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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

**A1677 ~ The Temple Cleansed Again.**

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*Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.*

Have you ever been in a very large building and felt very small as you looked up at the high ceilings? Herod's Temple in Jerusalem was one such building. According to a 1<sup>st</sup> Century historian, the Temple area and its various courts and buildings covered more than 35 acres, and modern archaeology work has since uncovered and confirmed this area.

The Court of the Gentiles covered about 10 acres and was a large outer court where devout Gentiles, who couldn't come into the Temple itself, could come to pray and worship at a distance. But they were forbidden, on pain of death, to come any closer. The area of The Court of the Gentiles was actually far larger than the Temple building and Inner Court, which were restricted to Jewish access only.

Today's *Bible Adventure* is all about the love of money. How could a Jew living in Jerusalem become so rich – far beyond his needs – and keep amassing wealth? Jerusalem had one monopoly business where no competitors could cut in on the profits. Passover was one of the three main feasts Jewish men were required to attend in Jerusalem each year. The Temple had become big business selling animals for sacrifice. At Passover time every year, each family needed to buy an unblemished lamb for sacrifice. The strength of the 'animal product' was that the people were commanded to offer 1-year-old lambs for sacrifice to the Lord, as Moses had instructed the people to do in Exodus, Chapter 12.

The weakness of the 'animal product' was that the lamb had to be unblemished. People could go to all the effort of bringing their own lamb from a far distant town that they lived in, but it first had to be inspected by a priest and passed as being without defect. If the priests received paybacks from animal merchants, the priest could unfairly rule perfect animals brought for inspection as being defective; and then the family had no choice but to buy one from a merchant at an inflated price. There were also money changers or bankers, as we call them today, to convert coins brought in from other countries into Jewish currency.

The Court of the Gentiles was the area where Jewish merchants had set up their pens of animals approved by the priests for sale. The merchants were controlled by the chief priests, who would have set the prices and received a portion of the profits. There were many thousands of people coming to buy animals at Passover time. So the area that Jesus cleansed was no small place; it was large with many, many people in it.

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Soon after Jesus' ministry first began with a miracle at a wedding in Cana, Galilee, Jesus and His disciples went to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. In John's Gospel, Chapter 2, it's recorded that Jesus made a whip and cleared out the Temple of all the livestock being sold there. He also drove out the money changers and said, "Take them out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"

Later His disciples remembered the words from Psalm 69: "My devotion to your house, O God, burns in me like a fire." Naturally the merchants and authorities weren't very pleased to have their profiteering interrupted. They asked Jesus, "What miracle can you perform to show us that you have the right to do this?" Jesus answered, "Tear down this Temple, and in three days I will build it again." They didn't believe Him or understand that Jesus was talking about His own body. But after Jesus had died and was resurrected, His disciples remembered those words and did believe who Jesus said He was.

Four Passovers later, Jesus again cleansed the Court of the Gentiles, as merchants were selling animals at a premium price and money changers were charging large fees for any transactions from other countries' money. The records of all those times tell that it was the family of the high priest who ran this commercial operation. The high priest had gone into the livestock and banking businesses. This second cleansing of the Temple is recorded in Matthew, Chapter 21, Mark, Chapter 11 and Luke, Chapter 19, and it happened the day after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey.

Mark's Gospel says that Jesus went into the Temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations?' But you have made it a 'den of thieves'." Jesus quoted from Isaiah 56 and Jeremiah 7. The force of the original language shows that He did it violently and in righteous anger.

The Temple area for Gentiles was supposed to be a quiet place of prayer and worship. Yet instead, it was filled with stalls of unsettled animals and their refuse, possibly thousands of shouting people and with no doubt, arguments about animal prices. Instead of quiet, prayer and worship, there was noise, cheating and chaos.

Driving out all the animals and people was no small task. Often in paintings, motion pictures or on television, Jesus is represented as a weak person who doesn't seem to have done a hard day of manual work in His life. This image is entirely false. Jesus worked as a carpenter for many years before starting His ministry. The Lord Jesus Christ was a mighty man; otherwise the Temple police would soon have stopped Him. In these accounts, Jesus teaches us about the holiness of God, the reverence that is due to God in worship, the disrespectful corruption of God's worship place by the Jewish rulers, and the fulfilment of prophecy concerning the Messiah's zeal for the house of God.

The priests and Levites who managed the Temple had lost their wonder of God's ways. The many sacrifices for the covering of the people's sins were originally done to highlight just how seriously God regards sin. But for those who worked in the Temple, it had become just another job and such routines dulled their interest in serving God with all their hearts.

As a result of this dullness, the Temple workers and rulers were more interested in making money than seeing people blessed by God or returning to their homes in peace. In 1 Timothy, Chapter 6, it says: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness."

