

## **Behold, the Man!**

As a young believer, I had a great appetite for the Word of God (I still do!). I devoured the whole Bible and spent as much time reading it as I could. I loved every book, line, word. However, I found the Gospel of John difficult to grasp, compared to the other Gospels. I found it almost too supernatural to get hold of. Indeed, even scholars have classed the first three Gospels together in a category, calling them Synoptic, as they are easy to harmonize and give a comprehensive overview. However, John's Gospel is not written like the others and can't be grouped with them in the same way. Sometimes, John is referred to as 'John the Divine', and even described as a 'mystic' by others.

It took some years for me to realise that John's Gospel is basically an account of the life and ministry of Jesus against the backdrop of the annual Feasts of the Lord: Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles, with the Temple worship and disputes with the Judeans as its focal points. In fact, John begins his Gospel referring to the Feast of Tabernacles, which is the time of year when Jesus was born. John wrote, 'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt (Lit: 'tabernacled') among us' (John 1:14).

Seeing it through this lens was not only liberating, but it has helped me to better

understand Jesus' deeds and teachings by placing them in their festive contexts. The Feasts of the Lord don't just commemorate historical events, they are also prophetic. Jesus' words addressed specific aspects of the prophetic spiritual calendar and the wonders Jesus performed weren't just miracles, they were signs that pointed directly to Himself as the promised Messiah, the Son of God!

In John's Gospel, there are several Passovers mentioned over the course of Jesus' life and ministry.

In John chapter 2, we find the first such Passover account. After Jesus purges the outer Temple, the Judeans asked, 'What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?'. Jesus answered and said unto them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up' (John 2:13-19). Note that they asked Him for a 'sign'. In Scripture, a sign is not necessarily a miracle - performed in the immediate situation - but can also be something that would occur in the *future* (see Is. 7:10-14) and signal something specific.

Remember, too, that the essence of their question was 'what was His authority?' for doing these things (cleanse the Temple, etc.). Jesus was never 'random' or



whimsical. His response revealed WHO He was, WHAT was going to happen to Him and WHEN! We can understand that Jesus' reply foretold His death and resurrection because the passage itself reveals it (John 2:21,22). But His hearers didn't have that advantage. So how did THEY understand this 'sign' and the symbolic application of the Temple *in the context of Passover*?

In Zech 6:12,13 we find a prophecy which contains a snapshot of the person of the Messiah in a highly distilled and clarified passage, to which Jesus is no doubt referring: 'Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and He shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of the LORD: Even He shall build the temple of the LORD; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.'

The title 'the Branch' (צמח) is the abbreviated name of 'the Branch of the Lord' (Is. 4:2), which means, 'the Son of God'. The Hebrew for 'he shall grow up' is the verb form of 'branch' – lit., 'He shall spring up' (יצמח). This verb is used in 2 Sam 23:5 in another Messianic prophecy about God's everlasting covenant with the house of David ('shall He not make it sprout?'). Jer. 33:15-18 reveals that God would 'cause the Branch of Righteousness to spring up' (אצמיח... צמח צדקה) unto David and that David would never lack a man on the throne; neither would the priests lack a man to offer sacrifices continually. The writer to the Hebrews uses this expression in chapter 7:14, 'For it is evident that our Lord **sprang** out of Juda; of which tribe

Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.'

These passages, along with others, clearly show the two-fold office of Messiah as priest and king (see: Ps 132, Is 4, Ps 110:4). We have an especially condensed couplet expressing the same thing in Psalm 114 (a 'Passover' psalm within the 'Hallel'). Verse 2a reads: '**Judah** was his **sanctuary**' (Davidic, ruling tribe and temple/priesthood).

Zech 6:13 emphatically adds the theme of building the Temple to the priesthood and kingship of one Person, to which Jesus alludes in His potent reply! John 2:22 tells us that after Jesus had risen, the disciples remembered this and believed the Scripture and Jesus' words! Is there anything else that Jesus was saying by referring to Zechariah's prophecy?

John 2:19 reads, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' I can't think of a more robust, compelling reply! We read in Zech 6:12, 'Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and He shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of the LORD.' The Hebrew phrase 'out of his place' (מתחתיו) is only used one other time in the Bible, regarding the penultimate plague on Egypt at the time of the Passover (Ex. 10:23). That judgement resulted in three days of darkness that could be felt, during which no one rose 'out of his place'. So Zechariah's use of this phrase indicates a time period of three days of darkness – pointing to the Messiah's three days in the tomb. The Egyptians did not rise out of their place, but the Messiah sprang out of His place!

What a response to the questioning of Jesus' authority! The impact would have been considerable – as the late Art Katz would say, 'Pow! Right in the kisser!' In a few succinct words, Jesus' reply – in the context of the Passover (John 2:13,23) – reveals that He is the Son of God, He would die and spend three days in the grave, then rise again as Messiah, the Priest and King - *at Passover*.

In fact, Jesus' rejoinder was so powerful that when no one could legitimately find fault with Him at His trial, it became the sole source of the false accusations levelled at Him (Matt 26:61 and Mark 14:58 - again, at Passover!).

With breathtaking prophetic precision, Pilate – a gentile with no background in the Hebrew Scriptures - declared, 'Behold the man!' (John 19:5; Zech 6:12), prompting a frenzied call for His crucifixion by the chief priests and officers. On the basis of Jesus' attestation the Judeans

were correct when they said, 'He made Himself the Son of God' (John 19:7, though it was NOT blasphemy!).

The 'plague of darkness' preceded the 'slaying of the firstborn' in Egypt, when a great cry went up from every [Egyptian] family in the land (Ex.12:29). However, Israel was instructed to 'take a lamb for a house' and apply its blood and eat its flesh (John 6 took place at the time of Passover). As Jewish families all over the world gather to commemorate the Passover this year, may the Lord open their eyes to 'look upon Me whom they have pierced, and [they shall] mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and [shall] be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn' (Zech 12:10)!

May the Lord bless each one of you as you meditate afresh on the finished work of Yeshua!  
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