

Cleansing of the Temple in the Gospel Accounts

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Citation: Andriafaliherry Rambeloson Herinosa. (2026). <i>Cleansing of the temple in the Gospel accounts</i>. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 2(7), 92-104.	<i>Although the temple purification is an important incident in all four gospels, the gospel of John is different from the other Synoptic Gospels regarding both the timing and theology of the passage. The historical background, purpose, and importance of the temple cleansing accounts in the Bible are discussed in this article through exegesis. In this research, the stories from Matthew 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-19, Luke 19:45-48, and John 2:13-22 are analyzed using historical, grammatical, syntactical, lexical, and contextual interpretation. Important Greek words concerning the temple, the actions of Jesus, and the business practices that took over the temple compound are discussed. It explores the history of the Jerusalem temple, the function of the merchants and money changers, the significance of the whip of cords and also the Old Testament scriptures that were quoted by Jesus, especially Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11.</i> <i>If there were indeed two cleansings that occurred during the life of Christ, which the Gospels have recorded at different times, or just one account written from varying perspectives due to theology, has been a much-debated issue which this study aims to solve. The paper maintains through the study of the literary and theological techniques used in the Gospels that the writers deliberately shaped their texts in order to deliver different theological lessons while affirming Jesus as the Messianic figure and fulfillment of the dreams of Israel. As a final act of prophetic judgment, the cleansing heralds the conflict that will eventually lead to the crucifixion of Jesus in the Synoptics. However, it occurs at the beginning of the mission of Jesus in John's Gospel so that we may understand that He is indeed the real temple and we may anticipate His death and resurrection because of this.</i> <i>Ultimately, the cleansing of the temple highlights the zeal for divine worship, His hatred of commercialization and corruption in religion, and the capacity of Jesus Christ to give a new understanding of God's presence among His people. Not only a historical event but also a theological statement about Jesus Christ, who He is, what true worship means, and how the resurrected Lord began a new covenant through Himself. Some of the terms that belong to the domain of biblical theology include Jesus Christ, the Temple of Jerusalem, the Synoptic Gospels, and exegesis.</i> Keywords: Temple Cleansing; Gospel of John; Synoptic Gospels; Exegesis; Jerusalem Temple; Jesus Christ; Biblical Theology.

INTRODUCTION

As a preliminary step in this investigation, we will first identify the key issues presented in John 2:13-25 and the synoptic Gospels (Matthew 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-19, and Luke 19:45-48), which recount the cleansing of the temple. The four passages raise critical questions concerning chronological placement, the Synoptic problem, and exegetical challenges.

Background to the study

The temple cleansing is one of the most dramatic and significant events in Jesus' ministry, recorded in all four Gospel accounts (Matthew 21:12–17; Mark 11:15–19; Luke 19:45–48; John 2:13–22). It involves Jesus driving out moneychangers and merchants from the temple, declaring that they had turned God's house into a "den of robbers." This act has sparked extensive debate among scholars regarding its historical and theological implications. One of the central discussions is whether the event occurred once or twice, once at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in John and another time near the end in the Synoptic Gospels.¹ Some scholars argue that John relocates the event for theological purposes, while others suggest that Jesus may have cleansed the temple on two separate occasions.

The temple in Jerusalem held immense religious, political, and economic significance in first-century Judaism. As the center of Jewish worship, it was the only place where sacrifices could be offered according to Mosaic Law. The temple also functioned as a major economic hub, where pilgrims exchanged foreign currency to pay the temple tax and purchased animals for sacrifice. However, historical sources suggest that this system led to corruption, with merchants exploiting worshipers by charging exorbitant prices and religious leaders benefiting financially.² The high priestly families, particularly the Sadducees, controlled temple commerce, which likely contributed to tensions between Jesus and the temple authorities.³ Jesus' actions in cleansing the temple can thus be seen as both a moral protest against economic exploitation and a prophetic act signaling impending judgment on the temple system.⁴

The fundamental issue at the heart of the temple cleansing is the perceived corruption of religious worship. Jesus' denunciation of the merchants and moneychangers reflects his concern that the temple had become more focused on profit than on prayer and genuine devotion. The phrase "den of robbers," which Jesus quotes from Jeremiah 7:11, suggests that the temple authorities had turned it into a place of greed rather than holiness.⁵ Additionally, some scholars argue that Jesus' actions were not just about ethical reform but also symbolized the coming destruction of the temple, which historically occurred in 70 AD. This study will examine whether Jesus' temple cleansing was primarily an act of moral purification, a prophetic announcement of divine judgment, or a symbolic redefinition of worship in the messianic age.

Scholarly discussions on the temple cleansing revolve around three main issues: its historicity, its theological meaning, and the differences between the Synoptic and Johannine accounts. Some scholars argue that the event is historically reliable and that Jesus physically disrupted temple activities, while others suggest that the story is a theological construct meant to convey deeper spiritual truths (Keener, 2010, pp. 513-520).⁶ Theological interpretations often focus on Old Testament references such as Malachi 3:1–3, which speaks of the Lord coming to "purify the sons of Levi." The placement of the event in John's Gospel, at the beginning rather than the end of Jesus' ministry, has led to ongoing debates about whether John reshaped the narrative for theological purposes or whether there were two separate temple cleansings. This study will analyze these perspectives to determine the most plausible interpretation of the event.

