

Why Did Christ Overturn the Tables of the Money Changers?

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In John 2:14 and Matthew 21:12, Messiah overturned the tables of the moneychangers just prior to the Feast of Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. His actions were challenged by the religious leadership of the day and his authority to do this was questioned. The following are a few of the lessons to be learned by the symbolism in these two events. We will examine why Messiah took this action, and what it teaches us today about his authority and that of his true followers.

The first example in John 2:14 took place at the commencement of Jesus Christ's earthly ministry while the episode in Matthew 21:12 took place at the very end of his ministry. In both instances the action took place during the time period some refer to as the Sanctification of the Temple, which culminated with the Passover. The Sanctification of the Temple commenced with the first day of the first month, or New Moon. It is the beginning of a new year, which occurs in the Spring, and coincides with the time that ancient Israel left Egypt.

Thus says the Lord God: "In the first month, on the first day of the month, you shall take a young bull without blemish and cleanse the sanctuary (i.e. Temple). The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering and put it on the doorposts of the temple, on the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and on the gate of the inner court. And so you shall do on the seventh day of the month for everyone who has sinned unintentionally or in ignorance. Thus you shall make atonement (lit. *covering*) for the temple (Eze. 45:18-21; NKJV; comments added in parentheses).

Messiah, who was the Rock that followed ancient Israel, was also the one who "covered" the tabernacle of meeting (cf. Ex. 40:34). His later sacrifice "covered" the sins of mankind; which made possible the inheritance of everlasting life after repentance, baptism, and the laying on of hands by one of God's representatives (Ac. 6:6; 8:14-17).

In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall observe the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten (Eze. 45:21; NKJV).

By adding this up, we can see that this sanctification period took fourteen days from the first day of the month (lit. *moon*) until the 14th of the first month; the day the Passover commences. Symbolically, if this fourteen day period had been properly observed, those who had participated would be unleavened by the first Holy Day on the fifteenth of the month during the Days of Unleavened Bread and would continue in this state until the 21st day of this first month.

On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the Lord's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no occupational work on it (Lev. 23:5-7; NKJV).

It is interesting to note that the only true God addresses those who appear before Him without proper preparation (i.e. sanctification), in the context of worshipping on one of His Holy Days. Proper preparation includes close self-examination as the Apostle Paul stated in 1Cor. 11:27-31. We will examine this text later.

When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? (cf. the moneychangers) Bring no more worthless sacrifices (because the people fail to recognize that these sacrifices are supposed to represent a right attitude on the part of the person giving it); incense (i.e. prayer) is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies (they are simply going through the motions – they do not really want to serve and obey God) – I cannot endure iniquity (because they are being hypocritical) with the sacred meeting (Isa. 1:12-13; NKJV; comments added in parentheses).

When you pray, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of bloodshed (this would not be the case if they had repented prior to attending God's festivals). Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow (Isa. 1: 15-17; NKJV; comments added in parentheses).

Messiah addressed this same problem during his ministry,

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you give a tithe of mint and anise, and cumin, but you neglect the heavier provisions of the law: judgment and mercy and faith; these it was necessary to do, and the others not to neglect.

(Mt. 23:23; RNT).

As with any self-examination, it is important to humble ourselves in order to have an attitude that is less self-righteous. Our human nature is very good at justifying the things we do even when we are wrong. Therefore, fasting without food and water for periods of time during the fourteen days leading up to Passover helps us see ourselves more clearly.

Combining this periodic fasting with prayer would enable God to show us things in a way that perhaps we haven't seen before. Once this happens we should be stirred to corrective action in our lives (cf. Mt. 5:23–24).

Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? (Isa. 58:6-7; NKJV)

Again, Messiah dealt with this issue as well:

“Then the king shall say to those at his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom that has been prepared for you from the foundation of the universe.’³⁵“For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you gathered together with me; ³⁶“naked, and you clothed me; I was weak, and you came to check on me; I was in prison, and you came to me. (Mt. 25:34-36; RNT).

Fasting and prayer will help us examine our inner attitudes, motives, and conduct. It should be a prerequisite to attending the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread.

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord (the Lord’s Supper service observed at Passover) in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many are dead. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged (1Cor. 11:27-31; NKJV; comments added in parentheses).

