

## **International Sunday School Lesson Study Notes**

**Lesson Text: Isaiah 56:6-7; Jeremiah 7:9-11; Mark 11:15-19**

**Lesson Title: The Cleansing of the Temple**

### **Introduction**

Have you ever heard the old adage, "Cleanliness is next to godliness?" It is often used as an admonition to clean or tidy up (such as from parents to children) and reflects man's focus on the outward part of man as a measure of inward spirituality. While there is actually no verse in the Bible that says, "Cleanliness is next to godliness," the subject of cleanliness and cleansing is prominent in Scripture (Psalm 19:12; 51:2; 119:9; Ephesians 5:26; James 4:8). In today's texts from Isaiah, Jeremiah and Mark, Jesus and the prophets will help us understand cleanliness from God's perspective, especially in relation to God's house.

The temple was a place that represented God's plan and purpose for the nation of Israel. God intended to use the nation of Israel to be a holy people through whom He would reach the world with His message of salvation. God also desired to reach out to the Gentiles and wanted those outside the covenant promises to come to Him. For this reason, the temple had a courtyard for use by believing Gentiles. At the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry and in the final week of His ministry, it was necessary for Him to cleanse the Temple and restore it to its original purpose.

### **A Call to God's House (Isaiah 56:6-7)**

The prophet Isaiah was born around 762-760 B.C. and began his ministry around 742-740 B.C., the final year of King Uzziah's reign. As far as we know Isaiah spent his entire life and ministry in and around Jerusalem. Isaiah's prophecy focused in part on the coming Messiah and His suffering for our salvation. Isaiah also warned the nation of the consequences of sin and the judgment of God upon sin.

Isaiah 56, 57, and 58 are written mainly for the purpose of ethical instructions to God's people. Chapter 56 begins with, "Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed." The statement is brief but, the implications are clear: Those who please God must keep the law both as it relates to reverence toward God and purity of personal life. Also recorded in this section are encouraging words in relation to the foreigner, or "stranger." Since the temple at Jerusalem was viewed as the center of worship for all people, Isaiah prophesied about a day when those who did not

belong to Israel by race or natural birth would come and partake of God's "*covenant*" (Isaiah 2:3). This is significant because the "stranger" or foreigner was ban from participating in Israel's worship (Exodus 12:43; Deuteronomy 23:1-8).

### Verse 6

"Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant"

"The sons of the stranger" are Gentiles, people outside the covenant community who will one day in the future, "join themselves unto the LORD." When Israel came out of Egypt there was a "*mixed multitude*" (Exodus 12:38) that came along for the ride. These people proved to be a problem to the nation. In contrast, Isaiah sees a day when "strangers" will be invited and welcomed to "join themselves unto the LORD" and find a place in God's family and God's house (Ephesians 2:12-13).

Upon what conditions will these "strangers" be able to "join themselves unto the LORD" (1 Corinthians 6:17). First, those Gentiles who commit themselves to the Lord commit "to serve him" and "be his servants." This speaks of consistent continual service to the Lord. They will be devoted to the Lord's interest and obedient to His commands. Second, those Gentiles who commit themselves to the Lord commit "to love the name of the LORD." This means they will be pleased with all the revelations God makes of Himself through His "name." Serving Him and loving Him go together; for those who truly love the Lord will serve Him faithfully. And it is impossible to serve the Lord and love the Lord without knowing His "name." His "name" reveals who He is. Third, those Gentiles who commit themselves to the Lord "keepeth the sabbath from polluting it." Foreigners and strangers who come to Jehovah and His temple in Jerusalem will never desecrate the Sabbath but rather "take hold" of the stipulations and requirements of God for Sabbath worship. Fourth, those Gentiles who commit themselves to the Lord "taketh hold of my covenant." It means they become resolute and courageous in both the requirements and the benefits of God's relationship with them (Jeremiah 11:4; Ezekiel 36:28).

To be invited to be a part of God's family is a blessing of grace. To accept that invitation and "join" the ranks of the redeemed requires a commitment of service, love, obedience, and embracing all the requirements and benefits of being God's child.

## Verse 7

"Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people."

"Them" is a reference to the Gentiles, the strangers. "Will I bring" means these Gentiles that will come will not come by accident, but rather by being led there by God Himself (Psalm 43:3). The "holy mountain" is the temple location in Jerusalem. When God leads these Gentile strangers to the temple in Jerusalem, they will be "joyful" in God's "house of prayer." Isaiah sees a nation not only restored but a nation full of joy with both Jew and Gentile united in "prayer, burnt offerings" and "sacrifices accepted upon mine altar." He is painting a picture here of pure and joyful worship.

"An house of prayer" is mentioned twice in this verse. King Solomon in his dedicatory prayer in 1 Kings 8:41-43, looked forward to the day when foreigners from distant lands would come to worship the Lord in Jerusalem. Isaiah clearly states that God's Holy Temple will one day be a universal "house of prayer for all people." Jesus quoted these very words in Matthew 21:13 and Mark 11:17.