This research will examine the temple cleansing from both historical and theological perspectives. It will analyze the differences between the Synoptic and Johannine accounts and explore the Old Testament background of Jesus' actions. Additionally, it will assess how this event fits within Jesus' broader mission and how early Christians understood its significance. Special attention will be given to the implications of the temple cleansing for New Testament theology, particularly in relation to Jesus' role as the fulfillment of the temple and the redefinition of

¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002), 73-75

² Marty E. Stevens, *Temples, Tithes, and Taxes: The Temple and the Economic Life of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), 112.

³ E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia, Pa: Fortress Press, 1985), 61-67.

⁴ Bruce Chilton, *The Platform of Mark's Gospel, Its Aramaic Sources and Mark's Achievement A* (Legacy of Learning, 2014), 43.

⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), 22.

⁶ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2012), 513-520.

worship.⁷ The study will rely on biblical exegesis, historical sources, and scholarly interpretations to provide a well-rounded analysis of the event.

While many scholars have examined the historical and textual differences between the Gospel accounts of the temple cleansing, there is still debate over its theological significance. Most studies focus on whether the event happened once or twice, but fewer works explore its implications for understanding Jesus' mission and the future of temple worship.⁸ Additionally, while some studies analyze the economic and religious corruption in the temple, there is a need for further research on how Jesus' actions relate to Old Testament prophecy and eschatology.⁹ This study will contribute to the field by providing a comprehensive examination of the temple cleansing from historical, theological, and exegetical perspectives, addressing these gaps and offering new insights into its significance.

Statement of the Problem

The first issue pertains to chronological placement. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-19, and Luke 19:45-48) position the cleansing of the temple after Jesus' ministry, shortly before His crucifixion. In contrast, the Gospel of John places this event at the beginning of Jesus's public ministry, immediately following His first miracle at Cana. This discrepancy raises the question: Did Jesus cleanse the temple twice (a doublet occurrence)—once at the outset of His ministry and again before His passion? Alternatively, did John deliberately relocate the event for theological purposes, emphasizing its symbolic significance rather than maintaining strict historical chronology?

The second issue involves the Synoptic problem, particularly the differences between John's account and those of the Synoptics. One of the most notable variations is Jesus' statement in John 2:19: *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* This declaration, which John later interprets as a reference to Jesus' resurrection, is entirely absent from the Synoptic narratives. The absence of this statement raises questions about whether John expanded the theological meaning of the event or whether the Synoptic authors chose to omit this saying for their own literary or thematic reasons.

Finally, there are significant exegetical challenges in interpreting this passage. One of the most debated questions

is: Did Jesus use violence? John uniquely mentions that Jesus fashioned a whip of cords (John 2:15), leading to scholarly discussions about whether He physically struck people or if this action was purely symbolic, intended only to drive out the animals. Was this a literal instrument of violence or a prophetic sign-act? This raises broader theological and ethical questions about Jesus' actions and their implications for His character and mission.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to investigate and find the correct answer to the problems above. Based on the multi-dimensional aspects of the above question, our research question has several specific objectives, which would interlink the individual aspects. Investigating the exegesis of these verses for appropriate interpretation is the first objective of this purpose. In the area of interpretation, gaps have prevented further deterioration in the Christian church both in attitude and in action during worship services.

Significance of the Study

The meaning of this study is important for a variety of reasons. It explains many Christians' questions about the challenging topic of cleansing the temple in the synoptic gospels and the Book of John. This research is extremely pertinent to Christians, and more specifically to congregations that adhere to the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. In addition to this, it makes an effort to address the gap that exists in the academic discussion of the subject.

Delimitation of the Study

This research will limit itself to scrutiny of the biblical text in that particular time frame of the different accounts with its original context while considering theological implications for cleansing the Temple. The research itself will not include empirical data and modern sample groups but rather a qualitative analysis of theological and exegetical literature. Key values touched Jewish leaders, whip of cord, destroy this temple.

Methodology and Procedure

Biblical theology and pertinent background information are both included in this paper. In the manner in which the study exegetical research is conducted, the technique is reflected. Following the introduction, the second chapter will consist of a literature study based on several readings of four accounts. Studying the context of the study is the emphasis of the third chapter. The passage's meaning or

⁷ N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, 1st North American ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 416

⁸ Bruce Chilton, *The Platform of Mark's Gospel, Its Aramaic Sources and Mark's Achievement A* (Legacy of Learning, 2014), 43.

⁹ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), 22.

exegetical study is discussed in the fourth chapter. The theological implications are the focus of chapter five. The study ends with the last chapter.

