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March 14th: Exodus 21 & Matthew 21:1-22

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Case laws of the book of the covenant. The Triumphal Entry and cleansing of the temple.

Some passages referenced:

Genesis 47:13-26 (the Egyptians saved by becoming slaves of Pharaoh); Deuteronomy 24:7 (death penalty for manstealing); Leviticus 25:42ff. (Israel allowed to enslave foreigners taken in war or to buy foreign slaves); Galatians 4:1 (children and slaves); Deuteronomy 5:15, 15:15, 16:12, 24:18, 22 (Israel reminded that they were once slaves in Egypt); Deuteronomy 15:18 (God will bless those who are faithful in the treatment of their slaves); Deuteronomy 15:12-18 (the release of slaves); Judges 15:1 (conjugal visitation); Genesis 44:28-30 (the loss of Joseph and Benjamin to Rachel, the woman wounded by the wrestling men).

Genesis 49:10-11 (Jacob's prophecy concerning Judah); 1 Samuel 9—10 (Saul's quest for the donkeys and the start of the story of the kingdom); Judges 5:10, 10:4, 12:14 (donkeys in the book of Judges); 1 Samuel 16:1-2 (Ziba bringing two donkeys to David as he leaves Jerusalem during Absalom's coup); 1 Kings 1:28-40 (Solomon riding David's mule to establish his claim to the throne); 2 Kings 9:1-13 (Jehu anointed and riding on people's garments); 2 Kings 10:18-28 (Jehu 'cleansing' the temple of Baal); Zechariah 9:9-10 (Zechariah's messianic prophecy); Isaiah 56:7 (the temple a den of robbers); 2 Samuel 5:6-8 (David's victory over the 'blind and the lame' in his first capture of Jerusalem); Ezekiel 8—11 (the glory of YHWH leaving Jerusalem).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Exodus chapter 21 Now these are the rules that you shall set before them. When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he comes in single, he shall go out single.

If he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her masters, and he shall go out alone. But if the slave plainly says, I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go out free, then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the door-post, and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave for ever.

When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. If she does not please her master, who has designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has broken faith with her.

If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a daughter. If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights. And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out for nothing, without payment or money.

Whoever strikes a man so that he dies, shall be put to death. But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee. But if a man willfully attacks another, to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar, that he may die.

Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death. Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death. Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.

When men quarrel, and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist, and the man does not die, but takes to his bed, then if the man rises again and walks outdoors with his staff, he who struck him shall be clear. Only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall have him thoroughly healed. When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod, and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged.

But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be avenged, for the slave is his money.

When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free because of his eye. If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let the slave go free because of his tooth. When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten, but the owner of the ox shall not be liable.

But if the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has been warned, but has not kept it in, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner also shall be put to death. If a ransom is imposed on him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is imposed on him. If it gores a man's son or daughter, he shall be dealt with according to this same rule.

If the ox gores a slave, male or female, the owner shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned. When a man opens a pit, or when a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit shall make restoration, he shall give money to its owner, and the dead beast shall be his. When one man's ox butts another's, so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and share its price, and the dead beast also they shall share.

Or if it is known that the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has not kept it in, he shall repay ox for ox, and the dead beast shall be his. Many of the themes associated with the Ten Commandments that we saw in chapter 20 of the Book of Exodus reappear in the next chapter, chapter 21. It begins with the release of people from slavery in the seventh year, reminding us both of the beginning of the Ten Commandments, as God recounts his deliverance of Israel from slavery in the land of Egypt, and also of the fourth commandment concerning the Sabbath.

As we move beyond this introduction, which recalls the first and the fourth commandment, we find a lot more that would remind us of other commandments. We have laws concerning honouring father and mother, concerning murder, concerning man-stealing, concerning theft, concerning false witness, and as we move through we'll see many things that recall the Ten Commandments. The material in chapters 21 to 23 can loosely be clumped together according to principles or laws of the Ten Commandments.

Chapter 21 could arguably be related chiefly to the themes of slavery and release, and of violence and murder, with a bit of honouring father and mother thrown in for good measure. By clumping laws together in this way, under the loose categories of the Ten

Commandments, it helps us to expand the core principles that we find in the Ten Commandments into larger bodies of law. You learn literacy in part through expounding things, expanding things that are tight, pithy statements into large, developed statements about a particular reality.