To those who trust the Lord for salvation, God extends acceptance in His Temple, which shall be called "an house of prayer for all people." "All people" is a difficult truth for some to accept. "All" means all. Not just the Jews, or in our case, those we grew up with, our race, or those we accept. God's house and the privilege of prayer is for "all people."

## **A Corrupting of God's House (Jeremiah 7:9-11)**

Nearly one hundred years after Isaiah, the prophet Jeremiah appears on the scene. Jeremiah was around twenty years of age when he was called to be a prophet. Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry around 628 B.C. and continued beyond the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. He prophesied during the reigns of the last five kings of Judah, Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah.

The central theme of Jeremiah's ministry and message was warning Judah of impending judgment. The reason for God's judgment upon Judah was made clear through Jeremiah's preaching. Judah was guilty of almost every sin imaginable. Judah turned away from Jehovah to the gods of other nations and as a result lost all reverence and fear for God's law and righteousness. Whereas the prophet Isaiah

described what the nation and God's temple should be like and would be like in the future, Jeremiah described what it really was like in the present.

Jeremiah preached a series of seven sermons throughout the prophecy. Jeremiah's third sermon begins in Jeremiah 7 and continues through Jeremiah 10. In this section, Jeremiah describes a people whose sins are public knowledge, but these people still come to the temple and worship as if nothing was wrong. Does this sound familiar?

### Verse 9-11

"Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord."

The temple had become a sort of "spiritual fix" for the people. They treated it like a place with magical power. No matter how sinful the people were they believed if they came to the temple they could just say *"The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD..."* (Jeremiah 7:4) and all their problems would vanish. Jeremiah argued that God's people were using the temple as a license to for immoral and disobedient living. His question in these verse is how can the people break God's commandments and then claim to be "delivered?"

Jeremiah was standing *"in the gate of the LORD'S house"* (Jeremiah 7:1) when he preached this message. From this position Jeremiah could view everyone as they came in and out of the temple. Standing here and preaching, Jeremiah mentions five of the Ten Commandments the people had broken. They had "stolen, murdered, committed adultery, lied, and burned incense unto Baal." They were following "other gods" whom they didn't even know. The gods of the heathen and Jehovah were being worshipped alike and the ways of the world were being mixed and intermingled with the worship of Jehovah. Sound familiar?

*Note: Mixing the world in our worship today is called "open mindedness" or "sinner friendly." God calls it an abomination!*

In spite of their obvious guilt, the people continued to "come and stand before" God "in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?" The phrase, "We are delivered to do all these abominations" reveals that the people thought they were safe because they came to

the temple and worshipped. "Delivered" means "discharged from guilt." What Jeremiah is describing here is simple "lip service" (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8; Mark 7:6). The people knew where and when to say "Amen, glory to God, and Hallelujah." They knew when to show up at church, what to wear, and how to fake a relationship with God. But God's man called their bluff! And God said, "Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD." Jeremiah said, "You're caught!"

The results of their sinful and deceptive lifestyles had resulted in God's "house, which is called by my name" becoming "a den of robbers" in their "eyes." The house of God that had been built for the purpose of both Jew and Gentile coming to worship had now become a place where a bunch of crooks hung out. It was nothing more than a hiding place for those who had robbed God of His glory. That is the way it was viewed "in their eyes."

Sadly, many people today see the church "in their eyes" as a place to go to cover their sinful lifestyles. "In their eyes," the church is a place they can go on Sunday morning and feel "delivered" or discharged from their guilt. There is genuine deliverance and salvation from sin. But it is not in the hypocritical unrepentant attitude that prevails today.

### **A Cleansing in God's House (Mark 11:15-19)**

The first thing Jesus did the first time He came to Jerusalem was to cleanse the temple (John 2:13-22). One of the last things Jesus did the last time He came to Jerusalem was to cleanse the temple a second time. After Jesus' triumphal entry, He went *"into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things"* (Mark 11:11) it is obvious He was troubled by what he seen. He then retired to Bethany to spend the night. The next morning, Jesus returned to the temple and cleansed it for the second time during His earthly ministry.

There is more going on here than Jesus condemning buying and selling on church property. We should be careful about that and avoid making our places of worship into bargain basements or general stores. There is entirely too much selling of ourselves and our ministries today. God is not pleased with merchandising the gospel. A careful examination of the text, especially in connection with Isaiah and Jeremiah's words, reveals that Jesus is saying something important about God's house and how we treat it.

#### Verse 15-16

"And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple."

Jesus' actions in "overthrowing the tables of moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves" is similar to His actions the first time He cleansed the temple (John 2:13-17). This is a terrible and violent scene. There is nothing passive about what Jesus is doing here. Notice the words, "cast out, overthrew, and would not suffer." The temple belongs to Jesus and He is in control.

