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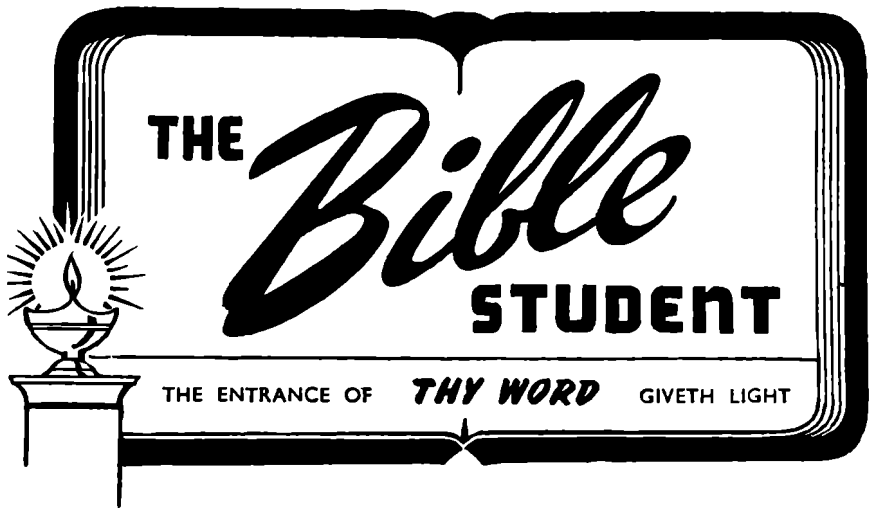
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A table of contents for *The Bible Student* can be found here:

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C O N T E N T S

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| PROPHECY OF EZEKIEL | 1 |
| 'THE HEIGHTS OF THE HILLS'... .. | 9 |
| EXPOSITORY STUDY OF JOHN'S GOSPEL | 14 |
| THE NECESSITY OF THE CROSS | 20 |
| BIBLICAL HEBREW WORDS ... | 26 |
| SEVEN OLD TESTAMENT FEASTS | 30 |
| WHO WAS TIMOTHY? ... | 35 |
| NOTES ON HEBREWS ... | 40 |
| N. T. WORD STUDIES ... | 46 |

Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

the physical strength of a frame that had endured untold hardships and sufferings, and the planning and motivating energy of a steadfast mind?

(iii) The narratives of Mark and Luke record an outstanding instance of costly giving in the very place where Abraham and David made their offerings (Mark 12:41-44). The Lord Jesus, seated by the treasury in the temple built on Moriah's summit, observed the manner and measure of each offering: He saw how and what each person cast in. But He took particular notice of a nameless, penniless and helpless woman, a widow, who 'cast in all that she had, even all her living'. No one can give more than this, and no true Christian should give less. On Moriah Abraham gave his son to the Lord, David gave his substance and his service, but the widow gave her *all*!

AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF ST JOHN'S GOSPEL

F. F. BRUCE, M.A.

II. Jesus reveals Himself to the World: 'His own received Him not' (John 1: 19-11: 50)

(a) THE WITNESS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST AND THE CALL OF THE FIRST DISCIPLES (John 1: 19-51)

Ch. I, v. 19—*And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent unto him from Jerusalem Priests and Levites to ask him, who art thou?*—The two prose passages dovetailed into the Prologue have already told us that John the Baptist came 'that he might bear witness of the light' (vv. 7, 8), together with the terms in which his witness was summed up (v. 15). John's witness is now recorded in greater detail (vv. 19-34). At the time when John commenced his public career as a preacher of repentance in the Jordan valley, there was a widespread sense of expectancy in the world—particularly among those pious Israelites who 'were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem' (Luke 2:38), but also to some extent and in a more undefined way among the Gentiles. The sudden appearance of this strange preacher and baptizer, displaying the authentic marks of the prophets of old, vested with 'the spirit and power of Elijah' (Luke 1:17), made an instant and