It's a process of expounding and also of condensing, of taking that big set of principles and truths and making it comprehensible in a single statement or a single reality. In the same way, when we're reading the Book of the Covenant in chapters 21 to 23 of the Book of Exodus, we are dealing with case laws that expound and unpack the principles of the Ten Commandments themselves. Meditating upon the relationships internal to the case law and upon the relationship between the case law and the core moral law of the Ten Commandments will give us a sense of literacy in the law.

It will help us to understand how principles can be derived from the core principles and how the expounded principles can be found to have a unity among themselves. That these aren't just a set of 600 odd laws that we have in Scripture, but they are bound together. There is a logic and a unity and a coherence to them.

And as we see these core principles, we'll realise we don't actually have a lot of detached commandments after all. We have a few key principles that are expounded and unpacked. There is a refraction of them as we see the clear light of God's law refracted into the particular colours of different situations.

The case law provides examples of judgements arising from the core principles of the law then, teaches literacy in the law, but it isn't a complete legal code. If you look through the law here you'll see a lot of commandments that seem odd and strange. You might puzzle upon why they're here in the first place.

You'll also notice a lot of gaps that aren't really addressed. Lots of situations that might arise in life that aren't really spoken to by the law. So the law is not a complete system.

Rather it teaches you how to arrive at case law and judgements in specific situations from the core principles without actually dictating every single one of those cases. It requires some sort of jurisprudence and wisdom and some recognition of specifics and how the law can be brought into relationship with those different situations. The other thing to notice is that a lot of the law is symbolic.

It helps us to read Israel's history particularly. Especially when we're seeing some of the odd and obscure laws. They seem to be included for some reason other than relevance to everyday situations of judgement.

This isn't a comprehensive legal system and it is a system that has many odd laws within it. Laws that don't seem to be related to everyday life but rather help us to read the symbolism and the significance of specific events in Israel's history. Nor should this be

treated as a timeless system of justice.

What we have here addresses divine justice to a particular time and a set of social realities. It is not something that we should apply in a contemporary situation as if it applied to us in the same way as it did to the people of Israel after they had been brought out of Egypt. These are laws given to a specific culture in a particular time and place that applies principles of divine justice to those particularities.

Our particularities are different. There are ways in which the law is accommodated to the hardness of people's hearts. And if we were to apply a system of justice to our own society based upon God's commandments we would find that we would be accommodating to very different problems within our society and there would be a need to do similar sort of things, to have laws that recognise specific aspects of sinfulness in our society.

This chapter begins with laws concerning slavery and release. It is important to observe that the laws here are arising out of God's deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt. Now they have to release their own slaves.

There is a principle of Israel's continuing life that must arise from the foundational principle of its national existence, which is that they were freed from slavery in Egypt. Now they must also give freedom to their slaves under certain conditions. Slavery isn't seen as a bad thing in principle in scripture.

From our historical perspective where we have the brutal legacy of race slavery it can be very hard for us to understand why the scriptural writers don't entirely condemn the practice of slavery and typically appear to condone it and maybe even on some occasions present it as a good thing. Slavery is mentioned at various points with some prophetic blessings and curses, for instance in relationship to the story of Canaan or the way that Esau is to serve Jacob. We see concubines and maidservants and characters like Hagar, Zilpah and Bilhah.

Jacob is reduced to the status of a servant by Laban but then gains great wealth through service. The story of Joseph's slavery is an important one and in all of these stories we're seeing some windows into what slavery was like. Slavery is not idealised by any means.

It's not a positive situation for the most part but nor is it presented as something that's universally vicious and evil. Indeed in the story of Joseph we see slavery presented in a very positive light in certain regards. Through the Lord's help Joseph brings the whole nation of Egypt first into a feudal relationship and then into outright slavery to Pharaoh.

In Genesis chapter 47 verses 13-26 Joseph's divinely given wisdom enables him to make the people by whom he was enslaved the servants of Pharaoh. And this is a good thing in many respects. It fulfils the divine promises that other people would serve Abraham and

his seed.

It brings the Egyptians under the wise and divinely blessed and provident rule of Joseph. It saves their lives from the famine. Our concept of slavery and servitude is powerfully shaped by the notion of slavery being involuntary or coercive and lifelong.

