

CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

- JOHN 2:13-22. - JANUARY 26. -

Golden Text: – "Holiness becometh thy house, O Lord, forever." – Psalm 93:5.

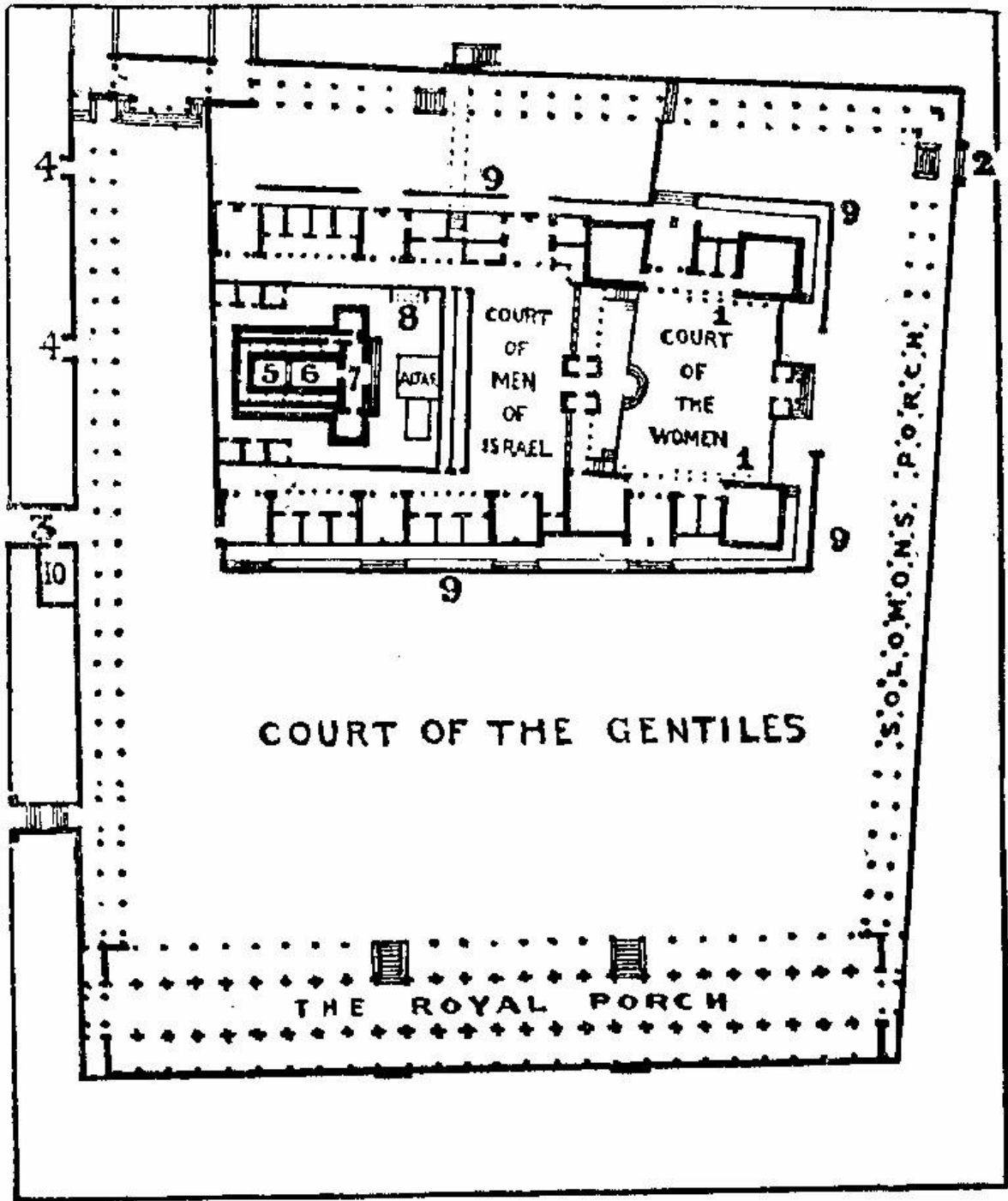
WE are aware that there are many scholars who believe that there were two cleansings of the Temple by our Lord. It is admitted by all that one cleansing occurred at the last Passover which Jesus attended a few days before his crucifixion. This is well attested by Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:15; Luke 19:14. Our lesson is taken from John's Gospel, and because this incident is grouped with others which occurred in the beginning of the Lord's ministry it is assumed, we believe without sufficient authority, that there were two cleansings, the one at the beginning, the other at the close of our Lord's ministry. It is acknowledged, however, that John's Gospel was written long after the others, and apparently with the intention of supplying certain details that were overlooked by the other historians. To our understanding Jesus began his teachings in a rather quiet manner, reserving many of his mightiest works for the last, amongst others the calling of Lazarus from the tomb, the triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the ass, and the cleansing of the Temple. This latter act has a peculiar significance when we remember that it followed our Lord's assumption of the office of King – which he did just five days before his crucifixion, when he rode upon the ass in fulfilment of the prophecy, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass." (Zech. 9:9.) Thus recognized by the multitude as the King of the Jews, our Lord exercised kingly authority in the cleansing of the Temple, and was no doubt backed up in the matter by the sentiment of the throng which had just acclaimed him the son of David with hosannas. It was under these circumstances that none attempted resistance.

