a cloak for corruption in business” (*Abingdon* 986).

“Upon entering Jerusalem Jesus' first overt act was to cleanse the Temple. Nearly three years before, he had purged it as a warning, but the

Temple authorities had not during the intervening years corrected the corruption he had exposed. Now he purged it again, this time as a judgment. . . . As he had found the fig tree barren, so he found the Temple barren of its proper fruits” (Shotwell 301).

12 ¶ And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,

“By acting out this prophetic parable Jesus was attacking a powerful, lucrative, and well-entrenched privilege. All financial transactions in the temple had to be in Tyrian currency, and the money-changers were allowed a substantial discount. The half-shekel was worth two denarii, the denarius being a laborer’s wage for a day and two denarii enough for a few days’ lodging” (*AB Matthew 255*).

“The money-changers sat in the Temple-court, 1) to receive the half-shekel which was due from every male Israelite at this period and could be paid either at home or in Jerusalem; 2) to change foreign money into Jewish currency, with which alone the half-shekel could be paid, or animals for sacrifice be bought” (Dummelow 694).

“By driving out the money-changers and the sellers of small animals for sacrifice Jesus threatened the economic functioning of the temple, which must surely have been one of the largest commercial enterprises in Palestine. All contributions to the temple had to be made in Jewish money, so that Jews from the lands of the Roman Empire and beyond who came to Jerusalem had to exchange their local money for Jerusalem coinage--to the benefit of the money-changers, of course” (*ICB 635*).

“The money-changers converted the standard Greek and Roman currency into temple currency, in which the half-shekel temple tax had to be paid. But letting these things go on at the temple site transformed a place of solemn worship into a market where the hum of trade mingled

with the bleating and cooing of animals and birds. Moreover, especially on the great feasts, opportunities for extortion abounded. Jesus drove the lot out” (*EBC* 8.441).

**13 And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.**

“The emphasis on prayer shows that Jesus thinks of the Temple as a place for worship and not as a place for sacrifices” (*Abingdon* 986).

It is the commercialism of the temple area that Jesus denounces by quoting from Isa. 56:7; Jer. 7:11 (*ICB* 635).

“Thieves and robbers live in dens and caves. Judea was then much infested with them. In their dens, thieves devise and practise iniquity. These buyers and sellers imitated them. They made the temple a place of gain; they cheated and defrauded; they took advantage of the poor, and by their being under a necessity of purchasing these articles for sacrifice, they *robbed* them, by selling what they had at an enormous price” (Barnes 99).

**14 And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.**

“Jesus spent the remainder of Monday teaching in the Temple courts. And when the common people present saw his fearlessness and heard his reprimand of the Temple authorities, they forgot for the moment their dread of the Sanhedrin and brought to him their lame and blind. With growing jubilation they witnessed one extraordinary healing after another as he made his Father’s house a true house of prayer, till the Temple rang with praise and even the children cried ‘Hosanna to the son of David’ (Shotwell 301).

“Verses 14-15 are found only in Matthew. Not only is v. 14 the last mention of Jesus’ healing ministry, but it takes place *en to hiero* (‘at the temple [site]’) and probably within the temple precincts in the Court of

the Gentiles. . . . Most Jewish authorities forbade any person lame, blind, deaf, or mute from offering a sacrifice, from ‘appearing before Yahweh in his temple. . . . But Jesus heals them, thus showing that ‘one greater than the temple is here’. He himself cannot be contaminated, and he heals and makes clean those who come into contact with him. These two actions--cleansing the temple and the healing miracles-- jointly declare his superiority over the temple” (*EBC* 8.442).