

## JESUS EXITS THROUGH THE TEMPLE GIFT SHOP

Title is a Joke—Meant to reflect the crass commercialism of Disney World that makes you go through a gift shop to get out of any location.

**READ John 2:10–25 (ESV)**

### DISCUSSION:

1. Imagine the thousands of pilgrims crowding the streets and courtyards of the great temple. What can you hear? See? Smell? What is the mood of the people? **Answers will vary.**
2. Why would you need a money-changer in the temple? **Local currency had pagan symbols and had to be exchanged for the official “temple money.” You can imagine a number of potential abuses regarding exchange rates and fees (and you thought ripoffs at the back were a modern invention!)**
3. What provoked Jesus’ anger? What suggests that this wasn’t just an impulsive act/ temper tantrum (v. 15)? **In addition to the lack of respect for the holiness of the place presumably Jesus was also angered by the injustices and cheating of the vulnerable.**
4. John 2:17 quotes Psa 69:9. What does this reveal about Jesus’ motivation? **It wasn’t about him. Much of our anger is usually about injustice or slights to ourselves, by contrast Jesus is concerned about others, most notably his Father. [the “father” language also reveals much about his relationship with God]**
5. Jesus was a carpenter (stonemason?) from the remote small town of Nazareth. Why didn’t the proud religious leaders stop him? **Sometimes people act with a presence of authority that causes other people to step aside. There are moments in scripture where Jesus’ glory shines through (Mt of Transfiguration, arrest in the garden). Perhaps it was something like that. This reminds me of a scene in the Lord of the Rings: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKaw5SjeHx0>**
6. Presumably lots of people saw what was happening in the temple. Why was Jesus the only one to do something? Are there lessons for us regarding situations we may find ourselves in? **Maybe they benefited. Maybe they just got used to it. We can become immune to the evils around us and like the frog in slowly heating water become oblivious to the evil around us, even in God’s house.**
7. What tone of voice do you think Jesus is using? What about the religious leaders? **Lots of yelling; sarcasm.**
8. Was Jesus’ behavior loving? **YES AND THIS IS AN IMPORTANT POINT. Love doesn’t mean “nice.” The opposite of love isn’t hate, it’s indifference. If you love someone their destructive actions affect you emotionally. God loves this world and the people in it. Those who bring destruction on what He lovingly created in His image understandably generate wrath. If God didn’t have wrath on evil and injustice; he wouldn’t really be a God of love.**

9. How would you explain v.24-25? **See attached commentary. Some good thoughts, especially that God doesn't just blindly accept "faith" at face value. He knows a fake.**
10. In light of this story, how would you respond to a person that tells you they are fed up with religious hypocrisy? **Good! So was Jesus!**

## Cleansing the temple (2:12-25)

**Passover** (2:13). Exodus 12 explains this feast. It was one of the annual feasts that all male Jews were supposed to celebrate in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16:16).

**Temple** (2:14). In order to satisfy his passion for building and win the favor of his subjects, Herod the Great had undertaken to build a magnificent temple. The project was begun in 19 BC and not finished until AD 64.[\[30\]](#) Although it was only half-done when Jesus was there, it was breathtaking and in full operation.

The temple proper (the Holy Place) was surrounded by

several courts. The innermost court was open only to Jewish men, the next admitted both Jewish men and women, and the outermost admitted Gentiles as well as Jews. The Court of the Gentiles was huge—some five hundred by three hundred yards—and it was here that Jesus probably **found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.**

These businesses were essential to the sacrificial system. People who came from hundreds of miles away could hardly bring animals with them, so they needed to buy them in Jerusalem. Also, since one was allowed to give money to the temple treasury only in Tyrian coinage, there had to be someone who could exchange Greek, Roman, or other coins for the acceptable type. However, there was no reason why these transactions could not have taken place near but outside the temple. The Court of the Gentiles was supposed to be the place where Gentiles could meet and worship the true God. The marketplace bedlam would have made this impossible.[\[31\]](#)

**My Father's house** (2:16). A Jew might speak of “my Father in heaven” or “our Father in heaven” but never of “my Father.” But Jesus often referred to God in this shockingly familiar way.[\[32\]](#)

50 Dollar words:

- Pericope—a section of scripture
- Paschal—of or relating to Passover (or Easter)
- Johannine—related to the apostle John

## 2. Transition (2:12)


<sup>12</sup>After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

**2:12** This verse links the Cana wedding sign and the story of the cleansing of the temple. Although the verse appears to some to be of minimal significance,<sup>22</sup> others consider it important.

