

Jesus and the temple in Jerusalem

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GLADEWATER, Texas—There are many scriptures about God's Temple in the Old and New Testaments. Jesus Christ related to the Temple in, at least, the following ways:

1. Jesus was zealous for the Lord and He showed respect for the Temple. He was a pious Jew and devoted follower of His Father, the owner of the Temple. He did not want to see the Temple desecrated by those trying to merchandise it.

Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He 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 [John 2:13-22].

And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

Jesus referred to the Temple as the house of God (Matthew 12:4) and *My Father's* house (John 2:16). Because Malachi 3:1 prophesied the cleansing of the Temple as something the Lord and His Messenger would do, Jesus' act implied His deity and messiahship. He taught that everything in it was holy because of the sanctifying presence of God (Matthew 23:17, 21). He taught this in the context of not swearing ("he who swears by the *temple* swears by it and by Him who dwells in it").

2. Jesus' zeal led Him to purge the Temple of the moneychangers (Mark 11:15; John 2:16) and to weep over it as He reflected on its coming destruction (Mark 13:1; Luke 19:41). Jesus mentions the Temple in connection with answering questions from His disciples.

Mark 13:1-4. Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!"

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"

The stones referred to in this verse were those used in the building of the Temple and the walls on the sides of Mount Moriah on which the Temple stood. The Temple was constructed of white marble, and the blocks were of a prodigious size. Josephus says that some of these stones were fifty feet long, twenty-four feet broad and sixteen feet in thickness.

The hard-hearted scribes and chief priests sought how they might destroy Him (Mark 11:18; Luke 19:47). They couldn't take it that this massive Temple would be destroyed. The disciples, on the other hand, perceived that Christ was paying, as it were, His last respects to this physical temple.

With the physical temple prophesied to be gone, therefore, it would be up to Jesus Christ to erect a *new temple* far more magnificent, and that He should produce a more flourishing and better kingdom, as had been foretold by the Prophets—for He had nothing to do with that temple, in which everything was opposed to Him. But, again, the disciples could not believe that the magnificent splendor of the Temple would give way to Christ. And it ought to be carefully observed that, owing to the prodigious costliness of the Temple, their eyes were so dazzled by the splendor of its present aspect that they could scarcely entertain the hope that the kingdom of Christ would arise.

3. Because He was the Son of God incarnate, Jesus taught that He was greater than the Temple (Matthew 12:6).

Matthew 12:1-8. But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is *One greater* than the temple. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

4. Finally, Jesus taught that the church (Matthew 16:18) is the new, end-time Temple of God (Matthew 18:19; John 14:23).

Matthew 16:17-20. Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.

At Jesus' death, the curtain of the Temple was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). By His death, Jesus opened a new way into the presence of God. A new dispensation replaced the old. No longer was the Temple in Jerusalem to be the place where people worshiped God. From now on, God's people would worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:21).

5. Jesus' teaching that if the temple of His body was destroyed in three days He would raise it up (John 2:19) likewise affirms His superiority to the Temple building. That saying of Jesus may have provided the basis for the claim of the two false witnesses at His trial who stated that Jesus said "I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days" (Matthew 26:60-61; 27:40; Mark 14:57-58; 15:29).

John 2:19-22. Then the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the *temple of His body*.

Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.