

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

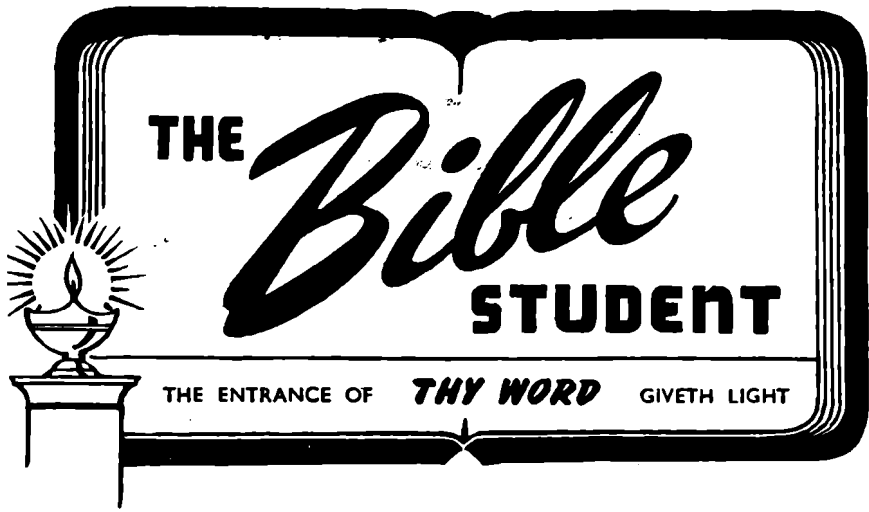
<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

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

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bible-student_01.php



New Series
Vol. XXV. No. 2

APRIL
1954

CONTENTS

AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF ST JOHN'S GOSPEL	...	49
THE DEATHLESS HERITAGE	55
THE PROPHECY OF EZEKIEL	61
'THE HEIGHTS OF THE HILLS ARE HIS'	71
'WRITTEN THAT YE MAY BELIEVE'	76
THE PAIRED WORDS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT	...	83
SEVEN OLD TESTAMENT FEASTS	...	89
NOTES ON HEBREWS	95
THE NECESSITY OF THE CROSS	99

Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

The Bible Student

Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

NEW SERIES

APRIL 1954

VOL. XXV No. 2

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)

ii. *John proclaims Jesus as the Messiah* (vv. 29-34)

v. 29—*On the morrow he seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!*—The day after the deputation from Jerusalem interviewed John, he had an opportunity of pointing out to his hearers the Coming One of whom he had spoken. Some six weeks or more had gone by since Jesus of Nazareth had received baptism at John's hands, as the Synoptic Evangelists record. Immediately after His baptism, Jesus had disappeared; as the other Evangelists tell us, He spent forty days fasting in solitude in the wilderness of Judaea, where He resisted and overcame the subtle temptations presented to Him of achieving His messianic destiny in ways more attractive to human nature than the divinely appointed way of suffering and death mapped out for the obedient Servant of the Lord. Now He had come back, and John, catching sight of Him as He drew near through the crowd, proclaimed Him as the One whose way he himself had come to prepare: 'Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!'

'The Lamb of God', as a title for our Lord, is so familiar to us that we can scarcely realize how strange it must have appeared to

those who first heard it. But its very strangeness must have made them think. Many of them were familiar with the varied forms of apocalyptic imagery under which reference was made to persons and movements concerned in the outworking of God's purpose, and in fact this imagery at times depicted the expected messianic deliverer under the guise of a horned ram or lamb.¹ But John's language is distinctive in that he speaks of a sacrificial Lamb, the remover of the sin of the world and not (as in the apocalyptic imagery mentioned) the champion of the Jewish people against their earthly foes. What is the source of John's language? Undoubtedly it is to be sought in the Old Testament. Abel's offering 'of the firstlings of his flock' (Gen. 4:4), Abraham's 'lamb for a burnt offering' (Gen. 22:8), and the paschal lamb of Ex. 12:3 ff. have all been suggested as sources of John's use of the title 'The Lamb of God'. Of these the most attractive suggestion is that of the paschal lamb, since the Evangelist seems to have it in his mind later, in the course of his passion narrative (compare especially Ch. 19:36 with Ex. 12:46 and Num. 9:12). But John's words 'which taketh away the sin of the world' suggest a sin-offering, and a sin-offering is not in view (expressly, at any rate) in the paschal sacrifice or the two other O.T. passages referred to. We may think therefore of the lamb of the sin-offering as being primarily in the Baptist's mind—yet not so much the lamb prescribed for this purpose in the Levitical law² as the Servant of the Lord who suffered 'as a lamb that is led to the slaughter' and poured out His life as 'an offering for sin' (Isa. 53:7, 10).³

¹ Cf. two works produced shortly before the beginning of the Christian era: 1 Enoch 90: 9 ff. and 'The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs'—Testament of Joseph 19: 8.

