

# Reflections on John 2.13-25

by Will Groben

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**Day 1 / Memorize:** Practice the verses you have already memorized.

**Learn:** Pray, then read John 2.13-25. Jews spoke of going “up” to Jerusalem because it was the capital city, and it sat up in the hills. Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was an eight day holiday remembering the Exodus from slavery in Egypt, when God passed over Jewish homes but struck dead the first born of the Egyptian families, which led to Jewish deliverance [Exodus 12]. Under the Mosaic Law, all Israelite men were to travel to God’s chosen spot for this annual celebration [Deuteronomy 16.16], which in Jesus’ day was at the Temple in Jerusalem. People from all over the Roman empire came to Jerusalem for this celebration, swelling the city to many times its normal population. People who traveled far did not bring animals for sacrificial offerings, instead they bought the animals near the Temple. The Temple tax was accepted in Tyrian coinage only [because it contained a high concentration of silver], so people made use of the money changers near the Temple. Jesus did not object to the services these merchants offered, but he objected that they were offering them *inside* the Temple compound. One reason was that this outer court was the only place within the Temple compound where Gentiles could go, and instead of finding a peaceful place to pray they were immersed in a carnival like atmosphere, with baying animals and excited voices. The merchants were distracting people from worship!

**Reflect:** Every believer should have a daily time of prayer. When you have yours, what atmosphere do you provide yourself? Do you find a place of quiet, with no distractions? or do you have the television on or the children running around the house? or are you busy driving or doing chores around the house? God deserves your full attention; and you deserve focused time with God. Pray about this and commit to any changes you need to make in your daily *quiet* time.

**Want more?** Jesus probably was successful in clearing the Temple because of his moral authority and the righteousness of his act rather than any physical threat. His action was forceful, but not cruel: his “whip” would have been little more than a quirt used to usher animals along; he did not whip the flesh off, just pushed them along. John records this action near the start of Jesus’ ministry. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record a second cleansing of the Temple [Matthew 21.12-13; Mark 11.15-18; Luke 19.45-48], which hardened the opposition of the religious leaders [Mark 11.18]. By then, the opposition had been growing, so they were ready to act. This first time, Jesus was largely unknown to the religious leaders and the crowd liked him, so the leaders simply questioned him. If there had been too much of an uproar, the Roman guards would have come out of the adjacent fortress. Do you rely on the righteousness of your decisions to influence others or on leverage, position, and fear? Ask God to reveal if your attitude has been in error about these things.

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**Day 2 / Memorize:** Practice the verses you have already memorized.

**Learn:** Pray, then read John 2:13-25 again. Speaking of the Messianic time to come, Zechariah 14.21 could be translated, “And there will no longer be a *merchant* in the house of the Lord of hosts in that day.” The Temple was often called “House of God” or “House of Yahweh Almighty.” Jesus called it “my father’s house” – implying his claim to deity – and used a play on words that is lost in most English translations: “Stop making my father’s house a house of merchants” [literally, “marketplace”; 2.16]. The second reason Jesus was angry was the irreverence and disrespect for God shown by bringing otherwise legitimate trading activities into the house of worship where they did not belong.

**Reflect:** Due to Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, we can worship God anywhere today, but we still should gather together to worship and show reverence when we worship. There is no special anointing on a church building, but when we gather there we must focus on worshiping God, not getting needs met or social networking. And we must keep in mind that biblical worship involves more than singing, it is about heartfelt devotion, dependence, and submission toward God. Ask God to show you if you need to refocus on the purpose of our gathering together or be more consistent about it; prayerfully consider how passionate, focused, and devout is your worship when you are in church.

**Want more?** In v.18, some literal translations have “Jews,” but John uses this term to refer to the religious leaders of the Jews who questioned Jesus’ authority to clear the Temple, like they questioned John the Baptist’s authority to baptize. They were the authorities of the Temple, so they had a right to ask about what Jesus did without their permission. Note they never questioned the *righteousness* of what Jesus did and said; they were concerned about his *usurpation of their authority* in the Temple. In asking for a sign, they probably were demanding a miracle, for they would have understood Jesus’ words to be a claim to deity and would have expected miracles from the Messiah [see what Paul said about his people in 1 Corinthians 1.22]. Ironically, the cleansing of the Temple itself was a sign which they did not understand! Are you demanding signs of Jesus [or God]? Do you look for him to prove himself or his authority in your life?

