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John Testifies Again About Jesus
John 3: 22-36

John testifies again about Jesus DIG: Given the different ideas about baptisms, what do you think happened at that river? What do you think you would have said if you were one of John's disciples at that point? How did the Baptist respond? What is the point of the allegory or story about the bride and the groom? What does John's response tell us about him? What facts about Jesus does John bring out in verses 31-36? When Yochanan says for God's wrath remains on them, whom is he talking about?

REFLECT: When you use your spiritual gift(s) to minister to others, who's in the spotlight? The Lord or you? Would you risk being perceived as odd? Like John, is there an area of your ministry that you need to *get out of the way* and let God do His work? If the Holy Spirit didn't really mean "eternal" could He have inspired Yochanan to use another word? Does eternal mean eternal?

John didn't have the qualities of greatness we value most in people we have a high regard for. **He** didn't move among the rich and famous or the proud and powerful; **he** chose the solitude of the wilderness. **He** wasn't sophisticated; **he** wore **camel's hair** and ate **locusts and wild honey**. **He** didn't climb the ladder of political success; **he** confronted and offended people as **he** spoke the truth without compromise. In the most extreme and most admirable sense of the word, **he** was . . . odd. **Christ**, who measures greatness on a different scale, called **John the greatest man who ever lived (Matthew 11:11** paraphrased**)**.

Yochanan was born to be **the herald** to **the King** – and **he** fulfilled **his** role flawlessly. As such, **he** had *three main responsibilities*. First, **the herald** was to *clear the way*, and remove obstacles from the minds of the people regarding **the Messiah**. Second, **the herald** was to *prepare the way*, and call Isra'el to a baptism of repentance. Third, **the herald** was to *get out of the way* . . . and that's what made **John** great.[341]

After this, Jesus and His apostles went out into the Judean countryside, where He spent some time with them, and baptized. Now Yochanan was also baptizing at Aenon (meaning *place of refreshment*) **near Salim** (which means *peace*), **because there was plenty of water, and people were coming** to be **baptized (John 3:22-23). This was before the Baptizer was put in prison** (**to see link click Fl – John the Baptist Beheaded**)**.** Generally, **John's** ministry of about a year had been **in the wilderness of Judea** and **all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan** (which speak of *drought and death*). But, as **he** was faithful to **his** calling, it became to **him** a place of *refreshment* and *peace.* Such is the experience of the obedient servant of **God (Mt 3:1** and **5)**.[342]

It is clear that people were leaving **the forerunner** for **Jesus**. **John's disciples** were worried. **They** did not like **their master** taking a back seat to anyone. **They** did not like to see **him** abandoned while the crowds were flocking out to hear and see a new **Teacher**. **An argument developed between some of Yochanan's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. They came to the Baptizer** and said to **him, "Rabbi, that Man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan – the One you testified about – look, His talmidim are baptizing, and everyone is going to Him" (John 3:24-26).**

It would have been very easy for **Yochanan** to feel injured, neglected and unjustifiably forgotten. Sometimes a friend's sympathy can be the worst possible thing for us. It can make us feel sorry for ourselves and encourage us to believe that we've been treated unfairly. However, **the Baptist** was above that pettiness.

John told his disciples three things:

He told them that no one could receive more than what God gave them. To this John replied: **A person can receive only what is given them from heaven (Yochanan 3:27).** If the new **Teacher** was attracting more **disciples** it was not because **He** was stealing them from **the herald**, but because **ADONAI** was giving them to **Him**. What did **the Baptizer** do? Did **he** decide that **Ha'Shem** was done with **him**? Did **he** become discouraged because **his disciples** dwindled away? Did **he** fold **his** tent and go home? No. **He** faithfully persevered: **John was also baptizing (John 3:23a)! His** crowd was thin; **his** season of prosperity was over; a brighter **One** had eclipsed **his** light; nevertheless, **John was also baptizing!** Therefore, **let *us* not become weary of doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (Galatians 6:9).**

He told them that they were friends of the groom. The bride (Isra'el) **belongs to the groom** (the Messiah)**. The friend, who attends the groom** (**John** and the righteous of the TaNaKh), **waits and listens for Him, and is full of joy when he hears the groom's voice (John 3:29).** One of the greatest pictures of the TaNaKh is that of Isra'el as **the bride** and **ADONAI** as **the groom**. Their relationship was likened to a wedding. When Isra'el went after strange gods it was as if she were committing spiritual adultery **(Exodus 34:15; Deuteronomy 31:16; Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 3:6-9; Hosea 3:1-5)**. The New Covenant continued this motif and speaks of the Church as **the bride** of **Christ (Second Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:22-32)**. In **the herald's** mind, **Yeshua** had come from **God** and was the Son of **Ha'Shem**. Isra'el was **His** rightful **bride** and **He** was Isra'el's **groom**. **Yochanan** did say, however, that **he** was **the friend** of **the groom**.

The friend of the **groom**, the *shoshben*, had a unique place at a Jewish wedding. He acted as the liaison between **the bride** and **the groom**; he arranged the wedding; he took out invitations; he presided at the wedding feast. But, he had one special duty. He guarded the bridal chamber to let no false lover in. He would open the door and let him in only when he heard **the groom's** voice and recognized it. Then he went away rejoicing for his task was completed and the lovers were together. He did not resent **the bride** or **the groom**, but gladly faded out of the picture.