² A lamb is not the characteristic animal for a sin-offering in the Levitical law; cf. the bullock of Lev. 4: 3 ff., 14 ff., 16: 3, 6; and the goats for the day of atonement (Lev. 16: 5ff.).

³ This is probably also the source of 1 Pet. 1: 19, where 'lamb' represents Gk. *amnos*, as here. The horned lamb of Rev. 5: 6 ff. (Gk. *arnion*) has fought and won a victory (as in earlier apocalyptic imagery), but (and this is the important point) he has done so through death; he is a lamb slaughtered in sacrifice, and this (in spite of the different Greek word used) identifies him with the lamb of John 1: 29, the Suffering Servant of Isa. 53: 7.

It has indeed been urged by some scholars that the allusion to the Isaianic Servant in this verse is more explicit still. Behind Gk. *amnos*, used here for 'lamb', they see Aramaic *talya*, which might be rendered into Greek, according to the context, either by *amnos* or by *pais* ('servant', as in Matt. 12:18, etc.). This would indicate a double reference in the single word to the unnamed figure of Isa. 53. The argument, however is linguistically precarious. The allusion to the Suffering Servant is convincing enough without it, especially if we recall the quotation already made in v. 23 from the same body of evangelical prophecy.

The verb *airo* is rightly rendered 'take away' here. When the thought is explicitly that of *bearing* sin, the New Testament uses *anaphero*, as, e.g., in 1 Pet. 2:24. The occurrence in 1 Peter comes in a passage which is almost a running commentary on Isa. 53:5-12, and in the Septuagint version of the prophecy *anaphero* is used of the Servant's sin-bearing (vv. 11, 12). But in view of the influence of this same prophecy on these words of John the Baptist, the idea of *bearing* as well as that of *taking away* sin is probably implied. John is introducing Jesus as the Messiah, but doing so in terms of the submissive Servant who suffers vicariously for His people, bearing 'the sin of many' (Isa. 53:12). And, introducing Him thus, John makes it plain that the 'many' whose sin the Messiah is to bear are not confined to the people of Israel; He is God's Lamb, God's chosen and acceptable Victim, who by His self-offering 'taketh away the sin of the world' (cf. 1 John 2:2). The 'world' does not mean all men without exception, for it becomes increasingly plain throughout the Gospel that there are those who reject the One whom God has sent; but it does mean all men without distinction—national, religious or cultural (cf. Ch. 12:32).

v. 30—*This is He of whom I said, after me cometh a man which is become before me: for He was before me.*—Here we have in their natural context words already quoted in the Prologue (v. 15) to make it clear that the Word become flesh was identical with the Deliverer whose forerunner John was. The words 'This is he of whom I said' show that John had made an announcement in similar terms before—perhaps frequently. This is confirmed by the Synoptic account, according to which John had foretold the

advent of the Coming One in such terms before the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16). For the rest of the verse see our remarks on v. 15.

v. 31—*And I knew Him not; but that He should be made manifest to Israel, for this cause came I baptizing with water.*—Although John was related to Jesus, according to Luke's account (cf. Luke 1:36, where their respective mothers are called kinswomen), he may have had few opportunities of becoming acquainted with Jesus, since he appears to have spent several years in the wilderness before he began his brief career as a preacher of repentance (cf. Luke 1:80). Even so, he knew something of his Nazarene kinsman's manner of life, as is evident from his words of expostulation when Jesus asked for baptism at his hands: 'I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?' (Matt. 3:14). But it is in any case not this kind of personal acquaintance that John has in mind when he says 'I knew Him not.' He means, 'I did not know Him as the Messiah.' Up to the time when he baptized Jesus, John had been announcing the public appearance of the Coming One as near at hand, without knowing His identity. It was indeed to prepare the way for that public appearance that John had undertaken his baptismal ministry. But, while he knew that the Coming One was already present with them incognito, he could not as yet point Him out.