Definition of terms

Different terms used in this study may be defined as the following:

Gospel: The four canonical Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—tell of the “good news” of the Messiah: Jesus. The term “Gospel”—derived from the Anglo-Saxon “God-spell” or “Good News”—translates the Greek euangelion (“good news”). Its use as a label for the New Testament works Matthew, Mark, Luke and John derives from early manuscript witnesses which characterized them

as “the Gospel According to Matthew,” “the Gospel according to Mark,” and so on.¹⁰

Synoptic Gospels: Of the four canonical Gospels, three of them: Matthew, Mark and Luke are called “Synoptic” because they can be viewed together (syn, “with”; -optic, “see”) in a Synopsis, or a book that arranges the Synoptic Gospels in parallel columns.¹¹

Cleansing of the temple: The temple is a building or place dedicated to the worship of a deity or deities. Here, the temple indicated in this research is the Jerusalem temple, where Jesus cleanses it by throwing away all the merchants and telling them that his house is not a den of robbers.¹²

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW ON UNDERSTANDING

In the field of biblical studies, there has been an ongoing dispute over whether Jesus cleansed the temple once (during Passion Week) or twice (early in His ministry and later, as suggested in John's Gospel). Although some scholars, like Zimmermann, contend that John purposefully rearranges events to highlight theology, others insist that Jesus actually performed two separate cleansings.¹³

One piece of evidence supporting the idea of a singular cleansing is the consensus among the synoptic gospels that it happened near the close of Jesus' ministry, coinciding with his dispute with religious leaders. On the other hand, the logic behind the two washings implies that Jesus, at various stages of His ministry, used a comparable strategy to question temple practices, thereby bolstering his teachings.¹⁴

The synoptists put this event at the conclusion of Jesus' ministry (Mk. 11:15–17, Mt. 21:12, 13, Lk. 19:45, 46), whereas the traditional text of John places it at the beginning (2:13–17). We need to conclude what Jesus' action on this occasion meant before we can examine this discrepancy; we also need to review the differences between the Synoptic and Johannine accounts.¹⁵

Some academics believe that this event describes Jesus restoring the Temple to its original spiritual function as a place of worship by washing it and setting it apart for worship. Some see this as an attempt to seize political control of the Temple. Scholars such as R. A. Horsley and E. P. Sanders fall somewhere in the middle, viewing the event as a symbolic prophetic action that condemned the Temple but had limited scope. According to Sanders, before the eschatological restoration of the Temple, Jesus either foretold or threatened its destruction. Horsley interprets the events as a rebellion against the tyrannical governmental and economic structure that had its origins in the Temple. It was more than just a symbolic gesture; it included physical aggression against the oppressors. There was consensus among both groups that the demonstration was small enough to go unnoticed by the Temple guards and the Roman soldiers stationed in the Antonia fortress, but large enough to provoke a coordinated response critical of Jesus.¹⁶

¹⁰ Mark Goodacre, “Gospels, Synoptic,” *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

¹¹ Goodacre, “Gospels, Synoptic,”

¹² “Cleansing of the temple” *Collins Concise Dictionary*, 3.ed. (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1992).

¹³ J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*, ed. Alan Hugh McNeile, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner' Sons, 1929), 86.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ W. R. I. Herzog, “Temple Cleansing” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. J. B. Green & S. McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 820.

THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

General Background of the Gospel

Strauss starts by noting that the Old English god-spell originates the English word "Gospel," which means "good news" or "glad tidings." Commonly used in the Greco-Roman world to announce victories in battle or imperial decrees—especially the birth or ascension of an emperor—this is a transliteration of the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον (euangelion). A "gospel" was thus a public announcement of good news, usually connected with imperial power. But in the Jewish and Christian contexts, this word acquires theological richness. Good news was linked in the Old Testament, especially in Isaiah, with God's promise of atonement and the arrival of the Messianic Kingdom (see Isaiah 52:7). Particularly the writers of the New Testament, the early Christians used this word to declare the arrival of Jesus as the Messiah and the breaking in of God's Kingdom.¹⁷

Historical Context

Authorship

The Gospels seem to be anonymous; no authorial claim is made anywhere in the text, and there is no first-person narration, even though the manuscripts have titles like "According to Matthew," "According to Mark," etc....¹⁸

Date

Commonly accepted dates for the Gospels are as follows: Mark 65–70, Matthew 80–90, and Luke 90–100. Having said that, these dates are only estimates. Because it is possible that the Gospels reflect this knowledge, the key pivotal date is ad 70. The devastating loss of life and the temple in the Jewish War (66–70 AD) was an incredibly painful experience. The Gospels would likely have been

affected in some way if they had been written subsequent to this event.¹⁹

Provenance

A basic issue in biblical studies is the provenance, that is, the beginnings and development of the four canonical Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.²⁰

Destination

Strauss inserts that "there is almost universal agreement that the Gospels were written primarily to believers rather than to unbelievers. But who were the specific audiences? None of the Gospels identify their recipients except Luke, who addresses his work to a certain Theophilus."²¹

Purpose

Similar to how Scripture is read in worship services today, the Gospels had a dual purpose in the early church: to teach and to worship. A fresh viewpoint on Jesus Christ and his teachings can be found in each of the four Gospels.²²

Literary Context

Genre

One of the things often lost in studying a Gospel is that it is a *narrative*, presenting a sequenced story.²³ However, Strauss underlines that "the Gospels are historical narrative motivated by theological concerns."²⁴

Structure or limits of the Passage

Found in all four of the canonical Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the "Cleansing of the Temple" is a key pericope whose structure, narrative context, and textual limits vary greatly among them. Scholars have long discussed its theological consequences, literary form, and chronological placement. These variations represent different editorial goals of every evangelist.

¹⁷ Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2007), 26.

¹⁸ Mark Goodacre, "Gospels, Synoptic," *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

¹⁹ Mark Goodacre, "Gospels, Synoptic," *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

²⁰ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 5th ed. (New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), 95.

