

## **“DEN” OF ROBBERS**

**“It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers'." (Matt 21:13)**

American history reveals a number of robber's dens. One in southeastern, Utah, was a popular outlaw hideout for over 30 years. It is one of several "robber's dens" located along the Outlaw Trail. At this natural fortress fresh horses were reserved and large quantities of weapons were cached. Butch Cassidy considered it an ideal hideout due to the many lookout points. This "robbers den" was never successfully penetrated by authorities.

Another "robber's den" was in the panhandle of Oklahoma. A band of outlaws led by Captain William Coe made their headquarters there in the late 1860's. They built a rock fortress, later known as "Robbers Roost". It also was impenetrable. These robbers made forays into the surrounding area to steal Army horses and mules, and also preyed on freight caravans traveling the Santa Fe Trail . The outlaws' home had walls three feet thick.

There were also many other famous hideouts that were "dens" for robbers. One is now a State Park near Wilburton, Okla., another is in the Big Bend National Park in Texas along the Rio Grande, another was a cave near Sedona, Arizona, etc. The purpose of a "den" is obvious. It is designed so the robbers will be safe. Honest people are not welcome in a robber's den. That's why the robbers hated Jesus. Jesus knew that the Temple of God was supposed to be a house of prayer, and not a "den of robbers". (The same truth is repeated in Mark 11:17, and Luke 19:46).

Herod began the construction of this temple in 19 B.C. (the 18<sup>th</sup> year of his reign). According to Josephus, 10,000 skilled workers were hired to build it. 1,000 trained Levites were also used so that common people would not trespass into sacred areas. Herod died in 4 B.C. but the temple was not actually completed until A.D. 63, just 7 years before it was destroyed. When Jesus first cleansed the temple at the beginning of His ministry, it had already been under construction for 46 years (Jn. 2:20). By then, unfortunately, it was already a "den" of robbers.

How did a house of prayer become a den of robbers? "Follow the money"! That's what robbers are interested in. The love of money, as you know, is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). It is a historical fact that wealthy Jews helped finance the construction of the Temple. It is also a fact that those who pay the piper call the tune. Those who contribute large sums of money obviously have influence. If I contribute 10,000 shekels to help you, for example, why wouldn't you help me by hiring my relatives and friends? If my generosity constructed a certain area of the Temple, why wouldn't you let me use it for my money changing booth? Or conversely, if you don't buy my sheep for the Passover, I will quit paying your salary. Remember, Jesus was condemned by false witnesses who had been bribed. Remember, even the influence of the Governor was for sale (Matt. 28:14). Jesus, however, was not for sale, that's why He was a problem to the robbers. His death on the cross can be explained by monetary matters as well as religious ones. Those who devoured widow's houses certainly wouldn't let Jesus stand in their way of making money.

Like our modern day Mafia, these Jewish crooks gradually took control and filled the Temple with career criminals. They were all in it together, that's why it was a "robber's den". As honest men were systematically excluded, dishonest men felt increasingly safe. Like white washed sepulchers their hearts were filled with dead men's bones and all uncleanness. The Temple, run by robbers, was so corrupt that within it's walls these evil men could say and do anything they wanted to without fear. When Jesus exposed them for what they were, they never forgave Him. They plotted His death without hesitation. They said that if Jesus didn't die, the Romans will come and take away "our place and our nation" (Jn. 11:48). The NIV has a footnote on this verse that equates "our place" with the Temple. Just as the modern day mafia has the "Cosa Nostra" (our thing), the Jews had a robber's den that was "their thing". Remember the rich man who was clothed in purple and lived in luxury every day (Lk. 16: 1 - 19 - 31). Now he is in hell being tormented in flames. Who knows? Maybe he worked in the Temple, built bigger barns to horde his earthly wealth, and made no preparations whatsoever for eternity. Don't be like him!