

Chapter 13

At the Passover Feast in Jerusalem

John 2: vv. 12 – 22.

Throughout the whole of the land of Canaan, from North to South, thousands of Jews prepare for a journey. Yes, even the scattered Jews who live spread out in faraway lands, shut their doors and set out for ... Jerusalem. Oh, but why? What is happening in Jerusalem?

Read it in John 2 v. 13 "And the Jews' Passover was at hand".

At that feast especially hundreds of thousands of them always wended their way to the capital city of the land.

In chapter 7 we have already told you that those who came from great distances made the journey in groups, so that throngs of people arrived together to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. The Jews no longer served idols since the Babylonian captivity, and there were therefore not many stayers at home, as was often the case in earlier times.

What an enjoyable bustle filled the city then! At such times it was particularly busy near the temple. There the Jews brought their offering, the Paschal lamb!

Then they ate that roasted lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Then they thought upon that wonderful exodus from Egypt, centuries ago.

For those who came from afar it was however impossible to bring a Paschal lamb along with them. That would cause too much delay, and moreover a long journey would be far too tiring

for such beasts, but it was also quite unnecessary. The Jews who had to travel for days on end brought money, and with this they could buy their Paschal lamb in Jerusalem. The Lord had ordained that this was permissible in His laws.

The Jewish farmers in the vicinity of Jerusalem used to breed a great number of lambs which they sold, a few days before the Feast of Passover, to their fellow countrymen who had travelled from a distance. In itself that was not wrong, it was in fact allowed.

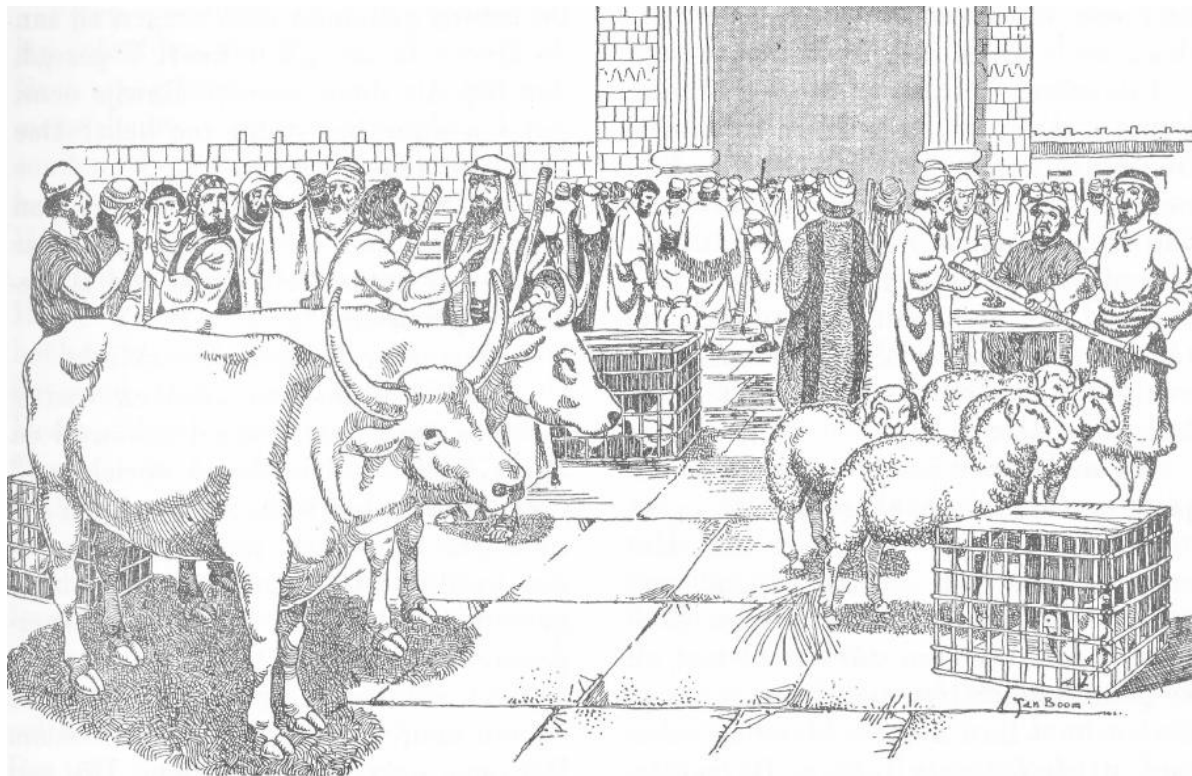
But what was indeed wrong was the fact that this trading went on in the outer court of the Lord's house. Then the temple looked like a huge market, where the cry of the sellers, the bleating of the lambs and the bids of the buyers filled the air with a noise which was quite out of place in the house of God.

