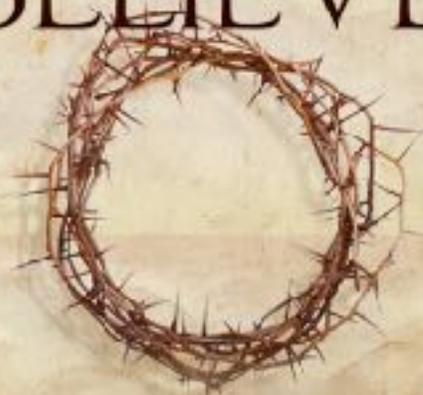


THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE



THE EVIDENCE OF JOHN'S TESTIMONY (JOHN 1.19-51)

John the Baptist was introduced in the prologue, being referred to as a "a man sent from God" who came "to testify about the Light" (vss. 6-8). A portion of his testimony was given in vs. 15, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" In our study of John's prologue (vss. 1-18) we spent little time on John the Baptist's role, but the importance of his testimony is emphasized throughout John 1.19-51. So, let's note how John testified about Jesus.

John testified by fulfilling his role (vss. 19-23)

While the other gospel accounts show that large crowds went out to John (see Luke 3.7f), John's account focuses on the Jewish leaders who went to question this strange figure in the wilderness. Note: "*John, in the Gospel, distinguishes between the multitude and the Jews. By the former he means the aggregate of the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine, the mass of the people, chiefly Galilaeans; by the latter, more particularly Judaeans, the leaders of Judaism in opposition to Jesus.*" (Vincent). Their questions show a pointed interest in the authority John used to justify his preaching and baptizing. Was he claiming to be the Christ, Elijah (Malachi 4.5) or the Prophet (cf. Deut. 18.15-18)? While we would expect John to deny being the Christ / the Prophet, his denial of being Elijah is interesting. In the other gospel accounts, John is identified as being Elijah (see Luke 1.17; Matthew 11.13-14). It may be that John was refuting a popular misconception that the first Elijah would walk the earth again, or he could have been making the point that "*while anyone could imitate Elijah's dress (cf. Zech. 13:4), no mere imitation could reproduce the note of judgment and the call to repentance which sounded both in his message and in John's.*" (F.F. Bruce).

John's answer in vs. 23, quoting Isaiah 40.3, shows that he did identify himself with God's Messianic purpose. No, he was not the Messiah, but he was sent by God to prepare the way for Him! "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'" Isaiah, who had prophesied so often that the people would be

punished by God, foretold that a way back to God would be made. However, this promise didn't apply only to the literal return from captivity, but also to the deliverance made possible by the Lord's suffering Servant (Isaiah 52.13-53.12). John's role was to straighten the way so that people could come to the Lord.

John testified by baptizing (vss. 24-34)

The Jewish leadership had particular interest in John's baptism (vs. 25). Baptism wasn't an unknown practice in John's day, for many Jewish groups used baptism as a means of induction. However, a significant difference was that in most Jewish groups initiates baptized themselves, whereas John baptizing others. Why was he doing this, what authority did he possess?

John's baptism played a significant role in preparing the way for Jesus. First, as the other gospel accounts recount, John's baptism demanded repentance (Luke 3.3, 10-14). This emphasized to the people that physical descent from Abraham would not insure their status as God's people, rather they must "bear fruits in keeping with repentance" (Luke 3.8). Second, as important as John's baptism was, he was quick to point out that it paled in comparison with what the Messiah would do (John 1.26-27; Luke 3.16). John's words were likely in reference to the prophecy of Ezekiel 36.25-27, "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." John could baptize others for the remission of their sins (contingent on the death of Christ, Hebrews 9.15), but he could not grant a new Spirit. Only God could do that, so John was pointing the people to Jesus who would baptize with both water and the Spirit (cf. vs. 33; John 3.5; Acts 2.38).

Finally, John's baptizing Jesus is what "proved" to him that Jesus is the Son of God (vss. 29-34). As Matthew 3.13-14 indicates, John already understood the superiority of Jesus, but it was the events at His baptism which allowed John to testify that Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (vs. 29; cf. Isaiah 53.7; 1Peter 1.18-19) and "that this is the Son of God" (vss. 32-34; cf. Isaiah 11.1-5; 42.1; 61.1). We cannot minimize the importance of John's baptism, the testimony it provides for Jesus being the Christ!

John testified by pointing others toward Jesus (vss. 35-51)

This section has two outstanding features. First, numerous Messianic titles are attributed to Jesus by different people.

- John refers to Jesus as the Lamb of God for the second time (vs. 36; cf. vs. 29).
- Andrew tells his brother Simon that he has found the Messiah (vs. 41).
- Philip tells Nathanael that Jesus is "Him whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote" (vs. 45). Later, Jesus would rebuke the Jews for not believing in

Moses, for if they had "believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me" (John 5.46).

- Nathanael confesses Jesus to be both the Son of God and the King of Israel (vs. 49). It is likely that Nathanael did not understand the true importance of his confession. He likely thought of Jesus in political terms, the king of the Jews and thus God's "son" (cf. Psalm 2.7). Jesus would later emphasize the spiritual nature of His kingdom (John 18.36).
- Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man (vs. 51). This is the preferred "title" that Jesus will use for Himself throughout the gospels. While we might see it as emphasizing His humanity, it has clear Messianic importance (see Daniel 7.13-14). Furthermore, Jesus equates Himself with the vision Jacob had of the ladder in Genesis 28.12. Jesus, the Son of Man, is the mediator between God and man!

The second outstanding feature is how men were instrumental in bringing others to Jesus.

- John the Baptist directed two of his disciples (Andrew and probably John) to look to Jesus (vss. 35-36).
- Andrew finds his brother Simon and takes him to Jesus (vss. 40-42).
- Philip, upon being summoned by Jesus to "follow" Him, goes and finds his brother Nathanael (vss. 43-45).

The point of this section is clear: those who have come to believe in Jesus want others to believe in Him as well! Thus, they go and bring others to the Him.