deep impression on the Jewish people. Less than a century before (63 B.C.) the native dynasty of the Hasmonians had fallen and the land of Israel became incorporated in the Roman Empire. This loss of independence and the failure of the hopes that had been pinned to the Hasmonian priest-kings brought about a revival of interest in the hope of a Messiah of David's line, as is clearly evidenced by the collection of Pharisaic hymns dating from 50 B.C. or thereby and curiously entitled 'The Psalms of Solomon'. John, to be sure, was born into a priestly family and therefore belonged to the tribe of Levi, not to the tribe of Judah to which the family of David belonged (although he was related to the family of David through his mother Elizabeth). But John's ancestry may not have been known to the populace at large. At any rate people soon began to wonder who he was and what he claimed to be: as another Evangelist tells us, they 'were in expectation, and all men reasoned in their hearts concerning John, whether haply he were the Christ' (Luke 3:15). It was natural, therefore, that a deputation should be sent to him from the religious leaders at Jerusalem. (We shall find several places in this Gospel where the religious leaders of the nation are simply called 'the Jews', as here). The deputation consisted of priests and Levites, perhaps because those who sent them knew that John was a priest by birth. They do not appear to have asked him outright if he claimed to be the expected Messiah, but this was probably the implication of their question 'Who art thou?' 'People are wondering whether you are the Messiah or not; what have you to say yourself?'

v. 20—*And he confessed, and denied not; and he confessed, I am not the Christ.*—The words 'and he confessed, and denied not' refer probably not merely to his answer to their first question, but to the whole account which he gave of himself, both negative (vv. 20, 21) and affirmative (v. 23). But in answer to the underlying implication of their first question he denied outright that he was the Messiah. Had he made such a claim, he might have found many willing to accept it, even if he was not a direct descendant of David. The title 'Messiah'—the anointed one—was applicable in Old Testament times to prophets and priests as well as to kings, and John was priest by birth and prophet by vocation. Besides, the idea of a Messiah of the tribe of Levi had been widely accepted in the Hasmonian period. But John refused to entertain any

Messianic claims for himself. It may be, however, that some of his disciples regarded him as Messiah and continued so to regard him for long after his death. If there was a group of such 'disciples of John' in the province of Asia at the time when this Gospel was written, as some believe, that would explain the emphasis with which here and elsewhere the Evangelist reports John's repudiation of Messianic dignity and his confession of inferiority to Jesus.

v. 21—*And they asked him, what then? Art thou Elijah? And he saith, I am not.*—If John was not the Messiah, he might be Elijah come to earth again. For one of the latest of the Old Testament prophets communicated this divine message to Israel: 'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord come' (Malachi 4:5). And John certainly bore some of the marks of Elijah. His very dress—he 'was clothed with camel's hair, and had a leathern girdle about his loins' (Mark 1:6)—must have reminded people of the description of Elijah in 2 Kings 1:8, 'a man with a garment of hair (R.V. margin), and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins.' But while anyone could imitate Elijah's dress, no mere imitation could reproduce the note of judgment and the call to repentance that sounded both in his message and in John's. Was John, then, Elijah? 'I am not', was his answer. To be sure, Luke's narrative of the nativity of John records how the angel Gabriel had given Zacharias a description of his promised son in terms of Malachi's prophecy of the eschatological mission of Elijah (Luke 1:17), and (more important still) our Lord Himself at a later date quite plainly pointed to John as the one in whom that prophecy was fulfilled (Matt. 11:14; 17:10-13; Mark 9:11-13). But John would make no such claim for himself. It may be relevant to remember, in addition, that current Jewish expectation looked for a personal, bodily return of the identical Elijah of the ninth century B.C., while John fulfilled Malachi's prophecy by coming 'in the spirit and power of Elijah.'

