

Jesus Purges the Temple

Matthew 21:12–17¹

Introduction

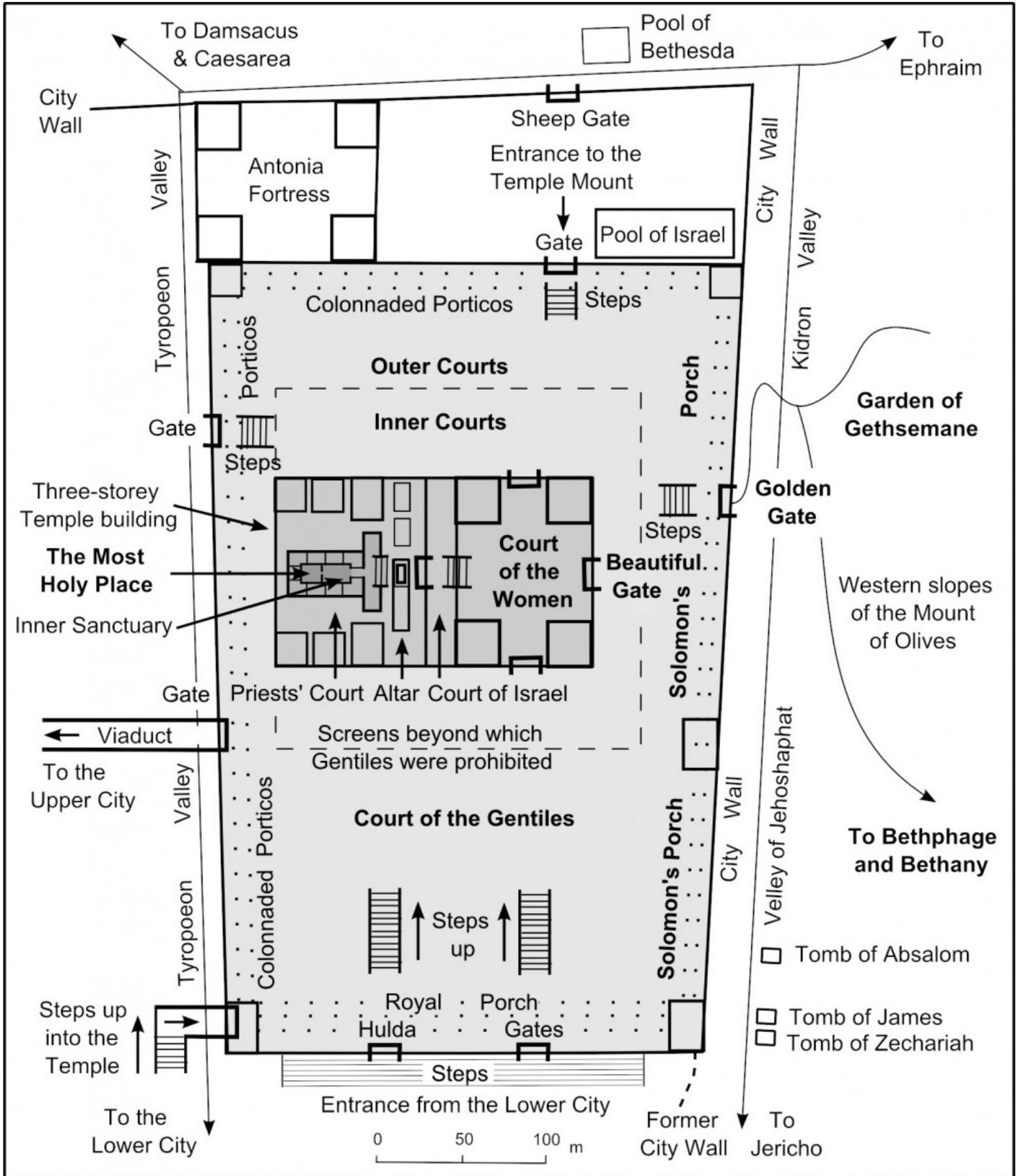
The entire book of Matthew is essentially an argument for the kingship of Jesus Christ. Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience who had a hard time believing that He was the Messiah. As we learned this morning, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on an untamed donkey to the cries of praise from the Jewish people (Matt. 21:1–11). But their praise to Him was not for His coming to redeem humanity from sin; their praise was for His supposed mission of ridding them from the power and authority of Rome. However, in our text for today their praise and admiration would turn into shock. Rather than claiming to be their human king, Jesus manifested his *divine* kingship over them. Matthew included this section of Scripture that we will look at help us know this truth: *that you must remember and believe that Jesus is the divine King who possesses all authority and as such deserves your unashamed worship.*

Matthew 21:12–17 ¹² Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹³ And He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’” ¹⁴ Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant ¹⁶ and said to Him, “Do You hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes. Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise?’” ¹⁷ Then He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and He lodged there.

