

A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS
XIX. The Witness Of Messiah's Forerunner About Jesus
(John 1:15-34)

I. Introduction

- A. Though Jesus needed to be tempted by Satan in Matthew 4:1-11 to demonstrate His moral sinlessness and hence His right to be Israel's righteous King and Savior before entering His ministry, He also needed to be presented by His human forerunner in John the Baptist in a credible way before John's human listeners that they might believe in the Messiah. Thus, John's credible presentation of Christ is recorded in John 1:15-34.
- B. We study this passage to note the credible way John ministered that made his presentation of Christ believable to his listeners, doing so for our insight, application and edification (as follows):

II. The Witness Of Messiah's Forerunner About Jesus, John 1:15-34.

- A. John the Baptist was born and raised by his parents Zacharias and Elisabeth to be the forerunner of the Messiah to prepare the nation to receive God's Messiah when He arrived, cf. Luke 1:5-25, 57-80.
- B. However, though John knew from his father and mother that Jesus was the Messiah by Mary's three-month stay with them (Luke 1:26-56), John did not rely on their witness to present Jesus to Israel as the Messiah!
- C. Rather, John relied on God's instruction and authority for his ministry in presenting Jesus to Israel:
 - 1. John was born six months before Jesus (Luke 1:36), so from the human view, John was six months older than Jesus, so John could be said to have existed before Jesus and so be in greater in authority than Him.
 - 2. However, John asserted the opposite, that the Messiah Who was coming after him was "previous to" (*emprosthēn*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 321; *The Analyt. Grk. Lex. (Zon.)*, 1972, p. 136) him, a reference to the divine "preexistence" of Christ as God, John 1:15; *Bible Know. Com., N. T.*, p. 273.
 - 3. Thus, when asked by Israel's religious leaders his identity, John candidly confessed and did not deny that he was neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet like unto Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 18:15-19 by Moses Who was to come, John 1:19-21. (We know that Moses' prediction here was of Christ, but Israel's religious leaders would clearly fail to believe that Jesus was that predicted Prophet!) It is clear that regardless of John's huge following that was evidenced in the crowds that came out to him from all around Israel and Jerusalem (cf. Matthew 3:1-6) that John was not trying to attract attention to himself as if he was trying to be some important person! He was on a divine mission to exalt the Messiah, not himself!
 - 4. When the Pharisees (John 1:24) then asked John who he was, John answered that he fulfilled Isaiah 40:3 as the voice who was crying in the wilderness to make straight the way of the Lord, John 1:23. That ministry involved calling the people to be baptized for the repentance of sins in preparation for the arrival of Messiah and His presentation of His Messianic Kingdom, Mark 1:3-4. John's mission was one of preparing Israel's people for the arrival of the Messiah, not to attract people to himself as an end in itself.
 - 5. The Pharisees then asked John why he baptized since he had admitted that he was not the Messiah, or Elijah or the Deuteronomy 18:15-19 Prophet Moses had predicted to come. The Pharisees were offended that John baptized without human authority because they considered themselves as having exclusive ceremonial right over all ritual practices like baptism. (John 1:25) To them, if John had no *innate personal* authority to baptize, he had no right to do so because that practice was a practice of *their* domain. (J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 1991, p. 108)
 - 6. John replied that he baptized with water to signify repentance, but that the Messiah Who was coming after him, Who was among the people of Israel and was not known by the Pharisees, was the One with the ultimate authority, and John admitted that he himself was not worthy to untie the strap of His sandals as His slave, John 1:26-27. In other words, John preached authoritatively, but not because he relied on his own authority, but since the authority behind his ministry was the authority of God Who had sent him.
 - 7. The next day John saw Jesus coming unto him, and he proclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," John 1:28-29. John added that this was the One Who was before him (v. 30), that God who had sent him had taught him that He on Whom John saw the Holy Spirit descending and remaining on Him like a dove was the Messiah and Son of God, John 1:30-34. It was all of God's leading!

Lesson: *John's ministry and testimony about Jesus being the Messiah and Son of God rings true, for John publicly refused to claim any fame or innate authority for what he did and said, but only to rely on the Lord.*

Application: *May we like John rely only on God and only on His authority and exalt only Him in our ministries.*