**Day 3 / Memorize:** Practice the verses you have already memorized.

**Learn:** Pray, then read John 2.18-22. In v.19, Jesus spoke prophetically, about his crucifixion and resurrection. He frequently said the only sign the people would get was his resurrection, but he always couched this in symbolic language [for example, see Matthew 12.38-42]. His answer astonished the religious leaders: not only did this seem ridiculous to them, it also was quite a sign to offer, for if he could rebuild the Temple in three days then he certainly had the right to regulate what happened within it. This misunderstanding of what Jesus meant came up twice more: they accused him at his trial of threatening to destroy the Temple [Matthew 26.60-61] and they mocked him about it when he was on the cross [Matthew 27.40]. This last reference is ironic, for Jesus was about to do what he had originally promised! It is also ironic that the religious leaders would themselves help bring about the sign they demanded but would not recognize it even then.

**Reflect:** There is another aspect to what Jesus said. Theologically, Jesus replaces the Temple as the center of worship and his death was the sacrifice that rendered the Temple obsolete. As Jesus taught his followers, this is an example of *typology*, when Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of something that existed in the Old Testament times. Read John 14.6: what does this mean to you? What are the implications for those who are not believers in Christ?

**Want more?** John 2.22 shows that the disciples did not fully understand at the time, but did understand after the resurrection. One thing they remembered was Psalm 69.9, which is quoted in v.17. David wrote this psalm about himself, but part of the messianic promise was that the Messiah would be the ultimate Davidic King – a rightful ruling heir of David’s – and many of David’s writings about himself in the psalms were ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. The author John continually used Old Testament references to show how Jesus was fulfilling God’s plans. When David wrote this psalm, the first Temple had not yet been built, but the Israelites had the Tabernacle, which was a tent-like structure. At the time of this conversation in John, the new Temple had been under construction for forty-six years. The Jews completed the Temple in AD 64, only to have it destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, during a Jewish rebellion.

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**Day 4 / Memorize:** Practice the verses you have already memorized.

**Learn:** Pray, then read John 2.18-22 again. When Jesus rose from the dead, fulfilling his prophecy, it strengthened the disciples’ faith in Jesus and the scriptures that pointed to him. John shows us misunderstandings by the disciples about Jesus while he was alive, but all of these misunderstandings were cleared up before Jesus ascended to Heaven. John was not writing to clear up these misunderstandings among believers, rather he was using them to illustrate who Jesus is.

**Reflect:** Jesus knew he was going to be crucified and then resurrected from the dead. And he was. John shows us both the foreknowledge and the miraculous sign of the resurrection; does this help inspire faith in you? Why or why not?

**Want more?** Read John 2.23. Jesus did miracles – signs – while in Jerusalem, but John did not record these miracles in detail. John explained why he included what he did and why he left some out: John 20.30-31; 21.25.

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**Day 5 / Memorize:** Practice the verses you have already memorized.

**Learn:** Pray, then read John 2.23-25. Jesus collected some followers, but he was unaffected by their passing affections. They believed when they saw signs, and this was better than no faith, but it was just the first step of attraction, they still viewed him in human terms, they did not yet know him as Christ their personal savior. They would have made him an earthly king in their enthusiasm of the spectacle, but they were not yet devout or dependent. There is some word-play here: They believed in Jesus but he did not believe in them, knowing the weakness inherent in people.

**Reflect:** To believe signs is to believe in what you can experience, but Jesus calls people to a deeper faith, to trust in who he is and not just because he passes some test we have devised for him in our lives. What about you? Would you describe yourself as devout, or more just going through the motions when it is convenient? Would you describe yourself as utterly dependent upon Christ, or more prayerful only when a crisis hits? Pray about your answers.

**Want more?** The Bible says God alone knows the heart of a person [1 Kings 8.39]. A rabbinic teaching of the time was that there were seven things hidden from a man, and one of them was what was in the heart of a fellow man. The others were the day of death, the day of comfort, the depths of judgment, by what he can make profit, when the Kingdom of David will be restored, and when the wicked kingdom will be uprooted. As his gospel unfolds, John shows that Jesus knew all seven of these things.