R. Brown, for example, is concerned with how the statement about Jesus' mother and his brothers affected the doctrinal thesis about the perpetual virginity of Mary.<sup>23</sup> Although this verse may

<sup>22</sup> It receives no comment in G. Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1987), 36.

<sup>23</sup> R. Brown, *John*, 1.112. The view that the brothers were the sons of Joseph dates back to Epiphanius and is the one most generally accepted by Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and many Anglican interpreters. The alternative view that the brothers were sons of Joseph's brother (or Mary's sister) was proposed by Jerome. L. Morris followed the view of Helvidus, a fourth-century theologian, who considered the brothers to be the sons of Mary and Joseph as the most natural interpretation (*The Gospel according to John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 187–88). The issue of course

cause problems for some and the term "brothers" (*adephoi*) may be reinterpreted by them as sons of Joseph by a previous marriage or as cousins, the basic point of the verse seems to indicate that Jesus and his disciples, along with his mother and brothers, were in a state of transition from the hill country of Cana to the lake shore region of Capernaum. 

It might be suggested with Morris that the transition could represent the movement of the family home to an area where Jesus did much of his ministry in Galilee,<sup>24</sup> except that it is not actually certain from the verse that even his mother and brothers continued there any longer than Jesus and his disciples. The other Gospels offer little insight into the meaning of this verse. Schnackenburg thinks the verse indicates that Jesus was not tied to home, family, or friends but pressed on to his self-revelation in

involves some strong presuppositions that affect the reading of the text. J. Bernard argues that a second-century tradition concerning the virginity of Mary supports the view that Jesus' brothers were not children of Mary (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928], 1.85).

<sup>24</sup> See Morris, *John*, 186–87.

Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. The Cleansing of the Temple and the Stage Set for Conflict (2:13–22)

<sup>13</sup>When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. <sup>15</sup>So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup>To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!”

<sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

<sup>18</sup>Then the Jews demanded of him, “What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?”

<sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”

<sup>20</sup>The Jews replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you

are going to raise it in three days?”

<sup>21</sup>But the temple he had spoken of was his body. <sup>22</sup>After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

Perhaps no text in the Gospel of John has created greater problems for historians than the positioning of the cleansing of the temple at this point in John.<sup>26</sup> For those expecting a chronological arrangement, the fact that the cleansing of the temple comes at the end of Jesus’ ministry in the Synoptics and at the beginning of his ministry in John is difficult to resolve. Arguments abound in which one

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., W. Howard, “The Position of the Temple Cleansing in the Fourth Gospel,” *ExpTim* 44 (1933): 84–85; G. Lewis, “Dislocations in the Fourth Gospel: The Temple Cleansing and the Visit of Nicodemus,” *ExpTim* 44 (1933): 228–30; F. Lewis, “Disarrangement in the Fourth Gospel,” *ExpTim* 44 (1933): 382; I. Buse, “The Cleansing of the Temple in the Synoptics and in John,” *ExpTim* 70 (1958): 22–24, and especially R. Lightfoot, “Unsolved New Testament Problems: The Cleansing of the Temple in St. John’s Gospel,” *ExpTim* 60 (1948): 64–68.

<sup>25</sup> Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1.343.

either posits an error on the part of John or the Synoptics or one argues for two cleansings of the temple. The suggestion of error involves a questionable presupposition and really does not solve much. But the familiar argument of two cleansings is a historiographic monstrosity that has no basis in the texts of the Gospels. *There is only one cleansing of the temple in each Gospel.*

Given this dilemma, then, readers of John need to consider that the problem may be one of perspective and false expectation. Why should John have to write his Gospel as a modern newspaper reporter? His purpose was not to report but to proclaim and persuade (20:30–31). He was a great inspired artist and theologian who organized his episodes from the life of Jesus in such a way as to bring people to faith in Jesus as the Son of God. What is more, the evangelist viewed the story of Jesus in its entirety from a *postresurrection perspective*.<sup>27</sup> The evangelist even told us what he was doing in this very pericope (2:22). At the time of writing, Jesus was not then living on earth and facing death; he was reigning in power with God.

<sup>27</sup> G. Borchert, “The Resurrection Perspective in John,” *RevExp* 85 (1988): 501–13.

