

# JOHN'S GOSPEL - "RIGHTLY DIVIDED"

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Jaime vH The fourth gospel is unique in several ways, one of them being its remarkable arrangement into three (+ one) parts which correspond to the parts of the Tabernacle that Moses was shown "on the mount", and then ordered to make exactly according to that heavenly pattern he had seen.

Interestingly, at the end of the Book of Proverbs, Agur's wisdom tells us 4 times that three things may expand into four (Pr. 30). So it is with the Gospel of John - the three expand into four, the fourth being the culmination of all that went before, and a completely new beginning!

## First division - John 1-12: **Court of the Tabernacle**

The Tabernacle's court, was often full of crowds, and so it is here, in these 12 chapters, we find ourselves in the midst of multitudes. Beginning at the Jordan River where John is baptizing, Jesus is often surrounded by crowds. And right in this first chapter, He begins to gather his disciples out from the world of the masses. A few times there are encounters with individuals, like Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the invalid at Bethesda and the man born blind - encounters which He turns into discipling opportunities.

Sometimes entire crowds seemed to want to be discipled, like in Chapters 2, 6 and 8, but Jesus knew their real motives - they couldn't fool him. He knows each one inside out. Especially in Ch. 6, even when they had failed to make him their king, they were still following him, seemingly as true believers, hoping Jesus would fit into their agenda. Then, finally, they turned back and left him, i.e., when he spoke to them about giving his flesh and blood as the true spiritual food for the world. Only the Twelve stayed with him.

In Chapter 12, the opposing Jews comment among themselves: "Look, the world has gone after him!" In verse 36, Jesus has had enough, and He hides from the crowds. From verse 44 to 50 then, He speaks to the crowds one last time, winding up his public ministry and leaving the crowds behind.

## Second Division - John 13-17: **The Holy Place**

We cannot help noticing how in these chapters which depict his last days before dying, Jesus is surrounded by his disciples only. At first, Judas is there too, until he goes out..., into the night! Chapter 13 ends on a sad note, not in reference to Judas, but to Peter in his human fear, lack of faith, and denying his beloved Lord.

However, starting right at that very low ebb, the Lord gives them Chs. 14-16, beginning with the mansions awaiting them in glory. But first let me draw your attention to the previous 3 chapters where Jesus is deeply 'moved' or 'troubled'.

In Ch. 11, He is troubled by the ravages wrought by Death. In Ch. 12, He is troubled at the nearness and horror of Calvary. In Ch. 13, He is troubled at the awful loss of Judas to Satan. Then He begins Ch. 14 like this: "**Don't let your hearts be troubled...!**"

Chapters 14-16, are choc-a-bloc with precious teaching for his disciples. They must have firsthand experience of his resurrection and Second Coming, of prayer, of the Trinity, of the ins-and-outs of fruitbearing, of their witness in a hostile world, of the Holy Spirit, working in and through them, and of the fullness of his joy and peace.

In other words, in these chapters, Jesus - as a priest in the "**Holy Place**" of the Tabernacle - is, as it were, ministering with the incense and its fragrance; with the oil and the wicks, producing flames of light; with the bread that pictures all-sufficiency. He is faithfully providing all that his disciples will need to know and experience and transmit in their soon to start apostolic ministries. They too are to exercise their spiritual priesthood before their Lord.

At Pentecost a new era is to start with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. From then on *all* believers are to be part of one 'universal priesthood'. As the 'Highpriest', He is preparing the Twelve (incl. Matthias) to lead the way.

In Ch. 17 we have the "Highpriestly Prayer of Intercession", uttered by Jesus in the presence of his disciples. He pours out his heart before the Father, his burden being his disciples. They have received all they need for their tasks in this world. Nineteen times, in this chapter alone, does He mention "*the world*". He knows how it will intensively seek to snuff out the light of their testimony. As they are sent into the world, He prays they and their testimony may be kept.

At the end of Chapter 16, He had told them to be of good cheer: had He not overcome the world? His prayer is now that they too may be "overcomers". Peter's ministry in the Acts, shows us the 'overcomer' - in complete contrast with his negative experience at Jesus' trial. Peter has taken up his 'cross'; he's following on.

