

G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ☐ DEO ☐ GLORIA

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

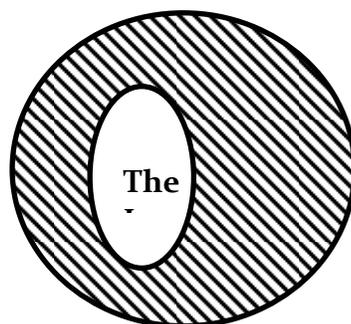
The Testimony of John the Baptist

October 10, 2004

¹⁹ This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰ And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." ²¹ They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." ²² Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" ²³ He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said." ²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶ John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. ²⁷ "It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."
²⁸ These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

BACKGROUND

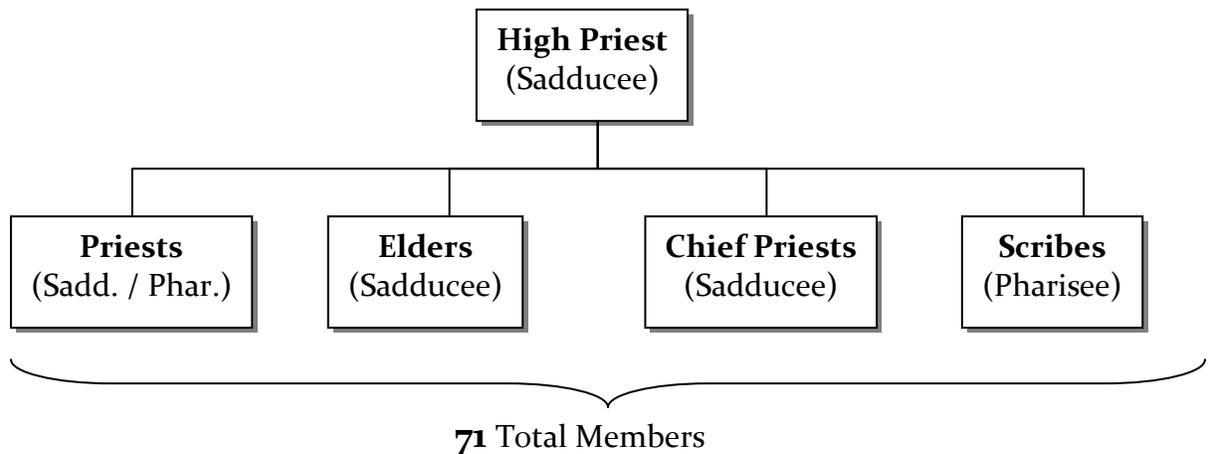
- ☐ **Pharisees** ("separated ones")
 - The "popular" party
 - Emphasized obedience to the Law
 - Legalistic in the development and adherence to Rabbinical (extra-biblical) law



Hedge;
Oral Tradition;
Rabbinic

- Example of the Law vs. the Rabbinical Tradition
 - Law: Remember the Sabbath and Keep it Holy.
 - Rabbinical Tradition: Is it lawful to eat an egg layed on the Sabbath?
 - Obeyed the Law as far as appearances were concerned; however, their hearts were far from God
 - See Isaiah 1
 - Believed in the immortality of the soul, final resurrection with rewards and punishments, and angels.
 - Related to modern-day Hasidic Jews
- **Sadducees**
- High ranking priestly class
 - Aristocratic sect
 - The High Priest was a Sadducee
 - Viewed only the Torah (Genesis through Revelation) as authoritative
 - Read the rest of the Old Testament but did not use it for legal norms
 - Rejected the Rabbinical Law as absurd
 - What the Torah did not address, they felt free to accommodate
 - Did not believe in a resurrection of the dead, immortality of the soul, future rewards and punishments, or angels.
 - Enjoyed privileged positions in society and managed to get along well under Roman rule
 - Any movement that might upset order and authority was bound to appear dangerous in their eyes
 - Deistic characteristics
 - Believed that God was not actively involved in the universe; man controls his own destiny
 - Likely were influenced by Greek philosophy
 - Enemies with the Pharisees
 - Focused their attention on the Temple and ceremony
 - No longer existed after the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70
- **The Sanhedrin**
- The highest ruling body and judicial court in Israel at the time of Christ
 - Organized similar to the body of elders under Moses in the Old Testament
 - Granted limited authority over certain religious, civil and criminal matters by the foreign nations that dominated Israel throughout its history

The Sanhedrin



- **This is the beginning of one “momentous week”**
 - The first day in this week begins with the delegation from Jerusalem of priests and Levites
 - The final day concludes with the Wedding Feast at Cana
 - This parallels creation (see also John 1:1)
 - Jesus is the new creation

²⁸ **These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.**

- This is not the Bethany, the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.
- The Bethany mentioned in verse 28 does not exist today.
- It is, possibly, the most probable that this Bethany was Batanea, or Bashan (as it is referred to in the Old Testament)

¹⁹ **This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"**

- Possible parallel to Matthew 3:5-9
- **the Jews**
 - Possible Interpretations (it is likely that all are accurate)
 - Those who opposed Jesus
 - The Jewish leaders (primarily in Jerusalem [which is in Judea])
 - Israelites from the region of Judea (as opposed to, for example, Galilee)

□ **Priests and Levites**

- *Priests*: traced their lineage back to (1) Levi, the head of one of the original twelve tribes of Israel, **and** (2) Aaron, the first High Priest of Israel.
- *Levites*: traced their lineage back to only Levi (i.e., both Priests and Levites were *Levites*; however, only the priests could trace their lineage back to Aaron)
 - Levites primarily assisted in temple worship, especially as musicians and temple police.