But that is an unhelpful way to understand most forms of biblical slavery which occurred on quite a spectrum of differing degrees of dependency and voluntariness. Man-stealing and kidnapping for slavery were subject to the death penalty in Deuteronomy chapter 24 verse 7 and also in this chapter. In perhaps the majority of cases biblical slavery was not strictly involuntary although it was an undesirable state to which to be reduced.

Slavery was a means of managing the dependence of the poor and the indebted in a society without a welfare state. It was also part of the criminal justice system as it was used as a means of providing restitution to people who had been wronged. Israelites could also enslave foreigners taken in war and could buy foreign slaves from others, something that they couldn't do in the case of Israelites as we see in Leviticus chapter 25 verses 42 following.

Finally people could voluntarily enter into the state of service to another if they wanted security and membership in a good master's household. So as dependents biblical slaves had certain securities but they also had many limitations on their freedom. Paul can say that the heir as long as he is a child does not differ at all from a slave though he is the master of all.

And that analogy between slavery and childhood isn't illuminating one in many respects. The slave was, unlike the hired hand, a member of the household in some level. He didn't have the autonomy of the hired hand and rather than having his employment ended or his pay cut he could be beaten as a form of punishment.

The master had a duty to provide for him as a member of his household and like the child his rights of free movement, his bodily autonomy and such things as his rights of marriage were curtailed. However also like the child this period of dependency and limited freedom was typically intended to be temporary. It was one that had a clearly and legally established ending point in view and ideally it was supposed to lead to the learning of greater self-discipline and providence from a master who had proved himself in these regards.

The system of slavery then is seen as a positive way of securing the survival of dependent and improvident people in society. It ensures that they are protected and provided for by provident masters into whose service they come. It's seen as a way that God blesses those who are faithful and wise bringing other people under their authority and provision.

As in the case of Joseph people coming under the rule of a wise and provident master could be saved from much of the fear that they would be in if they had to provide for themselves and found themselves unable to do so. This extends the influence of people who are wise and able to provide in certain situations and the level of their responsibility. It can also be a form of judgment upon the wicked as the Lord makes them the servants of the righteous.

Now this is not an ideal situation by any means. We should not idealize this but this is the sort of situation that was much better than many of the alternatives and the harshness of slavery is mitigated in many ways in scripture. The biblical slave is guaranteed the rest of the Sabbath in the fourth commandment.

In this chapter we see that there are clear requirements established for the release of different kinds of slaves after certain periods of time. There are protections provided for concubines. Departing Hebrew slaves were supposed to be sent out with gifts and the Lord consistently reminds his people that they were once slaves in Egypt.

He declares that he will bless those who are faithful in treating their servants and the entire story of the Exodus is a repeated reminder that the Lord hears the cry of the oppressed slave. So the state of slavery to men is not celebrated in scripture. It's a state of immaturity akin to that of childhood and the Lord's intention is always that his people gain maturity and independence through obedience and faithfulness.

The biblical expectations upon the slave were equivalent or similar at least to those upon children to grow in responsibility through faithful obedience. And like childhood it's very negative for people to return to the state of slavery. Rather people are expected to grow beyond it and the strict law bound character of slavery like that of childhood can provide a means of maturation.

Biblically slavery is oriented towards manumission and blessing and slave owning is a means by which the righteous and the provident can come to provide for and protect many dependent people training them towards independence or fully absolving them into the life of the family. While we have clear continuing forms of dependency relations in society it's very good that we've moved beyond slavery in many respects. There is still logic of slavery in our employment systems in our relationship to our governments.

We think of them in different ways but the logic of slavery is still at play. But the sort of slavery spoken of in scripture was necessary and served good purposes in a less developed society. As society matures such an institution fitted for a more childlike stage in humanity's life should be left behind.

So we can read these commandments, see the way that God is orienting his people towards growth, maturity and freedom and we can see them as good within their context. We can learn and apply them to our own context without seeking to translate

them or to re-pristiniate some system of slavery that we have rightly moved beyond. These commandments then concerning slavery come first as they correspond to Israel's own liberation.

It's institutionalising Israel's own release and there are parallels to be found in Deuteronomy chapter 15 verses 12 to 18. If your brother a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman is sold to you he shall serve you six years and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty handed.

You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor and out of your wine press. As the Lord your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you.

Therefore I command you this day. But if he says to you I will not go out from you because he loves you and your household since he is well off with you, then you shall take it all and put it through his ear into the door and he shall be your slave forever. And to your female slave you shall do the same.

