

Lost in Translation: Why Did Jesus Call the Temple a “Den of Thieves”?

Mark 11:15 And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons; ¹⁶ and he would not allow any one to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷ And he taught, and said 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 den of robbers.’*”

σπήλαιον ληστῶν/spēlaion lēstēs lit. “cave of violent ones”

Mark 15:7 And among the “rebels” in the insurrection, who had committed murder, there was a man called Barabbas...v.27 And with him they crucified two “thieves” (Gk *lēstas*) violent ones.

Josephus equates *lēstēs* to the Sicari or “dagger men”

At Jesus’ arrest: Mark 14:48 Have you come out against a *lēstēs* with swords and clubs to capture me?

The Source and Context of Jesus’ Temple Declaration

Jeremiah 7:11: Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?

מַעְרַת פְּרָצִים me’rah paritzim verb: PaRaTZ Break open, shatter, shred

Isaiah 35:9—Highway, the “Holy Way,” No lion shall be there, nor any *ravenous beast*...

Jer. 7:21 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: “Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. ²² For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, ***I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.*** ²³ But this command I gave them, ‘Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.’”

Amos 5:24 But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream ²⁵ “Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?”

Prophetic Ideal Future: They shall not hurt or destroy (תַּחַשׁ/shochet) in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11:9

Isaiah 56:6 “And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, every one who keeps the sabbath, and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant — ⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain, ***and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.*** ⁸ Thus says the Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.”