

D. Jerusalem and Its Rulers (2:13-3:21)

John recorded that, after the wedding in Cana, Jesus went down to Capernaum with His disciples. Capernaum became the center of Jesus' Galilean ministry and all four of the gospel writers recounted episodes in and near this town. Here John noted only that Jesus spent a few days in Capernaum (2:12) before turning his attention to the Lord's time in Jerusalem during the Passover. Scholars have proposed various explanations for verse 12, with some even questioning its authenticity since it contributes little to John's account. Assuming John did indeed pen this statement, it's likely he did so as a transition into the next section.

1. John continued his account of Jesus' self-presentation to Israel by turning next to the people of Jerusalem and particularly the Jewish rulers. These authorities already knew about Jesus (1:19-28), but it seems they had never encountered Him in person. John set that first encounter within the context of the Passover. It is also important to note that John provided no timeline in his narrative. It's unclear how much time elapsed between Jesus' few days in Capernaum and this episode in Jerusalem; John's account states only that it occurred after the brief stay in Capernaum. At the same time, the text certainly suggests that this episode occurred early in Jesus' ministry.

The reason the timing is important is that the three synoptic writers place Jesus' temple cleansing at the very end of His ministry when He'd gone up to Jerusalem for the Passover during which He would be crucified (cf. Matthew 21:1-13; Mark 11:1-17; Luke 19:28-46). Matthew and Luke place this episode on the day of Jesus' "triumphal entry," while Mark has it occurring on the following day. John recorded Jesus' ride into Jerusalem (12:12ff), but omitted any reference to His entering the temple and confronting the moneychangers. These discrepancies have led some scholars to conclude that Jesus twice cleared the temple at the time of the Passover; others believe Jesus simply *warned* about the temple's destruction on this first Passover visit (John 2:19), but then *acted* against it at His final Passover. The obvious problem with the latter view is that John indicated that Jesus issued His warning as His answer to the Jews who questioned His right and reason for clearing the temple (2:13-18). And if there were indeed two temple-cleansing episodes, why did John omit that from his account (ref. 12:12-19)?

Whatever the solution to the discrepancies within the four accounts, what is important here is that John treated this episode as marking the beginning of Jesus' public presence. The three synoptic writers recorded that Jesus had been ministering publically in Galilee for some time before making this journey to Jerusalem (cf. Matthew 4:12-23; Mark 1:14-28; Luke 4:14-41) and John, being one of Jesus' first disciples, obviously knew this. It's clear he chose to omit Jesus' early Galilean ministry and did so because his concern was *thematic* rather than chronological. John nowhere indicates that he sought to record an exact chronology of Jesus' life and ministry; rather, he constructed his account around certain themes in order to reveal and build his case for Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah. (One of those themes is that Jesus is the fulfillment of the temple.) While John's narrative recounts actual historical events and circumstances in Jesus' life and ministry, those events and circumstances are arranged thematically. This means that care must be taken when seeking to assign the chronology of particulars within his record.

John's account of this episode in Jerusalem has several parts: Jesus' actions in the temple, the Jews' interrogation of him afterward, Jesus' response to them along with John's commentary, the effect of Jesus' visit on the people, and Jesus' reaction to them.

- a. John recorded that, while in Jerusalem for the Passover, Jesus found the temple engulfed in commerce. Because many Jews and proselytes traveled far to be in Jerusalem for Passover, lambs had to be provided to them for the Passover sacrifice and meal. The result was that Passover – and the sacrificial system in general – had become a hugely profitable business with buying and selling taking place on the temple grounds, likely the court of the Gentiles. (Because the priests had to approve sacrificial animals, the door was wide open for collusion with the merchants.) To ensure daily trade, other animals employed in sacrificial rites were also available. Thus the worship of God had been transformed into a lucrative business enterprise and the temple had become a marketplace (2:13-14).
- b. Jesus was outraged when He saw what was taking place and He immediately went into the area where the moneychangers were operating and began overturning their tables and driving them away with a scourge. And, as He drove them out of the temple area, He railed against them for turning His Father's house into a house of merchants and a den of thieves (2:15-16; cf. Jeremiah 7:1-11 with Mark 11:17). Jesus undoubtedly created such a disturbance that he attracted the shocked attention of every person present. Even His disciples must have stood there stunned, unable to believe what they were seeing. Observing the indignation of this man whom they believed to be Israel's Messiah, their minds were reminded (perhaps by the prompting of the Holy Spirit) of the words of the psalmist: "*Zeal for your house will consume me*" (2:17).