It shall not seem hard to you when you let him go free from you. For at half the cost of a hired worker he has served you six years. So the Lord your God will bless you in all that you do.

Once again we should remember that the slave within the house was in many ways treated like a child within the house that's ruled by their parents. And in such a situation a master might give his slave a wife. The law considers such a case and in that case the wife would be left in the house of the master when the slave went free in the seventh year.

Such a situation would involve the wife remaining in the house and the released slave having the right to visit her and have conjugal relations but she would still serve for a period of time. We can see such a situation in Judges chapter 15 verse 1 where Samson has conjugal visitation rights without cohabiting with his wife. If the male slave however wants to bind himself to his master his ear can be bored to the doorpost.

The boring of the ear suggests the opening of the ear for hearing and obeying and listening. The ear is the organ of hearing and can be connected with obedience. You hear and you obey.

But it's also a reminder of the Passover. The doorpost is the site on which the blood was placed and as the ear of the slave bored to the doorpost with blood trickling down was seen it would remind Israel of its own status as servants within the house of God as those who had committed themselves to the service of a good master and wanted to be

members of his household. The Sabbath year one way or another then was to occasion a change in the slave's status.

It was either to lead to him going free or to him becoming a committed member of the family. The female slave is a different case. The female slave was sold into the family in order to become part of the family and there's a betrayal here if the female slave is not actually taken as a wife for her master or for her master's child.

And such a woman is to be treated as a full fledged daughter. It was one of the ways in which a poorer family could rise up in status. The young woman becoming a concubine of her master's servant or of the master himself.

And she was supposed to be treated according to the law of daughters with the protections that that gave her ensuring that she would not be abused or taken advantage of. And her husband if he took another wife was not to diminish her food her clothing or her marital rights. Her standing within the family was to be protected and the law of God exists in part to protect such people who would be very vulnerable in a system like that.

The laws that follow are laws concerning violence in decreasing severity. So there's intentional murder and manslaughter in verses 12 to 14. Assaults of greatest severity in verses 15 to 17.

Assaults intended to wound or intentional or unintentional wounds in verses 18 to 27. Animal violence to humanity if the animal is owned in verses 28 to 32. Dangerous inanimate property in verses 33 and 34.

And then finally animal violence to another animal. These laws contain elements related to the fifth commandment and also to the sixth commandment but primarily the sixth. It's dealing with situations of violence but also to an extent the honour of father and mother.

As we look through such bodies of material we'll often notice that laws can't neatly be divided up into particular categories. They do loosely categorise under certain headings but they blur into each other in different ways. There are laws concerning manslaughter and the cities of refuge.

The cities of refuge don't seem to have been set up yet but the manslayer seems to have been able to have fled to God's altar. There are some peculiar commandments here. One of the most peculiar is the law concerning the men fighting and wounding the pregnant woman.

A similar law can be found in other ancient Near Eastern bodies of legal material but here I wonder whether there is some connection with things that we've seen earlier on in the story of Genesis. And in the legal material of the book of Exodus and Deuteronomy

there do seem to be reflections back upon the narrative. We'll also see this in the book of Numbers.

Here Ammi Silva has suggested that there might be a connection between the story of Joseph, Benjamin, Jacob and Rachel. In chapter 44 of the book of Genesis in verses 27 following we read Then your servant my father said to us, You know that my wife bore two sons. One left me, and I said, Surely he has been torn to pieces, and I have never seen him since.

If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my grey hairs in evil to Sheol. Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then as his life is bound up in the boy's life, as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the grey hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. There are a few interesting connections to observe between these things.

First of all, the word for tragedy or harm that's used is one that's found outside of the story of Jacob and his sons only in reference to this law. It speaks about the one who went out from me, the same language that's used of the child or the children that go out from the pregnant woman who's been struck. The pregnant woman is someone who brings forth children.

Now that's very strange. How often in these cases are you dealing with twins? Why would it be said that when her children come out? It's a very strange thing to say. You'd say when her child comes out, but this is children plural.

The reference to life for life, etc. might also remind us of the way that the soul of Jacob is bound up with the soul of Benjamin. Here is a woman that has been struck by men who have been striving.

Jacob striving with Laban, the striving between the neglected brothers, the unloved children of the handmaids and of Leah and their father, and then the struggle that they have with their brothers by Rachel. And Rachel through this striving is struck and two of her sons are seemingly lost, Joseph and Benjamin. We should consider the possibility that this is actually a reflection in part upon that narrative of Genesis.