Art thou the prophet? And he answered, no.—There was, however, yet another Old Testament figure with whom it might be possible to identify John. Moses, in his farewell speech to the people of Israel, told them that when they wished to ascertain God's will, they must not have recourse to magic arts, as their heathen neighbours did; if God had any communication to make to them, He would raise them up a prophet as He had raised up

Moses himself, and they must pay heed to what this prophet said (Deut. 18:15 ff.). These words of Moses were early interpreted as pointing to one particular prophet, a second Moses, who would exercise the prophet's full mediatorial function as Moses had done. In some circles (e.g., among the Samaritans) the expected Messiah was conceived in terms of this prophet like unto Moses, and the early Christians, as we know, rightly saw in Jesus the one who finally and perfectly fulfilled the Mosaic prediction (cf. Acts 3:22 f.; 7:37; and consider the implication of the words 'hear ye him' in Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). But in other Jewish circles this prophet appears to have been viewed as an eschatological figure distinct from the Messiah, and such a view is implied in the present question (cf. John 6:14; 7:40). But John assured his questioners that he was not the prophet like unto Moses any more than he was the Messiah or Elijah.

v. 22—*They said therefore unto him, who art thou? That we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?*—But a man who behaved as John did must have some authority for his actions. The religious leaders in Jerusalem would not be content if their emissaries came back with a purely negative answer about John. If John claimed to be neither Messiah nor Elijah nor the Deuteronomic prophet, who did he claim to be? What account did he give of himself?

v. 23—*He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said Isaiah the prophet.*—Although John refused to be identified with the various figures of Old Testament prophecy that his questioners had suggested, there was one Old Testament passage to which he did appeal for his authority and commission. The Synoptic Evangelists quote Is. 40:3 as a prophecy of John's ministry; in this Gospel John himself claims to be the unnamed voice which the prophet heard calling:

'Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord,
Make straight in the desert a high way for our God.'

John was content to be but a voice, but what a message this voice had to proclaim! For these words are drawn from the poem to the great Old Testament Evangel which begins with Is. 40:1—an Evangel which begins by telling good tidings to Zion of the return of the exiles from their Babylonian captivity, but goes on to tell

better tidings of a greater redemption, wrought not by the edict of a Cyrus but by the vicarious passion and triumph of the humble and obedient Servant of the Lord. This redemption, foretold centuries before, was now on the eve of its accomplishment, and it was John the Baptist's high honour to be the voice announcing its near approach.

v. 24—*And they had been sent from the Pharisees.*—The reading of the Revisers' margin here ('And certain had been sent from among the Pharisees') suggests a second deputation, but it is in every way more likely that the sense of the text should be retained, and that this verse should be regarded as a parenthesis explaining the specifically religious tendency of the close questioning to which John was subjected. The Pharisees formed a strong minority in the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jewish nation. They were basically a religious fellowship, dedicated to the study and observance of the traditional law, and they enjoyed great influence throughout Palestine as popular teachers. The majority of the scribes came from their ranks. Their influence with the people was so great that the majority party in the Sanhedrin, the Sadducees, found it expedient to respect their wishes. The Sadducean party at this time was closely bound up with the interests of the great chief-priestly families. But the deputation sent to John consisted not of chief priests but of ordinary priests and Levites, and these may well have been associated rather with the Pharisaic party. A Sadducean deputation would have been interested rather in the possible political implications of John's activity; these messengers of the Pharisees were much more concerned about his religious authority, and in particular about the significance of his baptism.