The priests should have forbidden this, but instead they let it go on.

How do you behave in God's house?

There were also merchants who brought baskets of doves into the temple. These were for the poor people to buy.

Each Jew had also to cast an offering into the treasure chest. This was a very large money box which stood by one of the many doors. This money was used for the maintenance of the service of the Lord.



*The buyers and sellers in the God's house*

But the scattered Jews, who came from abroad, had no Jewish money. They had only Roman coins, on which appeared the likeness of the Roman Caesar. Now this Roman money must not be cast into the chest, for it was foreign currency.

For this reason there were also in the outer court money changers, who changed that foreign currency for Jewish money. Naturally these money changers made quite sure that they made a handsome profit out of this. No, they didn't do it for nothing.

Now you can well imagine what an uproar was going on in the outer court of God's house. This was really shameful, for the temple was not a market place, but a house of prayer, which it certainly did not now resemble.

Suddenly a stranger walks in. He looks around on it all. He hears the shouting and calling. He is overcome by holy indignation. His

eyes blaze with wrath.

What? .. Must all this take place in the temple? .. Is there nowhere to be found for it outside the Lord's house?

He makes a whip or scourge of small cords and drives out all those noisy people.

It becomes quiet, breathlessly quiet. The uproar ceases. Everyone looks with dismay towards the stranger. They dare not resist him, and they leave, they have to do so. All the merchants, with their frightened bleating lambs, he drives outside. He overturns the tables of the money changers. To those who sold doves he says "Take these things hence."

They dare not to answer him back, for the whole appearance of this stranger brooks no contradiction. A little later an unusual, strange stillness prevails in that great building. Who is this stranger? ...

You know already, don't you? It is - the

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Lord Jesus! He too has journeyed to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Now He comes not as a Child, but as a Man.

When He saw, however, that the forecourt was in such a state His noble soul was moved with holy indignation.

"Make not my Father's house an house of merchandise" says He in a commanding voice, and they depart, or rather they are driven out.

A little later when the Jews have come to their senses somewhat they ask the Lord Jesus: "What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?"

The Lord Jesus looks at them for a moment and then says solemnly "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

Mocking laughter resounds.

"Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?"

They do not believe it. They do not understand. Yes, they take offence at the Lord Jesus. When Jesus is later apprehended, they do not forget these words.

But, the Lord was not referring to the temple of stone, but to His own body. That would be crucified. He would die and be buried. But after three days He would rise again from the dead.

You see, boys and girls, that would be the sign that the Lord Jesus had the right to drive all those buyers and sellers from the temple.

But the Jews did not understand that, and therefore they mock these solemn words.

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### **John 2 vv 23 – 25.**

The Lord Jesus remained in Jerusalem during the days of Passover. He seems to have

performed miracles there, for we read in the Bible that "many believed in His name when they saw the miracles which He did." What miracles these were, we know not, nothing is told us about them. Only the cleansing of the temple is described in God's Word. Yet there is written "miracles", that is, more than one.

Many believed in His name. Many believed that He was the Messiah. But they did not believe in truth, but only for a while. Later these same people would shout themselves hoarse crying "Crucify him! Crucify Him!"