The task the evangelist faced then was to show his readers how the two sides of light and darkness (1:4–5), life and death (5:24–29; cf. 3:36), had been locked in the great eschatological battle even during Jesus’ life (cf. 1:10–13). What the evangelist as artist seems to have done here is what many great writers have done throughout history. He used a literary method that can be characterized as *in medius res* (“in the middle of things”). Similar dramatic patterns are frequently noted in television programs today. The point is to set the viewer in the middle of the most exciting and crucial part of the story in order to gain the viewer’s immediate attention.

But John was not simply interested in gaining the reader’s attention; he was concerned to have the reader understand the depth of the struggle in which Jesus was involved. Placing this pericope here was no mere superficial transposing of the temple story to the beginning of the Gospel to make room for the Lazarus scene, as R. Brown seems to suggest.<sup>28</sup> It was a calculated move to make this account the centerpiece of the Cana Cycle, bringing to the forefront the *deter-*

<sup>28</sup> R. Brown, *John*, 1.118.

*minative nature of Passover* in the work of Jesus. To miss the function of Passover in this Gospel is to miss one of the crucial stepping stones in the development of John's argument.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, merely to count Passovers as is frequently done in studies on John and then to talk about a ministry of two and a half or three years for Jesus because of the Passovers involves, I believe, superficial reading of a profound book. Accordingly, I find unsatisfying most scholarly attempts at a chronological study of John's temple cleansing in comparison with the Synoptics whether, for example, with Dodd, Lightfoot, and Barrett, who argue for the priority of Synoptic chronology,<sup>30</sup> with J. A. T. Robinson and Lagrange, who argue for the priority of Johannine chronology,<sup>31</sup> or with R.

<sup>29</sup> See Borchert, "The Passover and the Narrative Cycles in John," in *Perspectives on John* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1993), 307–8.

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., Dodd, *Interpretation*, 297–300; R. Lightfoot, "Unsolved Problems," 64–68; and *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), 60–79; and C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: SPCK, 1956), 162–64.

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., J. A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, ed. T. F. Coakley (London: SCM, 1985).

Brown, who argues for a combination of both.<sup>32</sup> They all seem to me to be nontheologically instructive efforts. By letting John write from his own postresurrection perspective, we do not give up on history but allow the book to be what the author intended it to be—a testimony.

Of course, being sure of an author's intention is a major problem. But when the author has explicitly stated his purpose, it is appropriate to give attention to that purpose and remember that this Gospel is an organized selection of pericopes. Such is precisely what he told us the book is, and perhaps it is time to think about his purpose (20:30–31) and how it affects the placement of a pericope like the cleansing of the temple.

2:13 The story opens with the important notation that the Passover of the Jews was near. That notation should contextualize for the reader the entire discussion because for John it was largely what gave the account of Jesus' death its meaning. In this Gospel the cleansing of the temple is not merely an example of divine wrath on the Jews (2:17); it also is a sign that points to the paschal death and the resurrection of Jesus (2:19). Further-

<sup>32</sup> R. Brown, *John*, 1.113.

more, the designation “Jewish Passover” also may suggest to the reader that this festival was not a Christian ceremony.<sup>33</sup> For the Christian *the last Passover has been held*. Jesus has fulfilled the Passover and carried the Christian beyond the need for the Jewish ritual when the people “went up” (*anebē*) like Jesus to Jerusalem.

For the Jew, Jerusalem was the center of the world. Anyone who has lived in Israel and has traveled much in Palestine knows by personal experience of the hills there that the pilgrim goes “up to Jerusalem” because Jerusalem is a mountain city (cf. [Ps 125:2](#); [Acts 11:2](#); [15:1](#); [18:22](#)).<sup>34</sup> Moreover, when people made their festival pilgrimages to Jerusalem, they usually sang the psalms of ascension ([Pss 122–134](#)). Mountains have been of critical importance in the formulation of Israel’s faith (cf. [Exod 3:1](#); [19:16–25](#)) just as they were in Matthew’s formulation of the story of Jesus (e.g., [Matt 4:8](#); [5:1](#); [17:1](#);

<sup>33</sup> See also Beasley-Murray, *John*, 39. Contrast E. Haenchen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. R. Funk et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 1.182.