Preview Outline:

1. **Jesus’ Authority Over Temple Worship (vv. 12–13)**
 2. **Jesus’ Aid to Helpless Worshipers (v. 14)**
 3. **Jesus’ Acceptance of Humanity’s Praise (vv. 15–17)**
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¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version.



Jesus' divine kingship is evidenced by—

I. Jesus' Authority Over Temple Worship (vv. 12–13)

“Jesus went into the temple of God” — Jesus, having just come into Jerusalem, went to the place of worship: the temple of God. Typically, the temple was buzzing with activity. In the temple people would offer one of five sacrifices: burnt offerings (Lev. 1:3–17), grain offerings (Lev. 2:1–16), peace offerings (Lev. 3:1–17), sin offerings (Lev. 4:1–5:13), and trespass offerings (Lev. 5:14–6:7). The temple was the center of penitent Israel's offering for sin—a grim reminder of the seriousness of sin against a holy God. Notice, as well, that the KJV includes the descriptor that Jesus entered the “temple of God” (v. 12). The sinless Son of God went into the center of worship towards God to demonstrate His divine authority as God.

“And drove out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money changers, and the seats of them that sold doves” — Jesus goes to the temple where the people no doubt expected Him to give a proclamation of His plan to vindicate the oppressed Jewish nation. They expected Him to save them from the oppression of Rome. Instead, He does the unthinkable: he begins overturning the tables and casting out the money changers and those who sold doves. Why were there moneychangers and those who sold animals in the temple in the first place?

Those who sold doves — Many people travelled great distances to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover Feast. Because of this, they could not bring with them the animals required for the sacrifices (see Leviticus). The priests and religious leaders recognized this problem and made a convenient means for people to come and purchase the animal necessary for sacrifice—at a severely high price. In essence, they were purloining the people in the temple where God was to be worshiped. Matthew specifically mentions that Jesus overturned the chairs of those who sold “doves.” The Lord describes in the book of Leviticus who could sacrifice doves in the temple:

Leviticus 5:7 (NASB) But if he cannot afford a lamb, then he shall bring to the Lord his guilt offering for that in which he has sinned, two turtledoves or two young pigeons, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering.

The sacrifice of doves frequently indicated that a person was financially incapable of spending money for the more expensive animals (e.g. Joseph and Mary in Luke 2:24). There were, of course, other animals sold in the Gentile Courtyard.

Moneychangers — The moneychangers were those who converted the foreign currency of travelers into the temple currency (shekels) so that they could purchase animals. Because these foreigners needed this “convenience” it was impossible to avoid utilizing the moneychangers. One commentators notes that “those who had to have their money converted into the exact amount for an offering were charged a twenty-five percent fee.”²

² MacArthur, John, *Matthew 16–23*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988): 268.

All of this happened in the outer court for the Gentiles (see diagram of Temple on page 2).

And He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’” — After tossing out the worshipers and overturning tables and chairs (a sign of indignation), Jesus quotes two portions of Scripture to all who were there:

Isaiah 56:6–7 ⁶“Also the sons of the foreigner Who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, And to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants— Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And holds fast My covenant— ⁷Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices *Will be* accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

The temple was intended to be a place where people where to recognize their sinfulness and praise the Lord who had drawn near to them. The focus should have been on prayerful praise to the Sovereign King rather than proud people’s centralized thievery. The second scripture that Jesus quotes from is Jeremiah 7:11 —

Jeremiah 7:8–11 ⁸“Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. ⁹Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, ¹⁰and *then* come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered to do all these abominations?’ ¹¹Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen *it*,” says the Lord.