This citation is from Psalm 69:9, a psalm of David. The psalm centers on David's plea to God for deliverance and preserving mercy in the face of attacks and reproaches from other men, including those closest to him. *And it was David's faithful devotion to his God that particularly drew this maltreatment.* Men scorned him because they scorned God, and one thing that especially drew their ire was David's zeal for Yahweh's house (ref. esp. vv. 4-12). This psalm expressed David's struggles and pleas, but Jesus' disciples saw Him mirrored in David's words. Indeed, David *prefigured* the Messiah, not only because of God's covenant with him (2 Samuel 7; cf. Acts 2:22-32), but also because David's life, kingdom and reign looked to another; David was to find his own fulfillment in another "David," namely the covenant son promised to him. This is why the Scripture refers to this One under the name of *David* (Ezekiel 34, 37; Hosea 3).

And David's zeal for Yahweh's house had its focal point in his desire to build Him a permanent sanctuary in Jerusalem, the city the Lord had chosen for His own habitation. David's zeal to build God a house consumed him, and God revealed that this zeal was going to reach its zenith and be satiated in his covenant son: *Yahweh would fulfill David's fervent longing by building **him** a house – a dynastic house – in a son who would establish his throne and kingdom forever.*

David's zeal for the Lord's sanctuary would one day be satisfied; Yahweh would indeed have a permanent dwelling in His chosen habitation, but the Davidic Covenant revealed that this house was to be built in connection with David's *dynastic* house – the house that, at the time of Jesus' coming, remained demolished and desolate. Solomon had built a house for the Lord, but it, like the dynasty and kingdom Solomon presided over, had long since been destroyed. The recovered exiles had rebuilt the temple, but it remained desolate (devoid of Yahweh's presence), just as did David's house. And both would remain desolate until such time as both were restored together. For what the Davidic Covenant promised, the prophets clarified: *Whether or not a building sat on the temple mount, it remained true that Yahweh's house would be built by David's Branch* (Zechariah 6:9-15). Again, David's zeal to realize a permanent dwelling for his God would be satisfied when He built a house for David in the promised seed.

Now, at last, David's Branch had finally come; now, David's long-fallen tabernacle was being restored (Amos 9:11-15). And the restoration of David's royal house meant the restoration of his throne and kingdom (cf. Luke 1:26-33, 67-75). And the restoration of David's kingdom meant the return of Israel's true King; it meant Yahweh's return to Zion to again be enthroned in His sanctuary and initiate His reign as Lord over all the earth (cf. Isaiah 9:1-7, 11:1-13; Ezekiel 43:1-12; Daniel 2:25-44; Joel 3:16-21; Micah 4:1-8; Zephaniah 3:14-20; Haggai 2:1-9; Zechariah 1-4, 6:9-15, 9:9-17, 14:1-21 with Matthew 1:17-2:6; Luke 1).

- c. These considerations are critical to grasping the significance of Jesus' disciples linking His actions with David's words in Psalm 69. Without them, it's easy to conclude that the point is simply that Jesus and David shared the same passion for God's sanctuary. Others believe John recorded the disciples' recollection of David's words to highlight their fear that Jesus' zeal would incur the same hostility as David's had. But framed within the wider Davidic context, it seems apparent that John had a more profound point in mind. John's design in his account was to reveal Jesus as the Messiah. And one key component of that disclosure is the fact that Jesus embodied Yahweh's sanctuary. He is the realization of Bethel (1:51), *and this truth rendered the Jerusalem temple superfluous*. That structure was marked out for destruction, not only because it was now irrelevant, but also because it embodied the corruption of Yahweh's people and their worship. The fate of the tabernacle at Shiloh and the first temple built by Solomon was appointed for the second one as well (ref. Jeremiah 7:1-14).