<sup>34</sup> For an excellent discussion with pictures and illustrations see R. Mackowski, *Jerusalem: City of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

[28:16](#)), but our text in John is one of the few hints at reminiscences of mountain ascents in the Gospel. 🗨️

Jerusalem may have been the center of the world for Luke (cf. the importance of Jerusalem in the beginning, at the end, and throughout that Gospel; cf. also the beginning of Acts), but the same perspective does not seem evident in the Gospel of John. Jerusalem and the temple in John is the place of the Jews, the place of tragic rejection (e.g., [1:11](#), [19](#); [5:1](#), [16–41](#); [7:14](#), [52](#); [10:22–31](#)). The Johannine community probably viewed it primarily as the place *in which* their salvation story was birthed and *from which* the church community expanded.

[2:14–17](#) The setting of this scene is the temple, which had come to resemble a market rather than a place of worship.<sup>35</sup> The scene can be contrasted directly with the old testament prophetic view of the role of the temple in the worship of God (e.g., [Zech 14:20–21](#); [Mic 6:6–13](#); [Jer 7:4](#)). The temple court (*hieron*) apparently had been turned over to the sale of animals and birds used in sacrifice.<sup>36</sup> The pigeons

<sup>35</sup> See S. Mender, “Die Templereinigung,” *ZNW* 47 (1956): 93–112.

<sup>36</sup> Str-B (1.850–52) did not discover any Jewish



or doves, the sin offering of the poor (Lev 5:7), is mentioned in the temple cleansing of Mark (11:15) and Matthew (21:12) as well as here, but the presence of the more expensive animals is noted only here. The usual sin offering was a lamb or goat (Lev 5:6). Oxen are mentioned specifically in connection with the burnt offerings of Numbers 7.

As far as the money changers (2:14) are concerned, each Israelite who was part of the annual poll was expected to provide a half-shekel tax/offering to the temple (Exod 30:13). Moreover, those who came from a distance instead of bringing offerings of animals or birds could bring money and purchase them from the temple staff, a practice that developed out of the alternative pattern provided in Deut 14:25. The payments of these items, however, could not be made in foreign currencies like Roman denarii, which contained

texts that supported the idea of selling in the temple. But V. Epstein indicated that because of a conflict between merchants and the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas permitted supporting merchants to set up markets in the very precincts of the temple (“The Historicity of the Gospel Account of the Cleansing of the Temple,” *ZNW* 55 [1964]: 42–58).

Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996).

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pagan symbols and the images of emperors. Therefore the money had to be exchanged for appropriate temple currency.<sup>37</sup> The result was that the temple also became a major money exchange or bank. Whether the people were here being cheated by the wily Annas, a “god-father” type high priest, and his high priestly clan is not clear.<sup>38</sup> But the entire affair obviously was detestable to Jesus. 🗨️

The temple, the Father’s house (cf.

<sup>37</sup> J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem zur Zeit Jesu* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), 2.20–31. Tyrian coinage was used in the temple only during the first century of our era. For an abbreviated statement concerning currencies, see the Eng. ed. *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, trans. F. H. and C. H. Cave (London: SCM Press, 1969), 18, 32–35.

<sup>38</sup> Through his sons and son-in-law Caiaphas, Annas controlled the high priesthood for years, alternating when a change was necessary. But he remained the power throughout the period. See, e.g., [John 18:13, 24](#); [Luke 3:2](#); [Acts 4:6](#). Texts suggest that confusion was present among the people concerning who the high priest was at any one time, and apparently the situation continued because Paul either made a mistake later and was corrected about the designated one or was speaking ironically in [Acts 23:1–5](#).

“house of prayer,” [Mark 11:17](#) and parallels), had become a market house or a house of business (cf. “den of robbers,” [Mark 11:17](#)), and the disciples recognized that Jesus was intolerant (zealous) when it came to the misuse of God’s place by the religious leaders ([John 2:17](#)). The way Jesus reacted to the Jewish merchandising in the temple troubles some who cannot conceive of a loving Jesus being angry. But spineless love is hardly love. Instead, characteristics that adhere to anger and judgment can in fact be the obverse side of the coin of love.<sup>39</sup> Personality is not single-faceted, and any theology that is monofocal and fails to encompass both love and judgment ultimately ends up in heresy.

Jesus’ zealous reaction to the temple merchants ([2:17](#)) closely mirrors God’s anger at Sinai when the people played the

<sup>39</sup> For an excellent example of the two sides of God, note the illustrations of the two mountains in [Heb 12:18–29](#). Judgment does not mean there is no grace, and grace does not mean there is no more judgment. For my discussion of the text see *Assurance and Warning* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 189–91. The splitting of these two sides of God was at the heart of Marcion’s inadequate theology as well as many Gnostic views.