²¹ Strauss, *Four Portraits*, 31.

²² Ibid, 30, 32.

²³ D. L. Bock, *Studying the historical Jesus: a guide to sources and methods* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 206.

²⁴ Strauss, *Four Portraits*, 29.

A Whip of Cords

A scourge (Greek: *φραγέλλιον*), this term appears only here in the New Testament. Uniquely, it is the Gospel of John which includes the specific detail that the scourge was made of small cords (Greek: *ἐκ σχοινίων*). The Revised Version omits the word small, yet it is worth noting that the Greek term used is a diminutive form of *σχοῖνος*, meaning, "rush," and by extension, a rope made from twisted rushes. In this sense, the Authorized Version is strictly literal in its translation. Herodotus recounts that when Croesus laid siege to Ephesus, the Ephesians symbolically dedicated their city to the goddess Diana by stretching a small rope (*σχοινίον*) from the city wall to her temple, a span of seven furlongs (Histories 1.26). Interestingly, the Schoene was also an Egyptian unit of measurement, originally marked by a rope made of rushes.²⁵

Exchange Money

Moneychangers (*κερματιπῳτάς*). Nowhere else in the Bible does it say this. A large supply of the diminutive coin or "small change" would be necessary for the moneychangers, as the related noun *κέρμα*, meaning money, appears only in verse 15. It is derived from *κείρω*, meaning to cut into bits. Therefore, those who deal in small change are strictly referred to as money-changers. In verse 15, both Matthew and Mark use the word *κολυβιστής*, which means small coin. The only difference is that the noun *κόλλυβος*, which means small coin, is also used to mean the rate of exchange. Other than that, the meaning is almost identical. The emphasis on trade is suggested by the second word, which is absent from John's original. In the rural towns, the money-changers set up shop one month before the celebration. See Matthew 17:24, 21:12, and Mark 11:15 for more on this. When the first wave of Passover pilgrims arrived at Jerusalem, the country booths had already closed and the money-changers had taken up residence in the temple. John paints a more vivid and detailed picture of what happened than the Synopses's, who only mention the traders being driven out and the tables being thrown over (Matthew 21:12–13, Mark 11:15–17, and Luke 19:45–46 side by side).²⁶ The yearly Temple tax, which was mandated in Exodus 30:13–16 and was to be paid by Jews "after the shekel of the Sanctuary," had to be accounted for in a nation where Roman money circulated mainly. The first century saw the exclusive use of Tyrian currency for

all Temple dues; this was because the Tyrian shekel was the nearest available substitute for the ancient Hebrew shekel.²⁷

Jews Leaders

Addresses the Jerusalem religious authorities. When describing people who oppose Jesus and His ministry, John frequently uses this term (e.g., John 5:16; 11:57). The expression is most often associated with "unbelieving Jews," though it can also be used in a neutral or even positive sense (e.g., 2:6; 4:22). The negative connotation John gives to "the Jews" is consistent with his dualistic oppositional patterning. Since John, Jesus, and the first Christians were all Jews, the spiritual rather than racial connotation of this term is clear in John's writings. However, the term "Jews" is never used by John to describe the group of people who follow Christ. Instead, he favors the terms "Israel" or "Israelite" (v. 47). By identifying nonbelievers as "Jews," John's dualism causes readers who believe in Jesus to separate themselves from any Jewish identity. If John was trying to differentiate more clearly between the Jewish followers of Jesus and the rest of the church in the latter half of the first century ad, this response might have been his goal in using rhetoric. Unfortunately, some Christian circles have been influenced by later uses of John's rhetoric to promote anti-Semitism.²⁸

Background of the Studies

Structure of the Temple

Oesterley confirms that "the word most frequently used in the Gospels for the temple is τὸ ἱερόν (*בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ*); it occurs nearly 50 times. This term generally includes the whole of the temple area, i.e., the Court of the Gentiles, the Court of the Women, the Court of the Israelites, the Priests' Court, and the Holy Place, together with the Holy of Holies."²⁹

The Sanctuary, also known as ναός (*הֵיכָל*), was a sacred area of the temple that could be entered by only the priests. This area encompassed the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies (see Lk 1:21, 22). The word ὁ ναός is misunderstood in John 2:20 when it says, "Forty and six years was this temple in building." The correct translation would be "has this temple been in building up to this point," since it refers to the entire temple area that had been under construction for forty-six years. It was not completed until just before Titus destroyed it in 70–71 AD.³⁰

²⁵ Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 84.

²⁶ Richardson, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, 83–84.

²⁷ W. L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 405.

²⁸ John D. Barry, Douglas Mangum, et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), John 1:19.

²⁹ W. O. E. Oesterley, "Temple," *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels: Aaron–Zion*, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh; New York: T&T Clark; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 708.

³⁰ Ibid.

The Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John

Many have noted, at least since the second century of our era, the dissimilarities between John's gospel and the Synoptic gospels. Assuming that (1) John was written to complement the others and (2) it was the last Gospel (see Gospel [Genre]) helped to explain the differences. "Last of all John, perceiving that the bodily facts had been made plain in the Gospel, being urged by his friends and inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel" (Eusebius, Hist. Eccl. 4.14.7), a statement that Clement of Alexandria is famous for making, came close to this.³¹

Mk. is the basis of the Synoptic tradition, while Mt. and Lk. omit some of his details. It is convenient to compare Jn. with Mk., and it appears that Jn. (as often elsewhere) knows Mk.'s narrative, which he amplifies and alters. Both evangelists describe moneychangers' tables being turned. Mk. 11:16 states that Jesus forbade the carrying of goods or implements through the Temple courts, likely to cut a shortcut between the city and the Mount of Olives. Jn., Mt., and Lk. omit this point. Jn. specifies sheep and oxen sales in the precincts (τὸ ἱερόν), while Mk. only mentions pigeon sales. Jn. adds that Jesus drove out the beasts with a whip and ordered their owners to remove the pigeons, saying, "Make not my Father's house a house of business." Mk.'s rebuke quotes Isa. 56:7 and Jer. 7:11, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations, but you have made it a den of thieves." In other words, Mk. portrays Jesus as condemning the dishonesty of Temple traffic, while Jn. condemns the traffic itself. Jesus' burning zeal recalls Ps. 69:9, where the Jews asked for a sign of His authority and Jesus replied, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days", enigmatical words that the Jews misinterpreted. Mk. adds that the chief priests and scribes sought Jesus' death, fearing Him and alarmed by His words' impact on the people.³²

All four Gospels describe the temple cleansing, but John's is the most detailed. John mentions trading oxen, sheep, and doves and describes Jesus making the whip of cords to drive out the animals. John 2:16 contains a command not found elsewhere. John does not mention the two Scripture passages (Isa 56:7; Jer 7:11) Jesus used to justify His actions in the Synoptic Gospels. The disciples apply Psa 69:9 to Jesus' action in John 2:17. Timing distinguishes John's temple clearing account. This is one of Jesus' first public acts, according to John. The Synoptic Gospels place

this scene near the end of Jesus' ministry. Either Jesus cleared the temple twice or the gospel authors rearranged the story. The latter is more likely. Since the Synoptic only recorded one visit to Jerusalem by Jesus and the disciples, the event must be placed then. John celebrates the Passover over Jesus' ministry multiple times in Jerusalem. The Synoptic later placement is most likely due to John's preference for chronology to suit his theological purpose and the possibility that this event may have sparked some of Jesus' crucifixion's oppositi³³

Jesus' quotation in synoptic from Isaiah 56:7

Barry emphasizes "Turning the outer courts into a market effectively prevented worship for non-Jewish people. Jesus' quotation of Isa 56:7 in the Synoptics underscores His desire for the temple to be a 'house of prayer for all peoples.' Jesus is angered by the commercialization of temple worship, which created an obstacle to true worship."³⁴

Lane supports that with great solemnity, the biblical justification for Jesus' violent deed is presented. This verse matches the LXX text word for word; it is taken from Isa. 56:7. God has a purpose and a plan for his house, according to the prophecy, and it comes amid promises that outline his good intentions for Israel and all nations. Isa. 56:7 and Mark's summary of Jesus' teaching are the only places you will find the clause "for all the nations," even though the Temple's designation as a house of prayer is ancient (cf. 1 Kings 8:28-30; Isa. 56:7 twice; 60:7 LXX). It is clear from this announcement that Jesus banished the merchants from the Gentile Court to preserve God-given privileges and rights. The forecourt's use as a marketplace effectively blocked the one area of the Temple that the Gentiles could use for prayer. In his second point, Jesus draws on the words of Jeremiah 7:11 to contrast the Temple as it now stands with its proper place in God's plan. "You have made it a cave of marauders" is a statement in the perfect tense that emphasizes the irreversible nature of the priestly authorities' action and anticipates the severe warning in Chapter 13:2. When describing individuals involved in guerrilla warfare against the government, the harsh words "robbers" or "marauders" may be better understood in their more technical contexts found in Strabo's and Josephus' writings. At that point, Jesus would be claiming that the leaders of the Temple had paved the way for it to become a stronghold for the Zealots. But the unique words are

³² Bernard, *Exegetical Commentary*, 86-87.

³³ Barry, *Faithlife Study Bible*, Jn 2:14-22.

³⁴ Barry, *Faithlife Study Bible*, Jn 2:16.

³¹ G. R. Beasley-Murray, "Synoptics and John," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 792.

already in Jeremiah's criticism of the illusion of safety brought about by the Lord's Temple in his day, and they may be meant to bring to mind the broader context of Jeremiah 7:11, where the land is foretold to be destroyed. In that instance, the shopkeepers are characterized as marauders, not so much for their deceitful actions as for their callous disregard for the sacredness of the place where they worked. Jesus cleared the way for the Gentiles to

worship by driving them out of the forecourt. The question of whether Jesus' action was intended to reform or abolish the worship in the Temple becomes moot in light of the explicit citation of Isa. 56:7 and the reference to Jer. 7:11. At the Passover celebration, which celebrated God's rescue of his people, he is portrayed as facilitating the worship of the Gentiles. This would be of great significance to Mark's audience in the mostly Gentile Church of Rome.³⁵

CHAPTER IV

THE MEANING OF PASSAGE AND EXEGETICAL STUDIES

Exegetical Studies

In this section, we are going to focus on the grammatical analysis of “ἱερόν”, “ναός”, “ἐξέβαλεν”, “φραγέλλιον”, “ἤρξατο”, “κολλυβιστῶν”, “σώματος”, “ἐμπορίου”, “Πατρός”, “καταβάγεται”, in the first row. After is the syntactical analysis.

