

Jesus and the money changers

The narrative of **Jesus and the Money Changers** occurs in both the [Synoptic Gospels](#) and in the [Gospel of John](#), although it occurs close to the end of the Synoptic Gospels (at Mark 11:15–19, 11:27–33, Matthew 21:12–17, 21:23–27 and Luke 19:45–48, 20:1–8) but close to the start in John (at John 2:12–25) and as a result some biblical scholars think there may have been two incidents. In the episode, [Jesus](#) is stated to have visited the [Temple in Jerusalem](#), [Herod's Temple](#), at which the courtyard is described as being filled with [livestock](#) and the tables of the [money changers](#), who changed the standard [Greek](#) and [Roman](#) money for [Jewish](#) and [Tyrian](#) money, which were the only coinage that could be used in Temple ceremonies. According to the Gospels, Jesus took offense to this (extorting profit from the people to hear the word of God), and so, creating a [whip](#) from some cords, drives out the money changers, and turns over their tables, and those of the people selling [doves](#) Matthew[21:13] And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.21:14 And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.21:15 And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the son of David; they were sore displeased, Jesus said, "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. ""*Freely you have received, freely give.*" (*Matthew 10:8*).

In John, this is the first of the three times that Jesus goes to [Jerusalem](#) for the [Passover](#), and John says that during the Passover Feast there were (unspecified) miraculous signs performed by Jesus, which caused people to believe *in his name*, but that he would *not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men*. Some scholars have argued that John may have included this latter statement, about knowing *all men*, in order to portray Jesus as possessing a knowledge of people's hearts and minds (Brown et al. 955), and hence have attributes that would be expected of [God](#).

This event satisfies the criterion of [multiple attestation](#), and scholars of the [historical Jesus](#) generally credit this event as genuine and associate it with Jesus' arrest and crucifixion and as one of the first [events separating Christianity from Judaism](#).

Jesus' criticism

According to the synoptics, Jesus targeted specifically the money changers and the dove sellers and justified his actions by quoting from the [Book of Isaiah](#) and the [Book of Jeremiah](#):

My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.—[Isaiah 56:7](#)

and

But you have made it a den of thieves—[Jeremiah 7:11](#)

The quote from Isaiah comes from a section which instructs that all who obey [God's](#) will, whether [Jewish](#) or not, are to be allowed into the Temple so that they can [pray](#), and therefore converse with God. The loud market-like atmosphere of money changers and livestock often seems to modern readers to be at odds with the Temple being a place of quiet prayer. However, this interpretation may reflect anachronistic perceptions of ancient worship -- which often involved the sacrificial slaughter of animals -- and the manner in which understandings of pre-Christian ritualistic practices intersect with modern notions of contemplative worship. Further, from a Judaic cultural perspective, Jews would have certainly utilized money changers, yet the currency exchange would have been primarily accessed by [non-Hebrew travelers](#) changing foreign coins.

The area in question was almost certainly the [Court of the Gentiles](#), a location in the massive Temple complex setup specifically for the purpose of purchasing sacrificial animals and—out of necessity—a place where Jewish pilgrims could exchange their foreign coinage for the appropriate local currency.

The reference to *den of thieves* may be a reference to inflated pricing or more sinister forms of using a religious cult to exploit the poor. Or, simply to exaggerate the lecherousness of the traders. In [Mark 12:40](#) and [Luke 20:47](#) Jesus again accuses the Temple authorities of thieving and this time names poor widows as their victims going on to provide evidence of this in [Mark 12:42](#) and [Luke 21:2](#). Dove sellers were selling doves that were sacrificed by the poor who could not afford grander sacrifices and specifically by women.

According to [Mark 11:16](#), “...and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts.” Jesus then put an embargo on people carrying any merchandise through the temple—a sanction that would have disrupted all commerce.

The synoptics then state that the crowd were in awe of Jesus, which concerned "the chief priests and the teachers of the law." [Luke](#) and [Mark](#) say these Temple leaders were so concerned that they began to plot against Jesus' life, to which Luke adds that the crowd were so in awe with Jesus that no-one could be found to [assassinate](#) him.

[Matthew](#) says the Temple leaders questioned Jesus if he was aware the children were shouting [Hosanna to the Son of David](#), and Jesus responded by accepting the worship of the children as valid by quoting *...from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise* from the [Book of Psalms \(Psalm 8:2\)](#).

The Gospel of John presents a quite different exchange. Jesus is described as angrily criticising the occupants of the temple for turning it into a market. At some point (either after or during the incident) the disciples are described as remembering the quotation *zeal for your house consumes me* ([Psalms 69:9](#)). The word in Greek is ζήλος/zelos^[1] from which [Zealots](#) is derived.

Jesus' authority

The synoptics and John state that Jesus left the temple after the incident with the money changers, but returned to the Temple courts a day later (though Luke is unspecific how many days had passed), and begins teaching. According to [Mark 11:23](#) Jesus instructed his disciples that faith in God can move mountains.

The priests, teachers, elders, [Pharisees](#) and [Herodians](#) are described as coming up to Jesus, and questioning his authority to do the things that he is doing; John makes it clear that they are referring to his actions in scattering the livestock and overturning the tables of the moneychangers, but the synoptics imply that it is in reference to his teaching. The synoptics recount that Jesus called into question their own authority or allegiances.

First he asks his opponents to say whether [John the Baptist's](#) authority to [baptise](#) was divine or human. They do not believe John had divine authority, and so wanting to answer that he was just baptizing as a man—but this would run into conflict with the crowd, who believe in John's divine authority. Since the Temple authorities care so much about what the crowd thinks, this leaves them unable to answer truthfully, and so they are forced to claim that they *don't know*, exposing their divided loyalties and making them look incompetent. Jesus responds that in consequence he won't tell them what his authority is.

A second time when asked about Roman taxes, Jesus doesn't produce a Roman coin but asks his opponents to. American Standard Version: "Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, **knowing their hypocrisy**, said unto them, **Why make ye trial of me?** bring me a denarius, that I may see it" (Mark 12:15). They are able to produce one with an image of Caesar. He responds that those who are (or that which is) Caesar's should be given to Caesar and those who are (or that which is) God's should be given to God. See also [Render unto Caesar...](#)

The Gospel of John, which throughout presents John the Baptist as having no independent following, instead gives a quite different challenge and resolution of Jesus' authority. John recounts that Jesus was asked to perform a *miraculous sign*, but Jesus replies *destroy this temple, and I shall raise it again in three days*. The Gospel of John explains that Jesus had meant his body, and that this is what his disciples came to believe after [his resurrection](#).

To most scholars this shows a clear split between [Judaism](#) and the community surrounding the Gospel of John, as the suggestion that the people should destroy the temple would have been highly offensive to the Jewish people. It is also notable that John refers to the people as *the Jews*, distancing both the intended audience of his Gospel, and Jesus, from any [Jewish roots](#).

Account discrepancies

The differences between John and the synoptics, particularly the fact that the synoptics have the incident at the opposite end of the narrative, have led some Christian apologists to insist that Jesus must have fought with the money changers twice, once near the beginning and once near the end of [his ministry](#).^[3] More critical scholars are inclined to instead suggest that there was only the one episode, but that John relocated the story, perhaps to imply that Jesus' arrest was for the [raising of Lazarus \(John 11\)](#), not the incident in the Temple (Brown et al. 954).