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harlot and worshiped around the golden calf (cf. [Exod 32:10](#); [Deut 9:14](#)). It also is not very different from Paul’s view of the wrath of God against ungodliness in [Rom 1:18–32](#). In this text the disciples are said to have viewed the action as righteous indignation and indeed as the fulfillment of Scripture ([2:17](#); cf. [Ps 69:9](#)).<sup>40</sup>

Only here in John do we find that Jesus made a whip from cords ([John 2:15](#)) and used it as an instrument for driving out the merchants. Whether the whip was made from materials used to tether animals or from their feed and bedding materials is not stated.<sup>41</sup> Weapons and clubs were forbidden in the temple courts, but the prescription apparently did not include such whips (*phragellion*; cf. [T. Benj. 2:3](#)<sup>42</sup>). It is possible to interpret the text as suggesting that Jesus may have

<sup>40</sup> Concerning the use of scriptural references see F. F. Bruce, “The Book of Zechariah and the Passion Narrative,” *BJRL* 43 (1961): 350–51; E. Freed, *Old Testament Quotations in the Gospel of John* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 8–10; S. Edger, “Respect for Context in Quotations from the Old Testament,” *NTS* 9 (1962): 58–59.

<sup>41</sup> R. Brown suggests that the whip may have been made out of rushes used in bedding the animals (*John*, 1.115).

<sup>42</sup> See [BAGD](#), 865.

used it on both the merchants and the animals (2:15). The masculine “all” (*pantas*) need not refer merely to animals as in the NIV.<sup>43</sup> Jesus also overturned the tables of the exchangers and scattered the money. The term “tables” (*trapezas*) in the New Testament is a technical word used to refer to functions associated with the handling of money such as banking. It is the same word that is used in the much misunderstood reference to waiting or serving at tables in Acts 6:2.<sup>44</sup>

Some commentators question why Jesus whipped the animals (probably also their handlers) out of the temple yet merely told the bird merchants to get out of the temple precincts (2:16). They have posited that Jesus treated the merchants of the sacrifices for the poor better than he did the merchants who provided for the more wealthy. That distinction, however, seems to be unnecessarily precise. Anyway, birds and cages have to be handled differently. Moreover, it is doubtful

<sup>43</sup> See H. Moulton, “*Pantas* in John 2:15,” *BT* 18 (1967): 126–27.

<sup>44</sup> See my discussion of this text in *Today’s Model Church* (Forest Park, Ill.: Roger Williams, 1971), 37–38. It seems to me that BAGD, 824, should list Acts 6:2 under meaning #4.


whether Jesus’ “words” were less effective than the “whip.”

2:18 The reaction of “the Jews” (probably here the keepers of order<sup>45</sup>) was to demand a “sign.” The use of the term “sign” here in this context of confrontation or demand by the Jews has a slightly different focus from the sign for believers as in 2:11. The Jewish challenge was for *Proof* of either Jesus’ right to make a particular statement (e.g., 6:30) or to do a particular act (e.g., 2:18). The demand for such a sign was in effect the demand for Jesus to justify himself in their eyes.<sup>46</sup> In such contexts in John, Jesus refused the requests. He readily argued with the Jews, but he refused to become a magician performing signs for their benefit.

2:19 Instead of giving the demanding Jews a magical proof, Jesus offered them a prediction concerning destruction and rising. If they had had ears to recognize it, they would have understood that the prediction could have served as a sign. But Jesus’ response—“destroy [*lusate* could mean “tear down”] this temple [*naos*, the inner segment of a temple], and I will raise [*egerō* could mean “rebuild”] it

<sup>45</sup> See J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 2.23–33.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 40.

again in three days”—was completely misunderstood by the Jews.<sup>47</sup> This misunderstanding is a good example of the way John employed double-level thinking throughout the Gospel.<sup>48</sup> Unbelievers misunderstood Jesus because they perceived only the physical or surface level meaning of his statements and were unaware that these statements actually revealed something about Jesus and the transformation of life that he brought (cf. Nicodemus in the next pericope) 

**2:20–21** The Jewish response predictably was based on misunderstanding. The issue of their concern was buildings, but Jesus shifted the base system of the conversation to himself and his body (2:21). Not understanding the key to this shift, as far as the Jews were concerned, the statement was ridiculous. Indeed, misunderstanding of such a prediction statement appears in the confused trial testimony and in the mocking episodes at the cross in both Matthew (26:61; 27:40)

<sup>47</sup> For an interesting application of this idea see D. Stanley, “The Christian Mystery and the New Temple,” *Worship* 32 (1958): 233–39. Cf. Dodd, *Interpretation*, 301.