### **Third division - John 18-19: Holiest of All**

This last remaining 'compartment' in the Tabernacle is a room behind the "Holy Place", separated by a heavy curtain. In it there was just the (golden) "Ark of the Covenant". Its covering is called the 'Mercy Seat', on which stand the sculpted 'cherubim'. As to its contents, there are the gold jar with manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets with the 10 Commandments (Hb. 9:4). All of it wonderfully symbolized God's Messiah.

The *Jar with Manna* points to Christ, who superabundantly, and daily, provides for our every need.

The *Staff that Budded* points to Christ, who supernaturally prevails in times of adversity.

The *Ten Commandments* point to Christ, as they superbly pattern the Christ life.

On the 'Mercy Seat', the highpriest was to sprinkle blood, just once every year. That is what Jesus was about to do, once for all - not anymore as a symbol, but as the true Highpriest, entering God's 'Holiest of All' in heaven, with the blood of propitiation, not shed by an animal, but shed by him, the LAMB of GOD.

In Chapter 18 the disciples, apart from Peter's denial, are not in focus anymore. The hostile crowd wants to see blood. Pilate is in a quandary, then gives in to the crowd. After all, though not a part of this particular crowd, he is very much in with the bigger crowd of a world in mutiny (Ps. 2:1-3; Acts 4:24-28).

Mary and the other women watch from a distance. They and the disciples, with broken hearts, may well have cried out to God to intervene. Where was God??

The reality is that God was finally, after centuries of symbolism, making the 'shadows' to flee away. Everything was being marvelously fulfilled. God's own Lamb was being slaughtered! And *that* blood, 'sprinkled' on heaven's mercy-seat, would atone for all sins. Any one who truly believes is "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by his blood, through faith" (Ro. 3:24-25). All those who surrender to such a Savior, committing their lives to him, are saved out of a perishing world, only to be sent back into it with the message of a New World in Christ!

As He died on the cross, He cried out: "It is finished!" Sin's 'debt' was paid! The Great Creator had become the Great Redeemer! The "first Adam", created a "living being", had embraced sin and death. Now, the very "last Adam", in order to be God's "life-giving spirit", took all that was Adam's into the grave and left it there! From Hades and the tomb, He emerged as God's "Second Man" (1 Co. 15:45-47; Rev. 1:18); but that is what our next and last section is all about.

**Fourth division: Chapters 20-21:**

### **The new and everlasting Temple**

The Tabernacle with all its departments, furniture, appliances and services had long foreshadowed all that happened in John's Gospel, not least in chapters 18 and 19. The Tabernacle doesn't offer anything beyond that, yet after its three parts, we *must* look for a fourth and final part! We find it in the **Temple** built by the Son of David.

Just so, in John 20 & 21, we find that last and definite installment: The Lamb of God, the Son of David, rising victoriously from the grave! As Moses' Tabernacle was eventually replaced by Solomon's Temple, so, in our Lord's resurrection, a **Temple**, greater than Solomon's, was raised up - for ever! John chapters 20-21 are the "crown" of John 1-19.

We must remember, how in John 2, in the Jerusalem temple, there was this discussion: "The Jews answered and said to Him, 'What sign do you show to us, since you do these things?' Jesus answered and said to them, '**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up**'. Then the Jews said, 'It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the *temple* of his body. **Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.**"

John's 4th division gives us exactly that. There is an indestructable Temple! To raise it up, the old order had to be destroyed - that was Calvary! His life was the price, his blood the currency. But **all** his true disciples were made "living stones" in that one new Temple (Eph. 2:19-22; 3:10-11).

The Lord's intimate conversation with Peter in John 21 reminds us of what John saw in Revelation 1. There the Highpriest in the new Temple was seeing to the lampstands and the lamps. Isn't that what He was doing to Peter: trimming the wick and supplying the oil? The light must be seen, it must burn brightly in all the world and beyond; but for that your 'wick' and mine must be constantly 'trimmed'. That may be a painful process, but its bright light will be to the glory of God and of the Lamb in the midst of the throne! (Rev. 5).