

Accounts of the Cleansing of the Temple

Do the Gospel Accounts Describe the Same Event?

(English texts below are adapted from the NASV, 1995)

Matthew 21:12-13	Mark 11:15-18	Luke 19:45-46	John 2:13-22
<p>And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN."</p>	<p>Then they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. And He <i>began</i> to teach and say to them, "Is it not written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS'? But you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN." The chief priests and the scribes heard <i>this</i>, and <i>began</i> seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.</p>	<p>Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling, saying to them, "It is written, 'AND MY HOUSE SHALL BE A HOUSE OF PRAYER,' but you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN."</p>	<p>The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated <i>at their tables</i>. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove <i>them</i> all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business." His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME." The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple</p>

			of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.
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Matthew account	Mark account	Luke account	John account
#1	#1	#1	#1
implicit	#2	implicit	#2
#3	#3	#3	
	#4		
			#5
			#6
			#7

- #1 > Entered the temple and drove out those who were buying and selling (oxen and sheep). And he turned over the tables of the sellers of doves and of the money-changers.
- #2 > Ordered them all to stop carrying on business in his Father’s house.
- #3 > Quotes Scripture: it is written, the temple should be “a house of prayer for the nations,” but you have made it “a den for thieves.”
- #4 > The chief priests and scribes now resolve to find a way to kill Jesus.
- #5 > Jesus’ disciples are reminded, by Jesus’ actions, of the Psalm, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”
- #6 > Jews confront Jesus and ask him by what authority he did what he did. Jesus answers them, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”
- #7 > John comments that the disciples realized the meaning of his prediction after his resurrection.

Question: Is John’s account the same event as the one describe by the Synoptic gospels?

Certainly #1 and #2 are shared by John’s account and the Synoptic gospels. It is entirely possible that they are descriptions of the same event. But, on the other hand, if Jesus did “cleanse the temple” on two separate occasions, an account of these separate events would naturally and inevitably resemble one another so closely that it would be virtually impossible to tell that they were two separate events.

If #6 occurred as part of the event that the Synoptics are describing, its absence is very odd. It came up a few days later in Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin. Why would the Synoptic gospels omit it when they (two of them, at least) will refer to it a few chapters later? (Mark 14:58; Matthew 26:61) However, its absence makes perfectly good sense if it did not occur as part of the event they are describing. This fact, coupled with the fact that John locates it in the first year of Jesus’ ministry (and not during the last week), strongly suggests that we are dealing with two distinct events where Jesus performs the same symbolic act for virtually the same reason.