That in a symbolic law we are being presented with that story and the linguistic connections are there to trigger our awareness of it, to help us to realise that there is some sort of connection here and that that connection could be illuminating for our reading of the Genesis narrative and the Genesis narrative can be illuminating for our reading of the law. A question to consider. What are some of the analogies that you can see between Israel's release from slavery in Egypt and the different forms of release that are mentioned at the When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, Who is this? And the crowd said, This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee.

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers. And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.

But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, Hosanna to the son of David! They were indignant, and they said to him, Do you hear what these are saying? And Jesus said to them, Yes. Have you never read, Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babes do you have prepared praise? And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany, and lodged there. In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry.

And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it, and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, May no fruit ever come from you again. And the fig tree withered at once.

When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How did the fig tree wither at once? And Jesus answered them, Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, Be taken up and thrown into the sea, it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith. As Jesus draws near to Jerusalem in Matthew 21, he arrives at the Mount of Olives at Bethphage and sends two of his disciples ahead of them to find a donkey and a colt and to untie them and bring them to him.

For such a lowly beast of burden, it's interesting how significant a role the donkey plays in the history of Israel's kingdom. It seldom is the centre of the story, but it does play a common role within the story of the kingdom at pivotal historical moments in its establishment and in prophecies concerning it. At times it serves to reveal or to highlight identities and destinies of key protagonists, and at other points it plays a part in setting in motion key events.

The story of the kingdom begins with Saul searching for the donkeys of his father. In Genesis 49, verses 10-11, Jacob prophesies concerning the tribe of Judah, speaking about binding the foal to his vine, the donkey's colt to the choice vine, connecting the tribe of Judah with the donkey from the very beginning of its story. As already mentioned, the story of Saul focuses upon a quest for donkeys, and he is told as one of the first signs of the kingdom that the donkeys have been found.

And the whole episode concerning Saul ends with a conversation with his uncle about the lost donkeys in 1 Samuel 10, verses 14-16. And there's an association with donkeys and mules and ruling kingship. We first see this in Genesis 49.

It's also seen in the book of Judges, Judges 5, 10, 4, 10, and 14, 12. When David is sent

to Saul by Jesse, he is sent with a donkey and with other signs associated with the kingdom, the signs that Saul himself was given in chapter 10. In 1 Samuel 16, verses 1 and 2, David escapes from Jerusalem after his son Absalom's coup, and Zeba brings two donkeys for the king's household to ride upon.

And there's an ironic twist as Absalom the pretender ends up hung from a terebinth tree by his long hair when his mule goes beneath it. The association between Davidic rulers and donkeys or mules is seen most markedly in 1 Kings 1, verses 28-40. And in that chapter, the fraught situation of royal succession and who's going to take David's throne when he dies is resolved in large part as Solomon is distinguished as the true heir to the throne through a triumphal entry into Jerusalem on King David's own mule.

So the donkey or the mule or the king's steed is associated with peaceful rule, while the horse is an animal of war. There's a different sort of triumphal entry that we see in the case of Jehu, who's secretly anointed by Elisha and goes over a carpet of people's garments that they have stretched out before him in 2 Kings 9, verses 1-13. Jehu, however, is not a meek ruler riding on a donkey.

He's a furious and bloody charioteer and horseman. He kills Joram of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah. He tramples Jezebel under his horse's feet as he enters Jezreel.

And then, in chapter 10, verses 18-28, he cleanses the Temple of Baal in the most bloody of manners. When the prophet Zechariah foretells the coming of a new king to restore the people's fortunes, he's identified by his riding of a colt, the foal of a donkey. And the character of his rule is distinguished from that of the warmongering regents with their royal charges.

In Zechariah 9-10, This is a powerful prophecy and it's a prophecy whose words ring within this resonance chamber of all these references to the king and his donkeys and the way in which rule is demonstrated through horses, donkeys and mules and other symbolic beasts. This recalls the blessing of Jacob over his son Judah and some of the most glorious and tragic episodes in Israel's history. The coming king is the true bearer of Judah's scepter.

He's the one who will establish the kingdom. He's greater than Saul, who sought for the donkeys, and he's the true son of David. He will realize the unfulfilled promise of Solomon, who fell short of his name in calling to be the prince of peace.