Probably Jesus' disciples were very pleased. Perhaps they thought "Ah, this is good. Everybody must believe in the Lord Jesus. All must accept Him as the Messiah."

The Lord Jesus Himself however is not happy. Oh, but why not? ... Well, He knows that they do not believe in Him sincerely. He knows what is going on in their hearts. Those hearts are not renewed, no, the hearts of those Jews still remain the same evil, sinful hearts. The Lord Jesus knew this, but His disciples did not. That is why the Lord Jesus is not happy.

O, children, we can deceive men, but God we cannot deceive, for the Lord pays attention not so much to our words but to our hearts. Never forget that, for that is the most essential.

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### **John 3 vv 1 - 11.**

Calm has returned to Jerusalem. Not that the multitudes who celebrate the Passover have left already, but they are asleep, for it is night. All the houses are shut and the inhabitants and their guests are fast asleep. Not a soul is to be seen in

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the streets. They are empty and forsaken.

But no! Look, a door is quietly opening over there and a man steps cautiously outside. With hasty steps he makes his way along. He arrives at a certain house, carefully opens a door and steps inside.

Who is this man? ... What is he doing at this time of night?

You can well understand that a lot has been talked about Jesus in Jerusalem. With amazement they have seen what He did and listened to what He said. He had after all driven out the buyers and sellers from the temple, and had said that He was the Messiah.

Not only common people but also the priests, the Scribes, the self-important Pharisees and Sadducees discuss among themselves the amazing conduct of this Stranger. Even in the Council of the Jews, the Sanhedrin, they talk about the happenings of the last few days.

No, these rulers of the Jews do not talk about Jesus reverently or respectfully. On the contrary their voices betray contempt and ridicule.

What? ... That common man from Nazareth, the despicable little town up North, the Messiah? ... Impossible! It can't be so! The Messiah, the Son of David, will not come out of Nazareth, but out of Bethlehem, the city of David. This Jesus of Nazareth must be a deceiver. He cannot be anything else. They decide to keep a careful eye on Him. Who does he think He is? He must think that He is Master in Jerusalem. He must fancy that they must all listen to Him, and that they must all do what He tells them. That's it, of course. But that will never happen. They are still about, and they will not put up with anyone

who interferes with their affairs.

All sorts of evil thoughts well up in the hearts of those pious Pharisees and they talk about Him with words which are full of scorn and derision.

Yet not all of them are of this opinion. No, just look there. There sits a man, also a Pharisee, deep in thought. Quietly, he listens to all that is said, but says nothing himself. Many questions arise in the heart of that still, silent man. His name is Nicodemus. He also is a member of the Sanhedrin.

As he listens to the evil jeering words of the other Pharisees, he does not join in: He does not dare to say that Jesus is a deceiver. But when the other Pharisees say that the Messiah will come out of Bethlehem, then they are surely correct. That is true. The prophets have foretold that only too clearly.

But - a deceiver? - No, that cannot be, for a deceiver cannot perform such signs and wonders as Jesus has done.

Nicodemus doesn't know what to think. He worries and ponders, but cannot work it out. He cannot find the solution of this riddle. If only he could just have a quiet talk with this Jesus of Nazareth.

But that he dare not do because ... people you know ... What ever would people say about it? What will his fellow members of the Sanhedrin think of him, if he goes to Jesus? No, no, he won't do that, he dare not. They would laugh at him. They would shrug their shoulders at him contemptuously - and Nicodemus doesn't want to be laughed at. He is ashamed to go to the Lord Jesus.

Yet he cannot get rid of the idea. This is

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what he will do - he will go at night or late in the evening when it is dark, when no-one can see him.

He has carefully enquired where the Lord Jesus stays the night in Jerusalem, where this prophet has his lodging.

Now he is on his way to Jesus. Perhaps Jesus is still awake, perhaps He is not yet asleep. In any case he will try.

Look, there he enters the house in question. Come, let us join him in our thoughts. Yes, he is in time. The new prophet has not yet gone to bed.

Oh, and why not? ... Does Jesus then not have to sleep? ... Is He then not tired?