One of the best examples of a man known for his greed and love of money in the Bible was called Balaam; his life story is listed in Numbers, Chapters 22 to 24. Balaam's love of money is mentioned in various other books and even by the Lord Jesus in Revelation, Chapter 2. Balaam was a Gentile prophet of God during the time when the Children of Israel had left the wilderness and were now on their way to Canaan.

Balaam lived in a city close to the Euphrates River, about 350 miles north of Jericho. Balaam was a famous man throughout the Middle East. When God spoke through him, his words came true. The children of Israel had come out of Egypt about 40 years earlier. God had been helping them and given them victory over their enemies and these things were known by all nations nearby them.

As the children of Israel were encamped in the plains of Moab, the King and people of Moab became very nervous. They were very afraid of the Israelite people and knew that if they started a war against Israel, Moab would be completely destroyed. The King of Moab had heard of Balaam and his God's supernatural ability to bless those whom Balaam blessed and curse those whom Balaam cursed.

The king thought that if he could get Balaam to curse the Israelites, he would stand a better chance of beating the Israelites in battle. So he sent ambassadors with generous gifts to Balaam, to ask and bribe him into travelling down to Moab and cursing the Israelites.

Balaam invited the ambassadors to stay the night, saying that he would pray to God. God did speak to Balaam, and he was told not to go. In the morning, Balaam explained to his visitors that God had told him that he was not to go with them or curse those people, for it was God who had blessed them. Balaam said that not for a house full of gold and silver would he say one word other than what God would give him.

This was a reasonable reply but the King of Moab was not satisfied with Balaam's answer. The King thought he needed to send Balaam higher officials this time. So he sent princes to Balaam, promising him great rewards and honour. Again, Balaam invited the princes to stay the night while he consulted with God. Balaam already had his answer from God – he knew what God's will was but he secretly hoped God would change His mind.

This time, God told Balaam to go with the princes but he was to only to say what God told him to say. The next morning, Balaam set off with the princes on the long journey towards the land of Moab. Balaam desired in his heart to earn the rewards that the King of Moab offered. However, along the way, an angel of the Lord appeared to the donkey on which Balaam rode. At first Balaam could not see the angel, so he struck the donkey three times for avoiding the angel's sword. Amazingly, the donkey was given power to speak back to Balaam.

Only after this was Balaam allowed to see the angel of the Lord and to see what danger he was in. The angel said, "I have come to bar your way, because you should not be making this journey." This time, Balaam admitted that he had sinned. When Balaam asked God the first time if he should go and curse the Israelites, God had said "NO".

Sometimes God permits us to have our own way just as He did with Balaam. However, our ways end up in death, just as Balaam's ended up in death. When shown that God knew what was in Balaam's heart, Balaam asked the angel if he should go back. Yet the angel said to continue on but only say whatever God would tell him to say.

Much to the anger and frustration of the King of Moab, Balaam ended up blessing the Israelites three times, with no curses. At the end of the third blessing, Balaam added: "Whoever blesses Israel will be blessed, and whoever curses Israel will be cursed." And this statement is still true today. Those nations which try to harm Israel will one day themselves be destroyed. And yet there are some Christians within our churches who happily associate with charities and causes that have an anti-Israel, even anti-Semitic agenda, and are eager to be accepted by secular society for cursing Israel. There's always a heavy price to pay for this. It is dangerous to curse God's people even today.

After the third blessing for Israel, Balaam gave a prophecy that Israel would defeat Moab and some other neighbouring nations. The King of Moab was enraged at what he considered to be treachery from Balaam. He sent Balaam home without any honour or the coveted rewards Balaam had secretly longed for.

Interestingly, Balaam went back to Moab to try to counteract his own predictions and if possible, earn the rewards the King of Moab still had on offer. Balaam believed that if Moab could seduce the Israelites into idolatry and sexual sins, God would leave the Israelites to suffer the consequences of doing such wrong.

This evil counsel was taken and as a result, the Israelites sinned against God and were heavily punished. Balaam himself died with his sword in his hand fighting against the very people that he had three times pronounced a blessing of God on.

What was Balaam's most treacherous sin? Balaam taught the King of Moab how to cause the children of Israel to curse themselves. Balaam knew that Israel was blessed by God if they continued to obey God. Yet if they sinned, they would come under God's curse for such sin.

In Jude, Verse 11, it says of false teachers creeping into the churches: "Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain (a murderer), have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah (against Moses)." Balaam was greedy for money and in so trying to gain it he led many others to sin as well as himself.

In Hebrews, Chapter 13, Verse 5, it says: "Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' "

*The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.*

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