His coming will not be like that of the violent Jehu. The chariot and the horse and the conflicts to which they belong will be cut off and the nations will be granted a gentle word of peace. And so Christ comes into the city in a way that's deeply symbolic.

This is an action that's carefully considered. Jesus is engaging in a symbolic action that displays kingship, but kingship of a very particular type. And he comes into the city and

goes to the temple.

His action in the temple interrupts the affairs of the temple. He drives people out. He overturns tables.

There are lots of allusions to scripture in these sections. He speaks about the way in which a house of prayer has been made into a den of thieves, a den of robbers. And what does he mean by this? A robber's den is a place to retreat for brigands to protect themselves from the consequences of their violence.

It's a place of safety and security and refuge for brigands. And Jesus is teaching that for the Jews of his day, the temple has become just that. It's become a place to claim refuge from the consequences of their sins.

It's like the people of Jeremiah's day. The temple, the temple of the Lord are these. They take confidence in the fact that they have this building.

It's a sort of talismanic security against the judgment of God. And yet God is going to come to the temple. He's going to inspect his temple and he's going to purge it.

The promise of Malachi is going to come to pass. The Lord whom you seek is suddenly going to come to his temple and he's going to purge and test. He's going to come to the threshing floor, which is associated with the temple, and he's going to clean it and cleanse it.

And Christ comes as foretold by John the Baptist. Now this is a cleansing in preparation for a later judgment. There's a judgment upon the temple that will fall in AD 70 and this prepares for that.

It's supposed to be a house of prayer. It's supposed to be a place of prayer for all nations. That's what it was originally established to be by Solomon.

And now it has failed in that regard. It's actually serving the exact opposite purpose. A place not of holiness but a place to excuse wickedness.

A place to shield people from the consequences of their wickedness. Jesus cleanses the temple and then the blind and the lame come to him in the temple. We've already discussed themes of entry into Jerusalem in conquest and victory and triumph.

Something like the story of Solomon as he's about to be established as king or the story of Jehu as he goes into Jezreel with judgment. And Jehu cleanses the temple of Baal and in a very bloody way. Jesus is coming into the temple and he's coming in in a way that maybe reminds us of some other stories.

And those reminders can be given to us in the way that he treats the blind and the lame. In 2 Samuel chapter 5, David conquers Jerusalem. And the king and his men went up to

Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, you will not come in here but the blind and the lame will ward you off.

Thinking David cannot come in here. Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion. That is the city of David.

And David said on that day, whoever would strike the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to attack the lame and the blind who are hated by David's soul. Therefore it is said the blind and the lame shall not come into the house. The taunt of the Jebusites concerning the blind and the lame is a crucial part of the story of David's original conquest of Jerusalem.

The fact that Jesus enters in triumph into Jerusalem and then enters into the house, the temple itself, and there he heals the blind and the lame who come to him, suggests that he's playing out this story of David once more, but in a way that involves ironic reversals and fulfillments. As we noted earlier in 2 Samuel chapter 16 verse 1, Zeba brings two donkeys to David for himself and his household. He brings the two donkeys to David in a similar location as the two disciples find them.

In riding in on two donkeys then, Jesus is symbolically reversing the departure of David from Jerusalem. As the greater son of David, he is re-entering Jerusalem. You can also see it as a reversal of God's movement out of Jerusalem in Ezekiel chapter 8 to 11.

Once again, children epitomize the true behavior and character of the kingdom. They greet Jesus with hosannas and they express the joy and the delight that should be characteristic of the kingdom, the welcome that they give to Christ. The judgment that follows this upon the fig tree is a symbolic judgment upon the temple and upon Jerusalem.

In Mark's account, it frames Jesus' action within the temple. The fig tree represents Israel and its leaders and their failure to produce fruit. And the reference to the mountain should also be considered in this context.

It's not any old mountain that Jesus is referring to. It's the mountain that is exactly opposite. This mountain, the mount of the temple, that that is going to be removed and thrown into the sea.

It's going to be part of this new order. The old mountains are going to be removed and put out of place and the new world is going to be established. No longer will they worship upon that mountain or upon some mountain up in Samaria, but God's worship will occur all over the world.

That mountain of the temple will be cast into the sea, the sea of the Gentiles, and not one stone of its temple will be left upon another. A question to consider, how might the laws for a leprous house in the book of Leviticus help us to understand Jesus' action

within the temple?