Certainly, just as much as any other man He needs sleep, for He too is man. His body had just as much need of rest as has ours. Why then has He not yet gone to bed? ...

He is waiting! ... Waiting? ... For whom? ... Well, He is waiting for Nicodemus. He knew that Nicodemus would come to speak with Him. He knew too, that Nicodemus was ashamed to come in the day time. And yet, He waits.

We wouldn't do that, would we? We



*Nicodemus on his way to Jesus*

would say, "If you don't dare to come in the day time, keep away now too, at night. I'm going to sleep now. Come back tomorrow, I've no time for you now."

But Jesus doesn't say anything like that. Oh, children, how unspeakably good the Lord is,

how patient He is toward us! Be honest, boys and girls, are you not often also ashamed of the name and service of the Lord, when you are among your friends? Oh, sometimes, no doubt!

There sit those two men in silence. They are alone.

Very soon Nicodemus begins to speak. Listen, he says: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

He hopes that the Lord Jesus will now tell him exactly who He is, where He comes from and what He intends to do. In short, the Lord Jesus must fully inform him. He looks at Him inquisitively and awaits His answer attentively.

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," comes the quiet voice of the Saviour.

Startled, Nicodemus stares at the Lord Jesus. Jesus does not answer the questions which Nicodemus has put to Him. Nicodemus had not expected this. Furthermore he can understand nothing of it.

In the greatest amazement He gives answer. "Born again? That is impossible surely. Anyone who has become old, cannot surely be born again? He cannot surely be laid as a little baby in the cradle again?"

But this was not what the Lord Jesus meant. He is not speaking about the birth of the body but about the birth of the soul. The heart must be renewed by grace.

For me to tell you all that the Lord Jesus and Nicodemus talked about, would be much too difficult for you, boys and girls. You would not yet understand it. However, I will tell you

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something of it, but you must listen carefully.

The Lord Jesus speaks to Nicodemus about the re-birth. He compares it with the sound of the wind. If you walk through a wood quietly on a nice summers day, then you can hear the wind softly sighing in the tops of the trees. You see nothing, but you hear it. You don't know where it comes from, or where it goes. You can only hear its soft rustling.

So it is too when God converts a person, when God gives a boy or a girl a new heart, then they do not know how it comes, but they can no longer live as they did formerly. If their friends laugh uproariously and have great fun, then often they cannot join in. They feel unhappy. They prefer to be alone. They often kneel down in some lonely place and weep over their sins. They have sorrow for sin. O, they cannot explain it themselves, but deep in their hearts is a mourning after God, they have a love of God.

Quietly those two men sit together in the hours of darkness. Jesus speaks, Nicodemus listens. Suddenly Nicodemus says: "How can these things be?"

And then the Lord Jesus goes on to tell him, that He has come to pay for His people's sins. Just as once, centuries before, the brazen serpent had been nailed by Moses to a pole, so would He be nailed to the cross.

Whosoever, bitten by the fiery serpents, looked but to that brazen serpent, was healed and did not die. So too shall each one who truly believes in the Lord Jesus as their Saviour, not be lost, but come presently into eternal glory.

And that true, that sincere, that saving faith is worked in the hearts of God's people by God's spirit. God Himself must give that faith. We do not receive it because we have earned it, but God grants it through grace to His elect.

You will perhaps not fully understand this, though you have more than once heard it spoken of, but ask the Lord often if He will teach it to you.

Nicodemus did not understand it either, and the Lord Jesus taught it to Nicodemus too. Later you will hear more about Nicodemus. Always remember this story.

At last Nicodemus leaves. A strange sense of awe fills his soul. He knows not why, but that talk has made a deep impression on him. Before, he had thought that he could earn heaven for himself; now, this night, he has heard that his heart too, must be renewed. He has heard that he must be 'born again'.

Look, there he walks, deep in thought, back to his home, before anyone awakes. He walks on in meditation, but he does not deride what he has heard. He dares not do that, for what the Lord Jesus has said is true.