

# Den Of Thieves?

By Rav Reuel Dillon

"Yeshua entered into the temple of Elohim, and drove out all of those who sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the money-changers' tables and the seats of those who sold the doves. He said to them, 'It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers!' - Mattityahu (Matthew) 21:12-13

In Mattityahu (Matthew) 21:12-13, we read about what is called “Yeshua’s cleansing of the Temple”. Many times in our anachronistic way of transmitting our current situation into our reading of scripture we can misinterpret and misapply what the scriptures teach. And, this passage can be a good example where people have done this. It is essential to understand that in reading this passage that the HaMikdash (The Temple) of Yisrael has no current modern equivalent. When Yeshua stated, “My house shall be called a house of prayer, ‘but you have made it a den of robbers!’”...He was quoting Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 56:7 which states,

"Also the foreigners who join themselves to HaShem, to minister to him, and to love the name of HaShem, to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Shabbat from profaning it, and holds fast my covenant; 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 on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

If we want to take the scripture literally in both Mattityahu (Matthew) 21:12-13 and in our passage here in Yeshayahu (Isaiah) we know that these passages most certainly are not speaking of a synagogue, church, or congregational building. It is speaking of a very specific “House” and it is none other than the Beit HaMikdash, the Holy Temple of Adonai. Yeshua and Yeshayahu speaks only of this, so we must be careful in our zeal not to die on a scriptural hill that really doesn’t exist. Although I don’t believe it would be right to sell products in a synagogue, congregational, or church building on Sabbath or on a Holy day...the passage in question is not a prohibition of having a small store or shop in a synagogue, congregational building, (or even a website for that matter), especially if all the proceeds are going for non-profit purposes and/or are going to support the ministry of the Kingdom of Elohim, as apposed to just making the minister(s) rich.

During our Master Yeshua’s time it had long been the custom to pay their temple tax and various other fees with a special coin called the “half-shekel”. It was a half-ounce of pure silver. In our passage in Mattityahu (Matthew) 21:12-13 Yeshua had come to Yerushalayim riding on a donkey as was prophesied would happen in the book of Zeckaryah. He entered into the Beit HaMikdash (Temple) with His talmidim during the season of Pesach (Passover) and a multitude of people where there as well. Every family would need a lamb for the Pesach sacrifice. These lambs had to be spotless and perfect

and many families that traveled long distances didn't bring their own lamb do to concern that the lamb may become injured or blemished along the trip. It also came to pass that the Cohenim (Priests) of the Temple started to prohibit people to bring their own lambs do to the possibility of the people offering a blemished lamb. The Temple Cohenim started to raise, care, and guard special sheep to be used for this reason to ensure that the sacrifices would be acceptable. And, these were the ones that the people had to buy...using the Temple money that they had to acquire through the moneychangers.

The reason that the Temple money had to be used was because the Cohenim had instituted another rule. This rule arose to do the fact that the common money of the Roman Empire had the image of the Roman Emperor on it...and the Emperor fancied himself to be a god. Of course this wouldn't sit well with any self-respecting Jew. Therefore, the Cohenim instituted moneychangers in the Beit HaMikdash. But, it is important to note that this situation alone was not the problem. It would have been an acceptable system if it hadn't started to be abused. But, the whole system became corrupted and the Temple Leaders started to scam the people. They had unequal weights and measures and the exchange rate was most certainly in favor of the moneychangers. And, the lambs that the Cohenim were making available to the people were grossly over priced. Also, because there was a limited supply of these half-shekels in circulation the moneychangers were taking advantage of the "law" of supply and demand. And, like anything else in short supply, they raised the price to what the market would support. They in turn were making immense profits with their control over these coins. In addition, many of them even charged extra and additional fees for a foreigner's (Gentile's) money to be exchanged, and thus Yeshua states, "Is it not written, 'My House shall be called a house of prayer for all Nations'?" Our Master Yeshua also clearly saw their deception and their unethical use of these coins as thievery and accused them of being a "den of thieves". This is the scriptural context behind Mattityahu (Matthew) 21:12-13.

Shalom,

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