Grammatical/Syntactical Analysis

Analyze the Grammar

To begin with the exploration of exegetical studies, it is essential to lay a solid foundation through grammatical analysis. At the heart of this process is the morphological parsing of key Greek terms that are directly relevant to the research questions. This grammatical groundwork is crucial for accurately interpreting the text and for achieving the broader objectives of this study. The parsing results presented in this section have been carefully derived using Bible Works 10.³⁶

Table 1. Temple Cleansing Vocabulary-Parsing

Greek word	Lexical form	Parsing	Range of Meaning
ἱερόν	ἱερόν	Noun, Neuter, Singular, Accusative	Temple complex (outer courts)
ναός	ναός	Noun, Masculine, Singular, Nominative	Inner sanctuary, Holy of Holies
ἐξέβαλεν	ἐκβάλλω	Verb, Aorist, Active, Indicative, 3rd Sing.	• He drove out • He expelled • He casted out
φραγέλλιον	φραγέλλιον	Noun, Neuter, Singular, Accusative	• Whip • Scourge
ἤρξατο	ἄρχομαι	Verb, Aorist, Middle, Indicative, 3rd Sing.	He began (to do something)

³⁵ Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 406–407.

³⁶ “Cleansing the Temple”, *Bible Works* (Norfolk, V.A: service@Bibleworks.com, 1992-2002).

κολλυβιστῶν	κολλυβιστής	Noun, Masculine, Plural, Genitive, Common	Moneychangers
σώματος	σῶμα	Noun, Neuter, Singular, Genitive	Body
ἐμπορίου	ἐμπόριον	Noun, Neuter, Singular, Genitive	• Business • Trade marketplace
Πατρός	πατήρ	Noun, Masculine, Singular, Genitive	Father
καταφάγεται	καταφάγω	Verb, Future, Middle, Indicative, 3rd Sing.	• Will consume • Will devour

Syntactical Analysis

It is necessary to focus on the word μετά, at the beginning of John 2:12. For syntax purposes, it indicates a time that is immediately following the preceding time, "after." Καὶ μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀναστῆναι 'and to arise after three days' (that is, 'on the third day,' since both the first and the last days of such a set were counted) Mk 8:31; μετὰ ταῦτα ἦλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν γῆν 'after this, Jesus and his disciples went to the province of Judea' John 3:22. John 3:22 can be translated as "these things happened, and then Jesus and his disciples went to the province of Judea" because in some languages there is no convenient preposition-like word like "after."³⁷

Lexical Analysis

It is very crucial to make a study of key terms, to understand the idea that the writer wants to reach.

ἱερὸν

The ἱερὸν is the outer court, or court of the gentiles, where the animals needed for sacrifice or offering were bought. It refers to the temple complex.³⁸

³⁷ J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 1:634.

³⁸ Bernard, *Exegetical Commentary*, 89.

ναός

The word ναός (נָחֳשֶׁת) denotes the Sanctuary, i.e. that part of the temple which was holy, and to which, therefore, none but the priests had access; it included the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies (see Lk 1:21, 22. In John 2:19, the word ναός is a theological shift suggesting His body as a temple.³⁹

ἐξέβαλεν

First, as ejection by force (MT 8.16); second, as expulsion or excluding without force (JN 6.37); third, as removal from something (MT 12.35), take out (LU 10.35); pull, tear, and discard (MK 9.47); and finally, as ejection from something without force (MT 8.16). Each of the four Gospels makes use of this term. The males are undoubtedly meant by πάτας ἐξέβαλιν in the Synoptist accounts (Mt. 21:12; cf. Mk. 11:15, Lk. 19:45); however, the driving out of the cattle is not mentioned by the Synoptists.⁴⁰ Palmer adds "καὶ εἰσελθὼν εἰς τὸ ἱερὸν ἤρξατο ἐκβάλλειν τοὺς πωλοῦντας καὶ τοὺς ἀγοράζοντας means "and having entered into the temple, he began to cast out those selling and those buying." Omit ὁ Ἰησοῦς after εἰσελθὼν Tisch. Treg. WH. RV.

³⁹ Oesterley, *Dictionary*, 708.

⁴⁰ Bernard, *Exegetical Commentary*, 90–91.

8BCDL Δ 1, 33, 91, 124, 238, 346 mss. Lat. Vet. Vulg. Memph.”⁴¹

ἤρξατο ἐκβάλλειν

The verb ἐκβάλλειν is an example of an auxiliary verb that frequently introduces an inceptive or progressive action and is usually followed by an infinitive. Used frequently at the outset of events in Hellenistic Greek, particularly in the New Testament.⁴² Furthermore, it is also very frequent in exorcism narratives in the Gospels.⁴³ This structure follows a typical NT Greek construction: inceptive verb (ἤρξατο) + present infinitive (ἐκβάλλειν). This syntax highlights the inception of an ongoing, repeated, or thematic action. To sum up, this is a progressive or deliberate action, not immediate anger.