He told them that he was merely the herald to the King. You yourselves can testify that I said: **I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of Him. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater and I must become less (John 3:28** and **30). John's** task had been to bring Isra'el and **Jesus** together; to arrange the marriage between **Christ the groom** and Isra'el **the bride**. That mission had been completed and **he** was only too happy to step out of the limelight once **his** work was done. **Yochanan's** humility was no less genuine than that of Moses, who, though raised to prominence by **God**, proclaimed **himself more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth (Numbers**

12:3). We need to remember that any task done for **God** is a great task.

One of the difficulties in interpreting the gospel of **John** is to know when the different characters are speaking and when **John** is adding **his** own commentary. These next verses may well be the words of **John the Baptist**; but, more than likely they are the witness and comments of **John** the evangelist.[343]

John begins by emphasizing the supremacy of **Yeshua**. If we want information, we have to go to the person who possesses that information. If we want information about **God**, we will only get it from **the Son** of **God**; and if we want information about **heaven**, we can only get if from **Him** who comes from **heaven**. **The One who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The One who comes from heaven is above all (Yochanan 3:31).**

The idea that a virgin would be selected by **God** to bear **Himself;** the idea that **God** would don a scalp and toes and two eyes; the thought that **the King** of the universe would sneeze and burp and get bit by mosquitoes. It's too incredible. Too revolutionary. We would never create such **a Savior**. We aren't that daring.

When we create a redeemer, we keep him safely distant in his faraway castle. We allow him only the briefest of encounters with us. We permit him to swoop in and out with his sleigh before can draw too near. We wouldn't ask him to take up residence in the midst of a contaminated people. In our wildest imaginings we wouldn't conjure up a king who becomes one of us . . . But, **God** did.[344]

When **Jesus** speaks about **God** and about heavenly things it is no fairy tale because **He** has been there. Because **the Son** alone knows **the Father**, **He** alone can give us **the truth** about **God**, and these facts are **the gospel**. **He testifies to what He has seen and heard, but no one accepts His testimony (John 3:32).** In the ancient world, if a man wanted to give his full approval to a document, such as a will, an agreement, or a constitution, he attached his **seal** to it. **The seal** was the sign that he agreed with it and regarded it as binding and true. So today, when people accept **Messiah**, **they** testify that **they** believe that what **God** says is true. **And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession (Ephesians 1:13b-14a).**

We can believe what **Jesus** says, because on **Him the LORD** poured out **the Spirit without limit**. **Whoever has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the One whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for He gives the Spirit without limit.** To hear **Jesus** is to hear the very words of **ADONAI**. Though the **Rabbi from Galilee's words** were profound, they are plain. **His words** were weighty, yet they shone with a luster and simplicity of a statement that staggered **His** enemies.[345] **The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in His hands (John 3:33-35).**

Finally, **Yochanan the Immerser sets before** us the eternal choice – **life** or **death**. Down through the centuries the choice had been set before Isra'el. Moses said: **See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction . . . I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).**
Joshua restated the challenge: **Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve (Joshua 24:15). John** then returns to **his** favorite subject. What matters most is our reaction to **Messiah**. **Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life** (see **Ms – The Eternal Security of the Believer**)**, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them (Yochanan 3:36).** If that reaction is love and longing, then that person will know **life**. But, if the reaction is indifference or hostility, then that person will know **death**. **Jesus Christ** doesn't send anyone to hell – they **choose** it.[346]

A football (soccer) player scores the winning goal and is embraced by his joyful teammates. An executive completes an important business deal and sees the look of appreciation in the eyes of her coworkers. A teenager graduates from high school and is photographed by the proud parents. In our society, admiration generally comes only as a reward for accomplishing some legitimate achievement.

Yet, **the forerunner** revealed that **Christ** looks at us differently. **He** simply rejoices in us for who we are, not for what we have accomplished or earned. Because we are now in the Dispensation of Grace (see my commentary on **Hebrews Bp – The Dispensation of Grace**), we are **the bride** and **Yeshua** is **the groom (Revelation 21:1-2). He** views us with such **joy** that **He** sings and rejoices over us **(Zephaniah 3:17)**. We are the object of **His** love and **He** rejoices in blessing us simply because **He** loves us **(Jeremiah 32:40-41)**. Our "achievement" lies in accepting **His** love and striving to live as **His** faithful **bride**.

As **John** observed our **Savior** beginning **His** ministry, **he** was happy to direct **his disciples** to **the groom**. **His** motto became **He must become greater and I must become less.** The delight that **the herald** took in having a part in **the Master's** ministry was far greater than any temporary accolades **he** might have received. **He** was **overjoyed at the** mere **sound of the groom's voice (John 3:29-30).**

Like **Yochanan**, we too can rejoice in our **groom** as we await the final **wedding feast** (see my commentary on **Revelation Fg – Blessed Are Those Invited to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb**). It will be a time of rejoicing and celebration as all pain, death, and mourning are done away with as **God** wipes **every tear from** our **eyes (Revelation 21:4)**. **ADONAI** pulls back the curtain and allows us to see our homeland. Just try to imagine the angels singing **His** praises as they see **Jesus'** generous love for **His bride**. Think about all the redeemed **from every nation, tribe, people and language** finally united with **the Lord** and one another in an unbreakable bond of love. What a time that will be!

Therefore, as we go about our day, let us be assured that **God** rejoices and sings over us. **Yeshua ha-Meshiach** is **the groom** and longs to spend eternity with us!

***Jesus**, thank **You** for loving me so much that **You** actually delight in me, even in my weaknesses. **Lord**, I want to be a part of your pleasing **bride**. Let **Your** ways increase in me and my ways decrease. I thank you for making my joy full as I draw close to **You**. Amen.*[347]