It was a requirement of the Jewish Law that the devout of the nation should assemble at the Passover season to keep the Feast of Passover in celebration of their deliverance from Egypt and the sparing of their firstborn on the preceding night. Josephus tells us that sometimes the population of Jerusalem on such an occasion was swelled to the number of two millions. Far more than half of these must have camped outside the city, unable to find lodgings within. It was the custom on such occasions to offer sacrifices, some representing thankfulness, some consecration and others contrition. Of course the multitude of strangers from afar rarely brought with them the doves or pigeons or lambs, etc., which they presented in sacrifice. The supply of these animals for sacrifice became quite a business on such occasions. Moreover, there was a certain Temple tax levied, which must be paid in a particular kind of money called the "shekel of the sanctuary." The last coinage of these was in B.C. 140, hence they were quite scarce in our Lord's day and sold at a premium. Roman coin was circulated throughout Palestine in general merchandising, so that when the time came at the Passover for the paying of the Temple tax with the Temple money not only visitors from foreign lands needed to purchase shekels of the sanctuary [R4123 : page 25] but also the home folk.

"TAKE THESE THINGS HENCE"

In consequence of these conditions the Temple area became quite a house of merchandise and money-changing, and as the necessities of the people were taken advantage of and high prices charged, our Lord called the place a "den of thieves." (Matt. 21:13.) In imagining the scene we are not to think of money-changers, sheep and dove-traders, etc., in the Temple proper, but in its outer courts, the whole of which was designated the Temple or the house of God. This trading was probably carried on in what was known as the Court of the Gentiles. Into the holiest precincts of the Temple proper only the priests were permitted to enter; into

the enclosure where the altar was located the Levites were also permitted; outside of this was [R4123 : page 26] the Court of the men of Israel, and still further out a Court of the women, and beyond this enclosure the Court of the Gentiles, provided to the intent that all nationalities might there congregate for worship. Our Lord referred to this fact saying, "It is written, My house shall be a house of prayer for all nations." (Mark 11:17.) Probably the Court of the Gentiles was little used, as few Gentiles had become sincere converts to Judaism. The size of the court apportioned to them was probably symbolical of the larger proportionate numbers who should ultimately come into the Lord's favor and become true disciples and fellow-heirs with the Jews of divine favor.



PLAN OF THE TEMPLE IN OUR LORD'S DAY

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It is claimed that any Jew under the Law had the right to do as Jesus did in the matter of driving out the traders, but very

evidently no Jew had previously attempted it. The scourge of small cords could not have done serious damage to anyone, but we do not know that our Lord used it upon humanity. He may have driven out the animals, whose owners would follow them, and it will be noticed that he did not set at liberty the doves, which could not so easily have been recovered, but permitted their owners to take them away. The overturning of the tables of the money-changers would not only stop their usurious exchange business, but keep them busy looking after their coin. We may be sure from the fact that our Lord lived under the Law and obeyed it that his conduct on this occasion was quite within the recognized proprieties, even though it was unusual, and even though he himself had visited the Temple time and again as a Jew, and had witnessed these same scenes but had not interfered with them. This we consider to be a proof that the occurrence took place but once, and that after our Lord had assumed the office of King – just before his crucifixion. Thus the statement, "The zeal of thine house hath consumed me," was fulfilled.

THE CLEANSING IN THE ANTITYPE

When we remember that the Law was a shadow of better things coming, that the Jewish people typified Spiritual Israel, and that their Temple typified the Gospel Church with its various classes, then we begin to see how we may look here for a parallel of that cleansing work of the Jewish harvest. Those familiar with Volume II., *STUDIES*, will remember that the Jewish dispensation is the parallel to the Gospel dispensation in very many particulars, including that of time and the fact that it ended with a harvest period, and that our Lord at his first advent was the chief reaper in the Jewish harvest, as he is to be the chief reaper in the Gospel harvest at his second advent. We have noted also the fact that the time parallel of October, 1874, corresponds to the beginning of our Lord's ministry at the time of his baptism, and that April, 1878, corresponds to the time of our Lord's acceptance

of the office of King, riding upon the ass and receiving the shouts of the multitude, and then proceeding to the Temple cleansing work. Our thought is that the antitypical cleansing of the Lord's Temple has been in progress since the spring of 1878.

Within the hallowed precincts of the nominal Temple of today are many who have long been making merchandise of their privileges, opportunities and knowledge. All intelligent people well know that religious matters are to a large extent made merchandise of. Amongst the Roman Catholics everything possible is hedged about with penalties and prohibitions and limitations, so that the people are led to believe that they can present nothing acceptable to God except as they receive it through their priesthood. They are expected to pay the priesthood for every birth and the baptism of the child; they are expected to pay at every service, that they may be participants in the blessings of the common mass; they are expected to pay for every blessed scapular sprinkled with holy water; they are expected to pay for every funeral service and for every prayer, as well as for the privilege of being buried in holy ground. In all this we have a close counterpart to that which our Lord denominated a den of thieves, making merchandise of divine things.