Φραγέλλιον

Only in John does this word appear in any of the four gospels. This is a whip or scourge. The Romans used this word when they sentenced people to death. Jesus spared death for the people. The whip represented His authority, and a single flourish would have adequately communicated His meaning. No whip is mentioned about the second washing.⁴⁴

κολλυβιστῶν or κερματιστάς

That is, apart from the NT. A word crucial to individuals who deal in money, "money" in verse 15 comes from the verb "to cut into pieces," meaning "small change" or little currency. Money changers are, thus, analogous to small-scale traders of currency. Both Matthew and Mark use the word κολλυβιστῶν, meaning trading in small coins, in verse 15. The exchange rate is also implied by the original word, κόλλυβος. This second one suggests the exchange premium, in contrast to John's expression. Money changers set up shop in rural areas one month before the feast.⁴⁵

τὸν ναὸν τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ

Only in John the temple of his body

ἐμπορίον

A place for engaging in business - 'marketplace'

οἶκος τοῦ Πατρὸς μου

The House of My Father is found in four Gospels. Johannine emphasizes on personal relationship with the Father.

σπήλαιον ληστῶν

Rather than thieves, and robbers. These are Jeremiah 7:11 lines. The context shows that Jeremiah's Temple is named after its inhabitants, not its sacrilegious uses. They used the Temple legally, but their behavior dishonored it. Nevertheless, their illegal Temple use is opposed. Our Lord's unexpected use of "robbers" to condemn them adds depth. Trading desecrates the Temple by profiting from its gifts and grounds. Jesus rejects God-money unholiest elsewhere. He calls Temple trading robbery, but he means more. This traffic seems normal. To harshly rebuke it when it entered the Temple courtyards, Jesus had to consider how all legitimate trade violated the Golden Rule. Robbery in commerce occurs when one side pursues their interests while the other pursues his, a practice called competition.⁴⁶ Next, the objects of Jesus for the money changers and sellers are changing God's house of prayer into a den of robbers.

Synthesis

At first glance, the Greek term ναός is instrumental in understanding the dramatic narrative of the Cleansing of the Temple found in all four Gospels. This term, often used to designate the inner sanctuary or dwelling place of God, is applied to Jesus Himself in the Gospel of John: as seen in the phrase ναὸν τοῦ σώματος (“the temple of His body”). This expression confirms the identification of Jesus as the true Temple, replacing the physical structure with His very person.

It is important to note that only the Gospel of John explicitly makes this theological point, emphasizing a deeper, symbolic interpretation of the event. John's account thus serves not merely as a retelling, but as a manifestation of the Synoptic message, casting the physical cleansing in Johannine theological metaphor.

⁴¹ Ezra Palmer Gould, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark, International Critical Commentary* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1922), 212.

⁴² Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 138.

⁴³ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 518.

⁴⁴ “Whip” [John 2: 15], *Seventh - day Adventist Bible Commentary* (SDABC), rev.ed. ed Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 5:923.

⁴⁵ Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 83–84.

⁴⁶ E. P. Gould, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark* (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1922), 213.

The inclusion of this event in all four Gospels points to its prophetic symbolism. In John, the cleansing of the temple is closely linked to Jesus' resurrection prophecy, a connection absent in the Synoptic accounts. While Herod's temple took forty-six years to build, Jesus speaks of raising His temple (His body) in three days, alluding to His death and resurrection.

Each Gospel offers a unique Christological perspective: Mark is the most dramatic, presenting a powerful and fast-paced narrative that captivates the reader. Matthew is the most structured, organizing Jesus' teachings into five distinct discourses. Luke is the most thematic, consistently highlighting God's love for the Holy Spirit's lost role and Jerusalem's significance. John is the theological, offering profound insights into Jesus' divine identity and purpose with explicit metaphors and deeper symbolic meanings.⁴⁷ Together, these accounts contribute to a more profound and multifaceted understanding of Christ and His mission.

Following a close exegetical analysis, it is noteworthy that Jesus did not approach the situation with immediate violence, as some interpretations may suggest. Although the text mentions the use of a whip and the act of driving individuals out, the narrative indicates that Jesus had the opportunity to engage with them, implying a more

deliberate and progressive action. This is supported by the use of the phrase "he began to drive out", which conveys a gradual rather than an abrupt intervention. Furthermore, the whip appears to have been intended for directing the animals, specifically to manage their movement, and not as a weapon brought into the temple for violent purposes.

Reflection

The day will come, as the story of Samaritan women who talked with Jesus about God's people would worship him neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem but in spirit and truth. In the new age of salvation, the forgiveness of sins would no longer come through the temple and its sacrificial system but through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, the temple of his body. The conversation with the Samaritan woman reveals a transformative theological vision: that worship of God is not about where but how, and more importantly, through whom. Jesus makes Himself the new meeting place between God and humanity, fulfilling and transcending the Temple system. This redefinition calls believers today to examine whether their worship is ritualistic or relational, surface-level or spiritual, exclusive or inclusive. Worship in spirit and truth is not just a doctrinal statement, it is a lifestyle posture of the heart toward God.