<sup>48</sup> X. Léon-Dufour, “Le signe du Temple selon Saint Jean,” *RSR* 39 (1951): 155–57.

and Mark (14:58; 15:29). In both of those scenes and in the antagonistic outcry against Stephen in Acts 6:14 the enemies *falsely argued* that Jesus made a threat that he would destroy the Jewish temple. This Johannine story provides a reasonable context for the accusation there that is not indicated in the other Gospels.<sup>49</sup>

The Jewish response in John provides one of the significant chronological or historical checkpoints in the Gospels. The scene should be dated  $\approx$  between A.D. 27 and 28.<sup>50</sup> Jesus was born before  $\approx$  4 B.C., when Herod the Great died. By the time John wrote his Gospel, the temple had been destroyed ( $\approx$  A.D. 70). Jesus was not responsible for its destruction. The Romans under Titus, the son of Vespasian (the one who before becoming emperor initiated the war as the legate in Syria and who left the final phase incomplete), destroyed the place because they finally

<sup>49</sup> Even Bultmann considers this reference in John to reflect the earliest level of the tradition related to this temple saying of Jesus (*John*, 126).

<sup>50</sup> Josephus indicates the temple reconstruction was initiated in the eighteenth year of Herod, which took place between 20 and 19 B.C. (*Antiquities* 15.380). Cf. R. Brown, *John*, 1.115–16.

had enough of the Jewish resistance.<sup>51</sup> It is significant that during Jesus' time the Herodian reconstruction that began in 20/19 B.C. was about half finished after forty-six years (2:20).<sup>52</sup> It was completed in A.D. 63 and only stood in its finished state approximately seven years before it was burned and its stones were pulled down (cf. Mark 13:1-2).

2:21-22 This verse is one of the symbolic mileposts in John that reminds the reader of how to view this Gospel. When this text was written, Jesus was no longer dead. He had been raised victorious over the tomb. The reader needs to understand

<sup>51</sup> It sometimes is hard for the contemporary world to realize how painful the Jewish resistance was to Rome. When Jerusalem was finally destroyed, the Romans built a triumphal arch in the heart of the forum area of Rome itself to honor Titus's achievement. The Jewish war probably was about as painful for the Romans as Vietnam was for the United States or Afghanistan was for the former USSR.

<sup>52</sup> Schnackenburg (*St. John*, 1.351-52) indicates that the number forty-six has been the subject of various symbolic interpretations such as pointing to the Greek numeric value of the name "Adam," but he forthrightly rejects such fanciful interpretations.


Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11*, vol. 25A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996).

the postresurrection perspective that is pervasive throughout the Gospel.<sup>53</sup> The recollection or remembrance (*emnēsthēsan*) of the disciples is thus from the victory side of the tomb.<sup>54</sup> Accordingly, the way John wrote the stories of Jesus presupposes that the disciples were convinced he was alive. Moreover, it was also their firm conviction that he was the fulfillment of Scripture. Therefore, the way the believer looks at the Old Testament is forever determined by the fact that Jesus the Christ (20:31) lives.<sup>55</sup> What

<sup>53</sup> For a discussion of the resurrection perspective see G. Borchert, "The Resurrection Perspective," 501-13.

<sup>54</sup> For a discussion of remembrance see R. Leung Tsung-Yat, "'Memory' in John's Gospel," *Theology Annual* (Hong Kong) 2 (1978): 3-17.

<sup>55</sup> R. Bultmann regards the designation "Jesus Christ" as a mythological faith construct of the early church that combined the name of the historical (*historische*) Jesus with the faith confession (*geschichtliche*=historic) of Christ. Bultmann refuses to make such a combined statement. See his discussion "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. H. Bartsch, trans. R. Fuller (London: SPCK, 1957), 1-44. See also my comments on "Demythologization," in *Evangelical Dic-*

specific text of Scripture fulfillment is meant here, however, is not totally clear, but the text most frequently considered to be relevant at this point is [Ps 69:9](#). The text that reflects victory over Sheol ([Ps 16:10](#)) may also have been in mind. 

#### 4. An Incisive Transitional Note (2:23–25)

<sup>23</sup> Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. <sup>25</sup> He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.