As for Protestants, there are many evidences of the same spirit amongst them, but as they represent a more intelligent class, the exactions upon them by the clergy are the more refined. With few exceptions the payment for baptisms and funerals and marriages is apparently left optional. This is the wisest way with this class of worshipers. Neither are there attempts made to collect money for saying masses for the dead, to exact a specific fee from each one occupying a place at a service, though the collection plate is passed with regularity, and frequently strong appeals are made for money, and sometimes with the announcement that nothing inferior to a silver piece will be acceptable. It is to the credit of Protestants that they do not tax the living for prayers and

masses for the dead, as do the Roman Catholics. Nevertheless strong impression is sought to be made upon all, that membership, either in a Catholic Church or in some one of the numerous Protestant ones, is necessary to salvation, and that liberality to the Church of one's choice is also a necessity. Although rarely so stated, it is implied that eternal torment is the alternative. We are not inveighing against charity and liberality for the spread of the Gospel of Christ: neither did Jesus say one word against liberal giving on the part of the Jews for the support of the Temple. Our Lord's condemnation fell upon those who were making merchandise of the opportunity, circumstance and conditions. It is our belief, indeed, that Christian people have been blessed in their response to the numerous demands: nevertheless the principle is all wrong. Whatever is given to the Lord should be voluntarily done, with love for him, with a desire to render unto him the first-fruits, the best of all that we possess, time, influence, money, etc.

"THE TEMPLE OF HIS BODY"

The Jews demanded of the Lord by what authority he set up so high a standard as he required of them in the cleansing of the Temple. He answered them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." Of course they could not understand that it was one of [R4123 : page 27] our Lord's dark sayings, which is fully comprehended even yet by only a few. The Jews thought our Lord spoke slightly of the Temple of which they were so proud, which just recently had been finished, after being in process of construction for forty-six years. They were incensed at him, and we recall that this was one of the charges against him a few days later. When he was arraigned before the High Priest it was said that he had blasphemed the Temple, spoken slightly of it in declaring that he would raise it up again, if destroyed, within three days. "But he spake of the Temple of his Body." The disciples evidently got the thought that he referred to his fleshly body as the Temple of God, and supposed that our Lord's prediction was

fulfilled three days after his crucifixion. But we cannot so view the matter. To our understanding the Lord spoke of the Temple of his Body – of the Church, his Body – of the Temple of which the Apostle Peter subsequently wrote, that we as living stones are built together upon Christ for a habitation of God through the Spirit. To suppose that our Lord spoke of the fleshly body as the Temple, and to suppose that that fleshly body was raised on the third day, would be to suppose that our Lord did not fully pay over the price necessary for our redemption.

Such a view would contradict his own statement, "My flesh I give for the life of the world." (John 6:51.) He gave his flesh not only for three days but forever, and he was raised by the Father's power from the grave the Lord of glory. As the Apostle declares, "Now the Lord is that Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17); and again, "He was put to death in the flesh but quickened in the Spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18); and again, "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, now know we him so no more." (2 Cor. 5:16.) The flesh was consecrated to death at the beginning of our Lord's ministry, and this great sacrifice was symbolized in his baptism. It was the New Creature that was there begotten of the holy Spirit (to which fact John bore witness), which grew during the Lord's three and a half years of ministry; and it was the New Creature, the Spirit begotten, that was born of the Spirit on the third day, when our Lord arose from the dead. Our Lord's change was but a sample of that which is to come to all of his true followers, as the Apostle explains, saying, It is sown in weakness, raised in power; sown in dishonor, raised in glory; sown an animal body, raised a spiritual body. (1 Cor. 15:43,44.) So, then, our Lord's body of flesh, destroyed by the Jews at Calvary, was not restored on **[R4124 : page 27]** the third day. No restitution work was accomplished in him, but a complete change, because, as the Apostle declares, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." – 1 Cor. 15:50.

But, on the other hand, we have the Scriptural declaration that the Church is the Body of Christ, of which the consecrated faithful are "members in particular." (I Cor. 12:27.) We see that as human beings our Lord the Head, and all the members of his Body, have been suffering the destruction of the flesh, have been sacrificing their human nature throughout this Gospel Age, and we see that in due time this glorious Church, the New Creation, will in the First Resurrection come forth a glorious Temple of God, composed of living stones and filled with the glory of God. This will be on the third day also, for if we consider the six thousand years past as six days of a great week, and the Millennial Age as the seventh or Sabbath day of that week, we find that it was early in the fifth of these days that our Lord sacrificed, that many of his followers suffered likewise during that and the following sixth day, and that the seventh day, into which we have chronologically entered since 1872, is thus the third day, in which, very early in the morning, the entire Body of Christ, the King of glory, will be perfected. Then the great Temple of God will be complete and ready for the great work of the Millennial Age, the blessing of all the families of the earth, and through it they all may have the opportunity of coming into full harmony with God and gaining the blessing thereof – eternal life.