NOTE: John the Baptist was a Levite and the son of a priest. This is likely one of the reasons the authorities were so interested in his behavior and [professed] identity.

□ **From Jerusalem**

- Likely, from the Temple [in Jerusalem]

□ **Who are you?**

- They are interested in his *identity*.
- It seems rather clear that he had a very influential ministry.
- Why would this be of concern to the Jewish authorities?
 - Sadducees
 - Pharisees

²⁰ **And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."**

□ In First Century Palestine, the Messianic expectations were high.

- Why would this be the case?

□ At time, some Jews were anticipating at least two Messiahs (or "Anointed Ones"):

1. **King**
 - a. From the line of David (Tribe of Judah)
2. **Priest**
 - a. From the line of Aaron (Tribe of Levi)

- **“I am not the Christ”**
 - John vehemently denies any suggestion that he is the long-awaited Messiah
 - This is evidenced by his used of the emphatic pronoun “*I*”
 - “ [John states] ‘*I am not the Christ*’ (as though to say, ‘It is not *I* who am the Christ!’). This emphatic pronoun is a marked feature of John’s speech in this chapter. He used it constantly, and each time he contrasts himself with Jesus and takes the lower place. He says:
 - “*I am the voice*” (v.23)
 - “*I baptize*” (v. 26)
 - “*I am not worthy*” (v. 27)
 - “*when I said*” (v. 30)
 - “*I did not know him*” (vv. 31, 33)
 - “*I came baptizing*” (v. 31)
 - “*I have seen*” (v. 34)
- The series is noteworthy and the effect is to make it quite clear that John claimed a subordinate position.” Leon Morris

- False prophets and false Christs existed at this time.
 - Zechariah 13:14
- Many thought [and, likely, hoped] John the Baptist was the Christ.

²¹ **They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."**

- **Are you Elijah?**
 - Malachi 4:5
 - "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD."
 - Since Elijah never died, many believed that Elijah would physically return to prepare the way for the Messiah.
 - NOTE: during Passover, Jews drink the “Elijah cup” [and open a door] to anticipate his return, marking the coming of the Messiah.
 - Jesus confirms that John was the one like Elijah
 - Matthew 11:14; 17:12; Mark 9:13; Luke 1:17
 - And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. Matthew 11:14

- Why, then, would John deny this claim?
 - *It appears that John was not fully aware that he was the Elijah-type.*

□ **Are you the Prophet?**

- Deuteronomy 18:15-18
 - “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. "This is according to all that you asked of the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.' "The LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well. 'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.”
 - NOTE: the Samaritans identified this prophet as the promised Messiah

²² **Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?"**

²³ **He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said." ²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.**

- John the Baptist applies **Isaiah 40:3** to himself.
 - “In the original context, the Old Testament prophet is calling for a (metaphorical) improvement in the road system of the desert to the east, a leveling of hills and valleys and a straightening of the curves, to accommodate the return of the covenant people from exile.”
- **A VOICE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS**
 - The Wilderness (Interpretations):
 - The Judean Desert / Wilderness
 - Spiritual Wilderness / Barren Land

□ NOT in the Temple

□ **Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.**

- This should, likely, read, “Some Pharisees who were in the delegation asked him.”
 - The words here seem to indicate that the Pharisees were not satisfied with the progress made by this delegation thus far; therefore, they decided to ask some questions of their own.

²⁵ **They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"**

□ The question asked of John the Baptist by the Pharisees related to his *authority* to baptize.

□ Two primary types of baptism in 1st Century Judaism:

- **Proselyte:** When Gentiles were converted to Judaism, the males of the family were circumcised, and all, of both sexes, were baptized. “This was seen as the ceremonial removal of all the pollutions contracted in the Gentile world.”

“The novelty in John’s case and the sting in his practice was that he applied to Jews the ceremony that was held to be appropriate in the case of Gentiles coming newly into the faith. All Jews were prepared to accept the view that Gentiles were defiled and needed cleansing. But to put Jews in the same class was horrifying.”

Leon Morris

- **Essene:** in the Qumran community [where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found] used passages like Ezekiel 36:25 to justify their daily baptism. This was to be a sign that they were a righteous community of the end-time.
- NOTE: Both the Proselyte and the Essene baptisms were *self-administered*.

²⁶ **John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know.**

- “The emphatic ‘I baptize in water’ prepares the reader for the mention of someone else who will baptize in a different medium. For the moment John does not speak of this different baptism, but he does speak of the one who will administer it.”

F.F. Bruce

- Matthew 3:8-11
 - "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
 - John’s baptism is as baptism of repentance pointing to Jesus Christ who will baptize (believers) with the Holy Spirit and (judge the unrepentant) with fire.

- **but among you stands One whom you do not know.**

- Possibly (rather, likely) two different interpretations are appropriate:
 - Jesus had not yet begun his ministry and made himself known
 - Although Jesus was known in his community as the son of Joseph, he was not known as the Son of God
 - Isaiah 6:9,
 - “He said, "Go, and tell this people:
 - 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive;
 - Keep on looking, but do not understand.'”

²⁷ **"It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."**

- He who comes after me
 - John the Baptist was born six months before Jesus and began baptizing and preparing the way for Jesus before He [Jesus] began His public ministry.
- In 1st Century Palestine, a student was expected to do everything for his master, except take his shoes off.
 - There is a traditional rabbinic saying that went as follows:

- “Every service which a slave performs for his master shall a disciple do for his teacher except the loosing of his sandal-thong (strap).”
- Yet, John selects this task, which rabbinic tradition stated was too menial for a disciple, and declared that he was unworthy to perform it.
- “Humility could scarcely take a lower place.” Morris