

The Witness of John the Baptist to Jesus

of the prophecy, however, it was fulfilled in John (see Matt. 11 : 14 ; 17 : 10-13 ; Luke 1 : 17). *The prophet* (Rev. Ver.) ? the one intended in Deut. 18 : 15. Some thought it to be Jeremiah or "one of the prophets," perhaps Moses. Peter in Acts 3 : 22 applies this prophecy to Christ. John did not put himself on an equality with any of these. How different are the claims of Jesus, Matt. 11 : 27 ! *What sayest thou ?* Nonplussed, they were unwilling to judge John by his works, and report that his was a God-given mission. *The voice*. See Isa. 40 : 3. His own personality does not count at all. He is a mouthpiece for a message. *Make straight*, etc.; a call for moral reformation to prepare for the Messiah (compare Matt. 3 : 2 ; Mark 1 : 4). The messenger may be forgotten, but his proclamation as herald of the coming King is all important. " 'The desert,' a pathless, fruitless waste, fitly symbolizes the spiritual condition of the Messiah's people. For the coming of their King preparation must be made, especially by such repentance as John preached. 'If Israel repent but for one day, the Messiah will come.' " (Expositor's Greek Testament.)

V. 24-26. *They . . . were . . . Pharisees* ; one of the two chief religious sects among the Jews. The other, the Sadducees, had no interest in the coming of the Messiah. The Pharisees, being much concerned about ceremonial washings (Mark 7 : 3), would naturally be struck by John's baptism. *Why baptizest thou ?* Proselytes who were admitted into the community of Israel were baptized. But the Pharisees could not understand by what authority John called upon Israelites to undergo a purificatory symbolic rite, unless he had a prophet's commission. These ritualists were more disturbed by the symbol than by the message. *I baptize with water* ; a preparatory symbol with an earthly element ; Messiah's baptism will be with the Spirit from above, v. 33. The Baptist's origin and work, though God-appointed, belonged to a lower sphere than Messiah's. *There standeth one among you*. Jesus had already been baptized and was about to begin his public ministry. *Whom ye know not*. Only John knew, so far, that Jesus was Messiah, vs. 29-34.

Vs. 27, 28. *After me* ; in point of time. *I am not worthy* ; to perform the service of a slave for his master. Yet this same John had moved all Judea and Galilee. What must Messiah be when He comes ? *Bethany beyond Jordan* (Rev. Ver.) ; not the village near the mount of Olives, the home of Lazarus and his sisters. (See Light from the East.)

II. Pointing to Christ, 29-34.

Vs. 29-31. *The next day* ; after the visit of the Pharisees. *John seeth Jesus* ; perhaps returning from His temptation, forty days after His baptism. (Westcott.) *Behold the Lamb of God*. It is probable that the Baptist had in mind Isa. 53 : 4-10, which he interprets in the light of sacrificial practice. The Servant of the Lord becomes the Lamb of sacrifice. There is a reference also to the lamb of the Passover (Ex. 12 : 3-14), then close at hand, ch. 2 : 13. *Taketh away . . . sin* ; by His atoning death on behalf of others. *Of the world*. How the Baptist's vision is enlarged ! Thus far his message of pardon had been confined to Israel ; now it is for the whole world. What greater pardon is possible than the removal of sin ? *I knew him not* ; as the Messiah, when He appeared at Jordan, though as His kinsman he was probably acquainted with Jesus. Yet his baptism had directed the believing element of His people, the true Israel, to their Messiah. This was John's mission, *for this cause came I* (Rev. Ver.)

Vs. 32-34. *John bare witness* (Rev. Ver.) ; probably to his own disciples. *I beheld* (Rev. Ver.) ; full contemplation, not a transient dream. *The Spirit descending* ; the promised endowment of the Messiah, Isa. 11 : 2 ; 61 : 1. *Like a dove* ; the gracious and guileless Spirit, with whom in His fulness the Saviour was endued. "The dove, as a symbol, here suggests the notion of (1) tenderness, (2) innocence (Matt. 10 : 16), (3) gentle and tranquil motion." (Westcott.) *It abode upon*. Jesus already possessed this Spirit (Luke 1 : 35), but now the endowment is complete and permanent. *Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending* ; the promise of the Messianic age, Joel 2 : 28 ; Acts 2 : 17. *The same is he*, etc. Christ's baptism is divine in a sense that John's never was. *I saw, and bare record* ; a testimony on personal knowledge of immense weight from one of the