The latter part of this scriptural reference is important because, “judgment begins at the house (i.e. true church) of God” as stated by the Apostle Peter in 1Pe. 4:17. These verses are being given to admonish God’s people to take their “calling” seriously and examine themselves closely during the fourteen days leading up to the Passover/Days of Unleavened Bread.

Prior to the Passover in Egypt, Israel was sanctified (or set apart) in the land of Goshen. They were protected from seven of the plagues that were coming upon the Egyptians. They were considering what was happening “next door” very seriously because their physical livelihood was at stake. At this point in time they could not have imagined what their future would hold. They would have been very sober and vigilant examining closely all the events that were taking place.

There are a number of lessons for us today in this example. Egypt is a type of sin (Rev. 11:8), and Israel was submersed in it (Eze. 23:8). Although Israel needed physical sustenance, it was not Egypt that was actually providing it. Ultimately, it

is the only true God who provides His people with all their needs. Israel had forgotten this truth. They had to be shocked into understanding this reality commencing with the plagues that came upon Egypt. By protecting the land of Goshen, God was teaching them that He was their protector. As they proceeded into the desert, He began to teach them that He was also their provider (Ex. 16:4). The pillar of fire by night and the cloud during the day was to teach them to follow His lead doing whatever He said, when He said it, because it was for their ultimate good. Messiah addressed this same issue in John. 10:4.

And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice (Jn. 10:4, NKJV).

Today, it is easy to believe that our modern world provides all of our needs, but in reality it is no different than ancient Egypt because it too entices God's people to sin (Gal. 1:4). It is only when God intervenes in our lives and brings us out of this way of thinking, acting, and relating that we can see ourselves as we truly are. One of the ways God does this is by periodically commanding that His people come out to worship Him on his Sabbaths, New Moons, and appointed feast days (Ex. 23:14, 17). This requirement and the authority to continue these observances, was vested in Messiah. It could only end if Messiah sinned, wasn't resurrected, or wasn't given the authority to continue observing the commanded feasts of the only true God. As we will see, Messiah's actions in John 2:14 and Matthew 21:12 show that he had the authority to prepare God's people for the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread as well as the other Holy Days.

For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath (Mt. 12:8; RNT).

And he (Messiah) said to them, **"The Sabbath came into existence on account of man, not man on account of the Sabbath. ²⁸ "For this reason the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath (Mk. 2:27-28; RNT).**

Messiah has the authority to administer and determine how his Father's Holy Days are to be conducted. He did not do away with them at all.

You call me Master (1320 Gk. *didaskalos*, instructor, teacher, one who instills doctrine) and Lord, and you say well, for so I am (Jn. 13:13; NKJV; comments added in parentheses).

...**"This is My beloved son, in whom I am well-pleased. Hear him!" (Mt. 17:5; RNT).**

Do not presume that I came to tear down the law or the Prophets; I came not to tear down, but to fill up. ¹⁸"For Amen I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one iota or one point will pass away from the law, until everything is accomplished (Mt. 5:17-18; RNT).

As heaven and earth have not passed away yet (2Pe. 3:10-13), Messiah still has the authority to bring out every aspect of his Father's law including how to properly observe the Sabbaths, New Moons and Festivals. The Pharisees missed the mark when it came to fully understanding how to properly obey the law and commandments (Mt. 23:23). Messiah was showing them that he had the authority to determine how God's people should be conducting themselves on the Sabbaths, New Moons and Festivals as well as the real reason for observing them, which was to learn the, "heavier provisions of the law" (Mt. 23:23) along with God's overall plan for mankind.

With these points in mind, we will now examine John. 2:14-16 and Matthew 21:12,

And he (Messiah) found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. When he had made a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And he said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make my Father's house a house of merchandise! (Jn. 2:14-16; NKJV; comments added in parentheses)

Messiah is teaching those who purport to know God's law how to properly observe it. In this case, it shows how to correctly prepare for the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. The religious leadership of the day brought into question Messiah's authority to take these actions,

Then the Judeans answered and said to him, "What signs do you show us that you do these things?" (Jn. 2:18, RNT)

As was mentioned earlier, Messiah would not have any authority to continue administering his Father's Sabbaths and Holy Days if he wasn't resurrected, and this is exactly what he said to the religious leadership:

Jesus answered and said to them, "Tear down this naos (Gk. 3485, the inner sanctuary of the temple), and in three days I will raise it (Jn. 2:19, RNT; comments added in parentheses).