Jesus' actions testified that the temple stood condemned; it would be torn down. But this didn't mean the end of Yahweh's worship or of the hope of His return. He *had* returned and His sanctuary had been restored. But before this true sanctuary could realize its destiny as the house of prayer and worship for all the world (cf. 1 Kings 8:12-61, esp. vv. 41-43 with Mark 11:17; also Isaiah 2:1-4, 56:1-8; Zechariah 2:1-13, 8:18-23), it, too, had to be torn down and rebuilt. Thus, when the Jews demanded that Jesus justify His actions, He responded that He would rebuild the sanctuary *they* were going to destroy (2:18-19).

It is notable that this interchange with the Jewish authorities is unique to John's account; none of the synoptic writers record these words, though Matthew and Mark reference them in their record of Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin. Evidently Jesus' statement was so shocking to those who heard it that they never forgot it; indeed it became a primary charge against Him (ref. Matthew 26:57-62, 27:39-40; Mark 14:53-58, 15:29-30). Jesus' insistence about the temple thus framed His self-disclosure to Israel: *The way He identified Himself to His interrogators that first Passover in Jerusalem was the way His interrogators identified Him during His final Passover in Jerusalem.* At the time Jesus uttered it, His claim incited scoffing and scorn (2:20); at the end, it incurred condemnation and crucifixion. John's account highlights his conviction that Jesus as Yahweh's true sanctuary was fundamental to His identity and self-disclosure to the people of Israel. Therefore, in seeking to reveal Jesus to his readers, what could be more appropriate or effective than presenting Him in the way He presented Himself?

- d. John concluded this episode in Jerusalem by providing his own commentary on it. He recorded that the Jews who heard Jesus' assertion derided it as outlandish and delusional. They couldn't begin to get their heads around it, *but neither could His own disciples.* John noted that it was Jesus' resurrection that finally made sense of His claim (vv. 20-22). Only then did His disciples really grasp and own His words, *but their insight also provoked their belief in the Scriptures.* This statement is easily passed over, but it's hugely important. For it highlights John's belief that what Jesus was asserting about Himself that day in Jerusalem was nothing other than what the Scripture had promised. *John was here insisting that the Scripture had spoken of the Messiah as Yahweh's true sanctuary – a sanctuary which would attain its ultimacy as Yahweh's house for all the nations through a process of condemnation and destruction followed by Messiah's work of rebuilding.* One need only consider the prophecies of Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah to see that John's conviction was well founded.

Through His prophets, the Lord had been proclaiming these glorious truths for centuries, but even the most studied scholars of Israel didn't discern them. They saw in the Scriptures the promise of the temple's renewal and they understood that its renewal was foundational to Yahweh's return, the end of exile and the inauguration of the messianic kingdom pledged to David. But they conceived all of these things with natural minds; they didn't discern them in the light of Jesus of Nazareth and His words and works. Even those who believed Him to be the Messiah didn't really *know* Him; they believed in Him as the messiah of their own conviction. Though believing, they remained unbelieving. This is another core theme in John's account and he notably introduced it here in connection with its counterpart theme of Jesus as Yahweh's true sanctuary (2:23-25; cf. 3:1-15, 22-26, 6:1-15, 22-64, 7:1-44, 8:31-59, 11:1-27, 13:1-29, 14:1-11, etc.). Thus John's summary: Jesus' signs were causing men to believe that He was the Messiah, but He was quite aware of the nature of this "faith." Knowing what lies even in the "faithful" human heart in its natural condition, Jesus understood that He could not entrust Himself to any of these who were "believing" in Him.