Jesus’ quotation of Scripture displays several things: (1) Jesus displays His zeal for proper worship (cf. John 2:17; Ps. 69:9); (2) Jesus speaks as though *He* is the one who said these (indeed, He did!); (3) Jesus’ condemnation of improper actions within the place of worship. Jesus, thus, is the divine King who has authority to dictate how worship of God should be done. Further, Jesus condemns the worship of these “thieves” instead of condemning their “enemies” (i.e. Rome).

Application:

- Have you recognized your own sinfulness? Are you aware that you are a sinner who stands condemned before a Holy God? Scripture indicts every human being—you are dead in your trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1ff) and there is no one righteous (Rom. 3:10). Everyone has sinned and falls short of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23). You have a need and that need is salvation from your sins!
- Have you recognized that Jesus is, indeed, the King? Those who confess with their mouths that Jesus is Lord will be saved (Rom. 10:9). Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and John records that if you believe that truth, you will possess eternal life (John 20:31).

Not only is Jesus kingship evidenced by His authority over temple worship, second His kingship is evidenced by His —

II. Jesus' Aid to Helpless Worshipers (v. 14)

“Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them” —After doing the “unthinkable” Jesus then turns His attention to the marginalized of His society: the lame and blind. Time and again Jesus had exposed the hypocrisy of the religious leaders (cf. Matt. 5–7 Sermon on the Mount). Many times the lame, blind, and deaf were looked down on because it was believed that God was displeased with them (e.g. the disciples questioning whether or not a man had sinned because he was born blind; see John 9:1–2). Yet Jesus has compassion on them, a clear display of His deity. Matthew has already argued this point earlier in His book when he records how John the Baptist questioned whether or not Jesus was in fact the Messiah:

Matthew 11:2–6 ² And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples ³ and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” ⁴ Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵ *The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.* ⁶ And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”

Jesus heals the marginalized of His society *in the temple court*. In doing so, Jesus demonstrates His supremacy over the temple of God (cf. Matt. 12:6). This was how worship was to be conducted in the temple: not in selfish acts of thievery, nor the busy hub of transactions. Rather, worship in the temple was meant to be a display of God’s glory and man’s humble perpetual praise to Him.

Application:

- Aren’t you glad that Jesus brings and heals the weak and helpless? Every person is weak and helpless. Yet Jesus came to seek and to save those who are lost (Luke 19:10). Even when we were God’s enemies Jesus died for us (Rom. 5:8).

Finally, Jesus’ divine kingship is not only evidenced by His authority over temple worship and aid to the helpless, it is also displayed in His—

III. Jesus’ Acceptance of Humanity’s Praise (vv. 15–17)

“But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant” — Rather than praising Jesus as the true Messiah, the Son of God, the religious leaders again reveal their spiritual blindness. They saw the “wonderful things that He did” and heard the children praising Him as the “Son of David” (i.e. the long awaited Messiah). How could anyone miss the clear picture of Jesus’ divine kingship? The markers were unmistakable! Yet the religious leaders became indignant. They refused to acknowledge what was plainly before them.

“and said to Him, ‘Do You hear what these are saying?’ ” — They challenged Jesus to refute the children (by implication). No doubt their thoughts were essentially *How could he simply let these children proclaim himself as the Messiah? This is blasphemy!* Luke records that they demanded that He rebuke them (Luke 19:39). The scribes and pharisees refused to accept Jesus as being God in human form (cf. John 10:31, 39).

And Jesus said to them, “Yes. Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise’?” — Jesus responds with the obvious: of course He hears them! And not only does He acknowledge that He hears them, He affirms their praise of Him! He quotes to them from the book of Psalms:

Psalm 8:1–2 ¹ O Lord, our Lord, How excellent *is* Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens! ² Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, Because of Your enemies, That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.

David, who is the psalmist, observes that the Lord has ordained the seemingly insignificant things of life to praise His name so that He is glorified throughout all the world. Thus, Jesus’ acceptance of these children’s praise is His acknowledgement that He deserves the worship that Yahweh (i.e. the LORD) does. He is accepting humanity’s praise of Him, revealing that He is God.

Conclusion

Jesus’ kingship is clearly evident in this passage. And what was true then in Jesus’ day is true now: *you must believe that Jesus is the divine King*. The sovereign king who came would only days later be the suffering servant who would be bruised for our sins (cf. Is. 53:1ff). May we worship this king who deserves our proper praise.