Because Messiah had freedom of choice, he had the authority to give up his life in service to others if he chose to do so.

As the Father knows me, even so I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear my voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. Therefore my Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me (i.e. he wasn't forced to do this), but I lay it down of myself (Messiah volunteered). I have power

to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from my Father (Jn. 10:15-18; NKJV; comments added in parentheses).

If Messiah did not trust his Father, it would have been much more difficult for him to lay his life down. However, he did trust his Father and had every confidence in his resurrection.

For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the son (Jn. 5:21; NKJV).

This is an important section of scripture when it comes to understanding that the authority once vested in the Levitical priesthood was in the process of being removed.

So also Christ did not glorify himself to become High Priest, but it was He (God the Father) who said to him (Messiah): "You are my son, today I have begotten you." As he (the Father) also says in another place: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:5-6; NKJV; comments added in parentheses).

Therefore, the authority that Messiah exercised in John. 2:14 is very significant because it was the first sign that he had taken authority away from the Levitical priesthood. After all he was born of the house of Judah and therefore did not have authority under the Levitical system to take the action he took. It was not only a clear statement, but also a serious challenge to the religious authorities that their time was up. To add insult to injury, Messiah overturned the tables of the moneychangers in Matthew 21:12, and quoted a prophecy from Isaiah 56:7. This prophecy stated that worship in the temple of God was no longer the exclusive right of Israel. The gentiles would now be able to worship as equals. If gentiles could worship as equals, they could also participate in the priesthood. So, there were very serious ramifications from the scriptures that Messiah quoted.

...For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations (Isa. 56:7; NKJV).

Matthew 21:12 combines two scriptures; the one mentioned above as well as Jeremiah 7:11, "Has 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".

Obviously, a thief steals and in the case of Israel's worship there was theft from God and it had to do with activities associated with sacrifices being offered to God. This was prophesied to happen in the last book of the Old Testament:

But you (Israel) profane it (God's name), in that you say, 'The table of the Lord is defiled; and its fruit, its food, is contemptible.' You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it," says the Lord of hosts. "And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?" "But cursed be the deceiver who has in his flock a male, and makes a vow, but sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished – for I am a great King," says the Lord of hosts, "And my name is to be feared among the nations" (Mal. 1:12-14; NKJV; comments added in parentheses).

To reinforce that the Levitical priesthood and Jewish system was being replaced by the authority vested in Messiah, there is important symbolism confirming this fact shortly after the tables of the moneychangers were overthrown,

Now in the morning, when he returned to the city, he became hungry.
¹⁹And seeing a single fig tree on the way, he came to it, and found nothing on it except leaves only; and he said to it, "No longer shall fruit be produced from you – into the age." And the fig tree instantly dried up.
(Mt. 21:18-19; RNT).

When we compare this scripture with one in the book of Jeremiah, we see that it is no coincidence that this took place.

"I will surely take them away," says the Lord. "There shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree... (Jer. 8:13; NKJV).

The fig tree is used symbolically of the nation as well as the priesthood of Israel. The nation of Israel would no longer enjoy its preeminent relationship with the only true God. The gentile nations would now be able to worship as equals in the temple of God. The priesthood would cease to be exclusively Levitical (Heb. 7:11-14). This was a very serious message to the religious leadership during Messiah's ministry. They were warned when he began his ministry in John 2:14, and they were given a final warning at the conclusion of his ministry in Matthew 21:12 –13.

In Luke 10, Messiah began directing the new priesthood that would include gentiles.

Now after this, the Lord appointed seventy two (Gk. *hebdomekonta duo*) others, and sent them two upon two before his face into every city and place where he was about to go. (Lk. 10:1; RNT; comments added in parentheses).

He also encouraged those who would be participants in this new priesthood by mentioning that they had authority to do great works and even greater works than he had done during his short ministry,

Behold, I have given you the authority to trample upon snakes and scorpions and on all the power of the enemy, and nothing will do you any harm. (Lk. 10:19; RNT).

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to my Father (Jn. 14:12; NKJV).

So the two incidents involving Messiah overturning the tables of the moneychangers were placed in scripture to show, among other things, that he had the authority given by his Father in heaven to replace the authority previously held by the Levitical priesthood. He also had the authority to sequester others, including gentiles, and place them in a new priesthood referred to as the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:17; 1Pe. 2:9-10).

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor.11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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