v. 32—*And John bare witness, saying, I have beheld the Spirit descending as a Dove out of Heaven; and it abode upon Him.*—But something had now happened which made it clear to John that the Coming One was none other than Jesus of Nazareth. He had witnessed a God-given sign which marked Jesus out as the promised Messiah-Servant, on whom, according to the prophets, the Spirit of God would abide in unique fashion (cf. Isa. 11:2; 42:1; 61:1). We know from the other Gospels that this sign was given on the occasion of Jesus' baptism by John; our Evangelist does not make explicit mention of this baptism, but most, if not all, of his readers would already know the main outline of the story as related in the Synoptic narrative. According to Mark, it was Jesus who 'saw the heavens rent asunder, and the Spirit as a dove descending upon him' (1:10); according to Luke, it was 'in a bodily form' that 'the Holy Ghost descended . . . as a dove, upon him' (3:22); so that

we are not surprised to learn here that the Baptist also saw the outward and visible sign of the Spirit's descent.¹ We are not, of course, to suppose that our Lord had previously enjoyed no endowment of the Holy Spirit; we know that from His infancy 'the grace of God was upon him' (Luke 2:40). If His forerunner was 'filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb' (Luke 1:15), how much more the greater than he! But the Spirit came upon our Lord at His baptism, as the prophets had foretold, to invest Him with all that was needful for His messianic office and service; it was now that He was 'anointed . . . with the Holy Ghost and with power' (Acts 10:38).

v. 33—*And I knew Him not: But He that sent me to baptize with water, He said unto me, upon whomsoever thou shalt see the spirit descending, and abiding upon Him, the same is He that baptizeth with the Holy Spirit.*—Thus John, who before the baptism of Jesus had not known the identity of the Messiah, was enabled to recognize Him in the One who was even now emerging from the Jordan; for he had previously received a divine monition that when he saw the Spirit come down and abide in this form on a certain Person, he would recognize that Person to be the One whose herald he was. Already John had declared that his baptism with water was to be followed by a baptism of a higher order—baptism with the Holy Spirit—which the Coming One would administer (cf. of Mark 1:8). Now this greater Baptizer stood revealed before them. He who had been so signally anointed by the Spirit Himself was uniquely empowered to impart the unction to His people (cf. Ch. 20:22; 1 John 2:20, 27).

v. 34—*And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.*—The visible descent of the dove confirmed in the

¹ The dove was probably visible to all who were there, but its significance was known only to Jesus and John. The use of the dove to signify the Spirit may go back to Gen.1:2. Cf. Milton's apostrophe to the Holy Spirit in *Paradise Lost*, i: 19 ff. :—

'Thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
And mad'st it pregnant.'

Baptist's mind the truth that was simultaneously proclaimed by the Voice from heaven: 'Thou art my Son, my Beloved; in thee I am well pleased' (Mark 1:11). God thus acknowledged Jesus as His Son, and John joyfully bore witness to the fact. As has often been pointed out, the Voice combined the words in which God addresses the Anointed Prince of the house of David in Ps. 2:7 ('Thou art my Son') with the words in which He introduces His obedient Servant in Isa. 42:1 ('my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth'—so R.V., representing the Massoretic Hebrew text). Jesus was thus acclaimed as Israel's Messiah, and at the same time it was made plain that He was to fulfil His Messiahship in terms of the prophetic portrait of the Servant, who by way of undeserved contempt, unjust judgement and death was to accomplish the will of God and spread His saving light to the ends of the earth.

While the title 'Son of God' belonged of right to the One whom God designated as His Messiah, it is plain—and nowhere more so than in this Gospel—that it was to Jesus no merely official or formal title, but one that expressed the essential and eternal relationship which He bore to God as His Father. This filial consciousness is the most impressive feature of our Lord's inner life, in so far as the Gospels enable us to penetrate the shrine of His personal devotion. In the order of revelation, no doubt, His Sonship as Messiah was appreciated by His disciples before they grasped the truth of His pre-temporal and pre-mundane Sonship. But actually the Sonship manifested in His messianic service was grounded in His eternal Sonship. This is taught as clearly, though not so repeatedly in the Synoptic Gospels as in the Fourth Gospel. It was because our Lord was antecedently the Son of God that God sent Him into the world as the last and greatest of His messengers (cf. Mark 12:6); it was because of the Son's unique and mutual knowledge of the Father in eternity that He was commissioned by the Father to communicate that knowledge to men in the temporal exercise of His messianic mediation (cf. Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22).¹

(To be continued)

¹ On this whole subject see G. Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus*, pp. 141-226.