[2:23–25](#) Between the pericope of the cleansing of the temple and the story of Nicodemus lies another of the typical Johannine saddle texts or linking sections (cf. [2:12](#)). The three verses of this section provide a decisive summation concerning Jesus and the nature of believing. All is set within the context of an important reminder that it was Passover time—in John the determinative setting for decision making and believing. Although this

*tionary of Theology*, ed. W. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), [309](#).

Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996).

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linking section is short, its length is hardly an indication of its significance. These verses are among the most significant statements for providing a correct perspective to the Gospel.

In the first place, this section may be somewhat frustrating to readers for several reasons. To begin, v. [23](#) refers to the “signs” (*sēmeia*; plural) Jesus was doing. Yet later, [4:54](#) indicates that the healing of the official's son was only the second sign Jesus had done. For some readers this type of mixed historical detail causes a major problem they wish would go away.<sup>56</sup> But some scholars use this text to argue that the Gospel is a poorly edited document that contains a number of nonintegrated sources.<sup>57</sup> From my perspective such discussions fail to deal adequately with the theological nature of this book. It is usually the very points where some have difficulties with the organizational logic of this Gospel that I find to be the most revealing theologi-

<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., the concern expressed by Morris, *John*, [206](#).

<sup>57</sup> See, e.g., the discussion in Bultmann, *John*, [130–31](#). Cf. R. Fortna, *Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor*, [244–45](#), for a more sophisticated theological use of sources.

cally and where the incredible skill of the writer is exhibited.<sup>58</sup>

Reminding ourselves constantly of the purpose of this Gospel can be of great assistance. Moreover, looking at the stories of Jesus with postresurrection eyes and viewing the life of Jesus as a whole can be most helpful to the interpreter. Thus here the point is being made that the temple cleansing event leads most naturally to a typical Johannine summation that provides insight into why the term “signs” has been used. ✎

This section opens with a verse that indicates many “believed into” (the literal rendering of *episteusan eis*) his name when they beheld the “signs” (*sēmeia*; plural) he was doing. The Greek expression *pisteuein* plus *eis* is normally used for authentic believing. But the next verse indicates that Jesus did not “believe” (a likely translation of *episteuen* plus the dative) them. Some scholars have puzzled over the two expressions and have sought to argue for a distinction between the two

Greek expressions by suggesting that there are here two different types of believing envisaged.<sup>59</sup> But that is hardly the point. The real point is that *Jesus did not believe their believing*. For people who have been brought up on a regular evangelical dose of hearing that humans determine their own destinies and that people become Christians by their believing, it is indeed salutary to remember that Jesus had something to say about what is acceptable believing.

Because Jesus knew (*ginōskein*) what human beings are like, he was not confused about what was authentic or unauthentic believing. Moreover, when it came down to the determinative moment of Passover, the believing of all humans vanished into thin air no matter how many signs they had seen. In John no one was left as a real believer at the cross. There was a witness (19:35), but not really a believing witness at that time. It took the resurrection for that type of witness to emerge. But the point here is that early in the Gospel John announced to his read-

<sup>58</sup> I have not been greatly helped by the commentaries and studies I have consulted on this section. It is my hope that the present explanation will be of some assistance to readers.

<sup>59</sup> Particularly see Z. Hodges, “Problem Passages in the Gospel of John. Part 2: Untrustworthy Believers—John 2:23–25,” *Bib* 135 (1978): 249–50.

ers that Jesus not only understood his determinative hour but that he was not fooled even by well-intentioned words of believing. He understood the nature of human frailty, and he did not require instruction (testimony) concerning human inconsistency. We as humans often experience the frustration of learning time and again that those humans we think we can count on are in fact not very dependable. But the Son of God did not need any lessons in the results of human sin. Human sin was the reason why the Son of God came to the world, and the Paschal Lamb had to die to take away that sin (1:29).

When John wrote this Gospel, he knew that Jesus performed many signs and that people said they believed. John also knew that Jesus died and that while he had no intention of abandoning the believers (14:18), they could not avoid abandoning him. For John, then, there was good reason for Jesus not to believe people's believing. Thus, when we read the stories of John, we must not treat them simply as stories from the past. They are also in fact living portraits of humanity in every era. Accordingly, we need to understand that the living Jesus does not believe everyone's believing because *he knows what is*

in them. Those words ought to stand as a warning to everyone. 🗨️