CHAPTER V

THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The Relation of Fig Tree

This significant portion includes a theological analysis. Consequently, it is preferable to assert that purifying the temple is an act of judgment. Mark Strauss emphasizes that while Jesus' acts were undoubtedly a purification, there seems to be more to the incident than this. In Matthew and Mark, the event is intricately connected to Jesus' malediction of the fig tree. This recent occurrence is probably undoubtedly a symbolic act of condemnation against Israel. In other instances, Jesus consistently foretells the impending punishment and devastation of Jerusalem and the temple. During the trial and execution, he is charged with asserting that he will demolish the temple. This allegation may misrepresent his prior forecasts of its annihilation and his doctrine concerning "the body of his temple." Consequently, it seems that the activities inside the temple served not just as a purification

but also as a symbolic act of judgment, representing an enacted parable of its obliteration.⁴⁸

Jesus' eschatological and incarnational theology

Certain scholars, such as E. P. Sanders, assert that Jesus anticipated both the destruction and subsequent reconstruction of the temple. In Judaism, there exists a legend that the forthcoming Messiah would repair and reconstruct the temple to surpass its former glory (2 Sam. 7:13; Zech. 6:13; Mal. 3:1). Although this view is plausible, it is more probable that Jesus saw the temple's enduring replacement as an integral aspect of the emergence of the new era, signifying the advent of the kingdom of God. In the contemporary era of redemption, the absolution of sins will no longer be attained via the temple and its sacrificial system, but via Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, when "the temple of his body" was dismantled and restored through death and resurrection.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Strauss, *Four Portraits*, 24, 25.

⁴⁸ Strauss, *Four Portraits*, 481.

⁴⁹ E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* Vol 1. Fortress Press ed., 11(Philadelphia, Pa: Fortress Press, 1985),73,75.

With peace but not violence

The cleansing of the temple should not be interpreted merely as an act of power abuse or violence, as it is often misunderstood. Instead, it carries a deeper theological meaning, especially in the Gospel of Luke, who presents this in his narrative. The central issue, according to Luke, is not the forcefulness of Jesus' actions, but rather the failure of the people of Jerusalem and the leaders of the temple to recognize who Jesus truly is. They do not understand His identity as the Messiah, nor do they grasp what genuinely leads to peace. Moreover, true peace, unlike the Roman notion of peace through military dominance and superior force, does not come through violence. Instead, peace is understood as salvation, as Paul writes in Romans 5:1, and this peace is available only through Jesus Christ, who is proclaimed as Lord of all in Acts 10:36.⁵⁰ Because humanity fails to comprehend the true source of peace, this peace must now be seen as a heavenly reality rather than an earthly achievement. Thus, the peace of heaven refers to the

reconciliation that the Messiah brings restoring the broken relationship between God and humanity. This divine mission of reconciliation is at the heart of Jesus' ministry, and it is what ultimately transforms the cleansing of the temple into a profound act of prophetic significance, not a display of power for its own sake.

The corruption of the temple

The temple, especially at its entrance, had become a place driven by self-interest rather than genuine worship. Its corruption rooted in rigid rituals that excluded many and concentrated power among a few illustrates a persistent danger for Christian churches and institutions. Throughout history, similar patterns have re-emerged: religious leaders, like their secular counterparts, often seek power and privilege, whether through closed systems, family ties, or political manipulation. Ultimately, this reflects a theology of self-glory, where God's power is misused to serve human ambition and justify unrighteous purposes.⁵¹

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This research helps readers to understand the statement of the problem above. Firstly, while some scholars argue for a doublet occurrence, suggesting Jesus cleansed the temple twice,⁵² the majority view holds that John relocates the event for theological purposes, emphasizing Jesus as the new Temple and setting the tone for His entire ministry. This theological arrangement reflects John's broader narrative strategy, prioritizing symbolic meaning over chronological order to reveal Jesus' identity and mission more clearly

Next, the absence of Jesus' statement in John 2:19 from the Synoptic accounts suggests not a contradiction, but rather distinct theological emphases among the Gospel writers. John includes the saying to highlight the resurrection as the ultimate sign, aligning with his broader Christological focus (cf. John 20:31). Many scholars, such as Raymond E. Brown, argue that John likely incorporated or preserved this

saying to develop a theological interpretation of Jesus as the new temple, intentionally linking the cleansing to the resurrection.⁵³ Conversely, the Synoptic authors may have omitted it to maintain focus on Jesus' prophetic critique of the temple system rather than advancing a symbolic resurrection theme at that narrative point.

Last, the image of Jesus with a whip in John 2:15 presents a complex exegetical and theological challenge, but many scholars interpret this act not as literal violence against people, but rather as a symbolic, prophetic sign-act aimed at confronting temple corruption and asserting His messianic authority. As Keener notes, the use of the whip was likely directed at the animals, consistent with prophetic traditions of symbolic action rather than physical aggression.⁵⁴ Thus, the emphasis lies less on violence and more on Jesus' zeal for pure worship and the reformation of sacred space, revealing His identity as both prophet and Messiah.

⁵⁰ David E. Garland, *Luke*, vol. 3 of *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 408–409.

⁵¹ Garland, *Luke*, 777–778.

⁵² D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press [u.a.], 1998), 178.

⁵³ Raymond Edward Brown, ed., *The Gospel According to John*. 1: I–XII, 2nd ed., 42nd print, vol. 29 of *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 118–119.

⁵⁴ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2012),

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