v. 25—*And they asked him, and said unto him, why then baptizest thou, if thou art not the Christ, neither Elijah, neither the prophet?*—Baptism they knew as a rite of cleansing and renewal. It was probably already in use as one of the ceremonial acts by which proselytes were admitted to the community of Israel. But John was baptizing people who were Israelites by birth; he was putting them in the outside place along with Gentiles and then baptizing them when they expressed their repentance, in token of their admission to the true Israel. Natural descent from Abraham was neither here nor there (cf. Matt. 3:9; Luke 3:8). Only by repentance and baptism could they become a people prepared for

the Lord, ready to receive the coming Messiah. That the Messianic age would be introduced by cleansing with water had been foretold by the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 36:25). But this cleansing was to be the work of God: who was John, that he should take it upon himself to administer such a baptism? That the Messiah would have such authority they readily acknowledged; that a great prophet like Moses or Elijah would act thus was quite conceivable; but why should John do so? Since he claimed to be only a voice, why did he not confine himself to the proclamation of his message?

v. 26—*John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: in the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not.*—John replied that his baptizing in water was but the preparation for something more. In the passage already cited from Ezekiel, God tells how He will not only sprinkle clean water on His people but also put a new spirit—His own Spirit—within them (Ezek. 36:26 f.). John's baptism in water is the prelude to the baptism in the Holy Spirit which is to be carried out by a greater than he (see v. 33 below). That greater one is already standing among them, although He is as yet unrecognized by them. (That John himself had by this time learned the identity of his greater Successor is evident from his narrative in vv. 29-34.)

v. 27—*Even he that cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose.*¹—So far inferior was John to the Coming One whose way he had been sent to prepare that he was unworthy to discharge for Him even the most menial task. 'Every service which a slave will perform for his master', it was said, 'a disciple will perform for his rabbi, except to undo his sandal thong'. But John, who regarded himself as unfit even to do this servile office, had been given a most honourable ministry to accomplish—to act as the Messiah's forerunner. The words and actions of a forerunner, however, do not depend on his personal authority, but on the dignity of the person whose way he prepares. John's authority was therefore derived from God and His Christ. The water in which John baptized repentant Israelites was but a

¹ Here, as in Mark 1: 7; Luke 3: 16; Acts 13: 25, the Baptist speaks of *loosing* his Successor's sandal; in Matt. 3: 11 he says 'whose shoes I am not worthy to *bear*.' Probably John used an Aramaic verb which (like Gk. *airo* in v. 29) could mean both 'remove' and 'carry'. But in any case it was the office of a slave both to take off his master's sandals and to carry them.

preparatory symbol of the true inward purification by the Spirit which Messiah Himself would effect at His coming.

v. 28—*These things were done in Bethany beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.*—Nothing more is heard of the deputation. The paragraph ends with a note on the locality where the conversation took place. The most authoritative texts agree in calling the locality 'Bethany beyond Jordan'—so called, of course, to distinguish it from the other Bethany near Jerusalem. This is one of several examples of the Evangelist's care to distinguish places and persons bearing the same name. But the A.V. reading Bethabara goes back to the time of Origen, who preferred it on geographical grounds. That his preference was based on local information is suggested by the fact that the oldest form of the Syriac Gospels (that exhibited in the Sinaitic Syriac palimpsest) has the same reading. Bethabara means 'the house of the ford'. The identification of the place is uncertain. It was evidently in Peraea (the region of Transjordan which at that time formed part of the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas); it has been identified by some with the Beth-barah of Judg. 7:24; by others with the Beth-nimrah of Josh. 13:27. The latter name is represented in one of the Septuagint editions by *Baithanabra*, a form which might yield our two variants here, Bethany and Bethabara.

(*To be continued*)

THE NECESSITY OF THE CROSS

MARTIN A. HOPKINS, TH.M., D.D.

¹A rationale of the Atonement is an absolute necessity for a rational faith, and no other sort of faith is Scriptural, or worthy to be called faith. To believe in the Cross without having any theory of the Atonement, without knowing how and why the Cross saves, is to believe that we are saved by magic. The anti-intellectualism of the twentieth century may be satisfied to say:

¹ Our first contacts with Dr. Hopkins were when he was Principal of the North China Theological Seminary, Tenghsien. The subject he deals with in this article needs to be kept in the front rank of our theological studies just as much as ever.—Ed.