How had the temple gotten in this shape? Who was to blame? At the heart of the answer to these questions is the fact that some people had found a way to make money off of God. The Jew was obligated by law to bring sacrificial animals to be offered for the forgiveness of their sins. A sick, injured, or imperfect animal was not acceptable to God. God expected the best, not some bird or lamb that was about to die. Unfortunately, that opened the door for corruption and extortion.

The priests and religious leaders saw an opportunity for financial gain in this system. As people would bring their animals for the sacrifices, these corrupt priests would look at their sacrifices and spot a supposed defect or blemish. Since the people respected their leaders, they would not argue or disagree. Of course, the corrupt priest would just happen to have a certified acceptable sacrifice to sell the worshipper. It was in that exchange that corruption and the extortion of people took place at the temple. These "moneychangers" would change the currency of the people and exhort tremendous exchange charges, thereby robbing the people. Those who "sold doves" did so with inflated prices. This is what angered our Lord.

This religious market was set up at the temple in the court of the Gentiles. Jesus also found the people just walking in and out of the temple in areas that were off limits. They were just trafficking through making everything common. In response to that Jesus "would not suffer that any man should carry out any vessel though the temple."

*Note: Today, a similar situation in the church is taking place through legalistic preaching and teaching that places unbiblical burdens and man-made standards upon the people beyond that which God requires. Rules and regulations that aren't in the Bible, but somehow make their way into the sermon and the lesson because they benefit the preacher or teacher. That is the kind of situation that would cause Jesus to come in and overturn the tables. Also, the preachers of the health and*

*wealth gospel and word of faith gospel are nothing more than "moneychangers" and "sellers of doves." They preach that you are poor because your faith is weak. If you buy their dove or their pigeon you're guaranteed to be right with God.*

### Verse 17

"And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves."

After cleansing the temple Jesus quoted Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 and "taught" concerning what the temple should be. "My house" are words reminding the people that the temple belongs to the Lord, not us. The same is true of the local church. The local church is not mine. It's not yours. It's not ours or theirs! The local church belongs to Jesus Christ. He is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23). The temple was also "a house of prayer for all nations." God's house was designed to be a place where people could come and worship and talk the heavenly Father. Imagine all the noise and conversations going on in the outer court of the temple prior to Jesus' cleansing. It must have sounded like the floor of the stock market or the fellowship hall in the average church. You couldn't hear yourself think! Sound familiar?

"But ye have made it a den of thieves" is also a reminder that the church can become whatever we make it. Our places of worship can be in agreement with God's design for worship and prayer or they can be entertainment centers, amusement parks, social clubs, or whatever else we make them. Jesus wants the meeting place of His people to be what He designed, not a place for a group of guilty thieves to come together and deceive themselves into thinking they are right with God!

### Verse 18-19

"And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine. And when even was come, he went out of the city."

Upon hearing Jesus' teaching the "scribes and chief priest sought how they might destroy him." The religious leaders hated Jesus for His indictments against their hypocrisy and desecration of His house. They "feared" Jesus because He was popular among the people. You see, this was all about the religious leaders, not God's glory. And that is probably the most abominable thing taking place in the temple. It is about them, not Him!

You would think after this display of authority and power by Jesus that those in authority would ask forgiveness and restore the temple to worship. But that didn't happen. And it won't happen today. Why? There is too much money and authority involved. For the legalist preachers and teachers to return to biblical preaching and teaching means they must give up their dominating authority over people. They can't do it. They are addicted. For the health and wealth preachers and teachers to return to biblical preaching and teaching means they must give up their wealth and entertainment dynasties. They can't do it. They are addicted. So, what is the answer? The answer is "destroy him." And that is what we do when we allow the temple to be desecrated.

## **Conclusion**

It is impossible to study our texts today from Isaiah, Jeremiah, and from Mark's Gospel without realizing God is serious about His house being clean. It is also evident that the people involved in these three portions of Scripture all had their own agenda and wasn't that concerned about God's. May we remember that God is serious about the cleanliness of His house. May we also remember that He will deal with it even if we don't.

One of the first ways our churches should be cleansed is in the removal of prejudices, man-made opinions, and insistence on our way or no way. Change is not easy. Isaiah challenged the people of his day to see that God wanted the doors of the temple opened to Gentiles. Our challenge today is to recognize that the gospel is for everyone. And if the gospel is for everyone, then the church building should be as well! Jeremiah challenged the people of his day to see their hypocrisy and understand they couldn't live as they pleased and then run to the temple and think they were safe. Jesus showed the people of His day that the temple was His and He would not tolerate anything that was not in accordance with His Word.

Our literal places of worship are important. It is important to invite all to come, hear the gospel, be saved, and unite together in prayer and worship. But before anything changes in regard to our places of worship, things must change in our hearts. The Apostle Paul said, *"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."* (1 Corinthians 6:19). The temple in Jerusalem belonged to God and those who are saved belong to Christ. Pray today for God to cleanse your "temple." It is the best way for His "temple" to be clean.



Amen.