

MISCELLANEOUS.

Written for this Paper.

JOHN THE BAPTIST.

In the Gospel narrative concerning the life of John the Baptist it is stated that John on one occasion sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him the question: "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?" Upon this text some have formed the opinion that the mind of John the Baptist had become darkened, so much so that he did not know that Jesus was the Christ. The writer differs from this view and begs to submit some of his reasons for so doing.

In the first place the parents of John were both righteous before God. It was announced to them by an angel that they should have a son, in answer to their prayers, and that this son should be filled with the Holy Ghost from the first moment of his existence.

When John was old enough to leave his parents, he went into the desert and remained there under the tuition of those angelic beings whose mission it was to instruct him in all the divine mysteries of the kingdom of heaven until the full time had come for him to go forth among the people and then the word of the Lord came unto him in the wilderness that he was to commence his mission saying: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, and so powerful and attractive was his preaching that "there went out to him all the regions round about Jordan and were baptized by him, confessing their sins." He informed the people that another man would follow him, much more mighty than he, who would baptize them with the Holy Ghost. Soon after this, Jesus presented himself among the multitude as a candidate for baptism, but John said, "I have more need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me," and Jesus said, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." Although John knew Jesus before his baptism, yet there remained another and more powerful testimony for him, one with which he had been made acquainted while in the wilderness, viz., that when he should baptize the Son of God he should see the Holy Ghost descending from heaven and resting upon Him like a dove, so that no mistake might occur, for John had already baptized many men, and there was no external difference between Jesus and others. Therefore it was absolutely necessary that John should have the means of knowing him beyond the possibility of a doubt. And John bears record saying, "I saw the Spirit descending like a dove and it abode upon Him."

The Pharisees on one occasion asked John why he baptized, if he was not the Christ. He answered them saying: "There standeth one among you whom ye know not, He it is who, coming after me, is preferred before me. The next day John seeth Jesus coming to him, and saith, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world. I knew He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.'"

Now it is evident that at this time the mission of John was nearing its close. It is also evident that Jesus did not connect his ministerial labors with those of John, for the evangelist makes the statement that "Jesus was baptizing at Enon near Salem," and some person brought the information to John. His reply was: "He must increase, but I must decrease." He evidently knew that his mission was soon to end.

Soon after this Herod laid hold on John and cast him into prison. "Now it was told John in the prison the works that Christ did, and he sent two of his disciples saying: 'Art thou he that should come or look we for another?'" The question arises here: Who was John's first informant? Who was it that told John in the prison the work which Christ did? And why did not John accept the testimony of the first? Why should John, after all the evidence he had received, be under the necessity of sending his disciples to Jesus to ask the above questions? It is not probable that John had lost the knowledge he had received from Almighty God concerning Jesus being the Christ. The most reasonable conclusion the writer can arrive at, is that those men whom John sent to Jesus to ask this question were some of his new converts, which he had made just previous to his being cast into prison. These might be men who had had an acquaintance with Jesus, who had seen no miracle wrought "for John did no miracle." John knew that his earthly mission was terminating and in order to save his new converts from doubt and disappointment and probably apostasy, sent them to Jesus in order that they might be benefited by the information sought.

If John could not know from all the evidence he previously had received, how could he accept the statement of these disciples on such an important matter? And if these men did not have a testimony stronger than that indicated in the text, viz., that of seeing miracles wrought, then the whole multitude present at the time had the same testimony and the recital of what they had seen could not be conclusive to John. The mere fact that these two men had seen a supernatural phenomenon, could be of but little service to John. If it is admitted that John sent those men to obtain information for himself, it is admitted also that all the heavenly light he had received—all the spirit and power of Elias which he formerly possessed must have become as a flickering wick ready to be extinguished by the slightest gust.

Should something have happened by which those disciples could not have returned to John to impart the result of their visit to Christ, then John must have died without knowing whether Jesus was the Christ or not, and his condition would have been much more hopeless than the dying malefactor who, while Jesus was dying by his side, addressed Him as Lord, and requested to be remembered when Jesus should come in His kingdom. Furthermore, if John should have died without a knowledge of this important fact, then he could not have eternal life, as eternal life is obtained through a knowledge of

God, and His Son Jesus Christ, "Whom to know is life eternal."

Another reason why I do not believe that John became darkened in his mind, and was under the necessity of sending his disciples to Jesus to get information for himself is the very strong testimony of Jesus himself to the divinity of John's mission. The Lord says concerning him: "Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist."

Jesus declared to the people that John was more than a prophet. In what particular the text does not state. The Prophet Joseph Smith in a discourse delivered May 24, 1843, touches upon this subject. After naming his text the Prophet said, someone had asked him the meaning of the expression of Jesus: "Among them born of women there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist," and he said he had promised to answer it in public, and would do it then. "It could not have been," he said "on account of the miracles he performed, for John did no miracle, but it was; first, because he was entrusted with a divine mission of preparing the way before the face of the Lord. Who was entrusted with such a mission, before or since? No man. Second, He was trusted, and it was required at his hands to baptize the Son of Man. Whoever did that? Whoever had such a great privilege or glory? Whoever led the Son of God into the waters of baptism, beholding the Holy Ghost descending upon Him in the sign of a dove? No man. Third, John, at that time was the only legal administrator holding all the keys of power there was on the earth. The keys, the kingdom, the power and the glory had departed from the Jews, and John, the son Zacharias, by the authority and decree of Heaven held the keys of power at that time."

Jesus in alluding to the prophecies, that a messenger should be sent before the face of the Lord to prepare His way positively says, this is he. Luke, the evangelist, says that they (the people) justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John; also that the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves not being baptized of John.

From the foregoing we infer that God had counseled the people to be baptized with the baptism of John, otherwise they could not have rejected the counsel. The announcement of the Angel Gabriel to Zacharias was that "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord, their God. And he shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." The prophecy of Zacharias was "And thou child shall be called the Prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His way."

All testify to the greatness of John and there is not one sentence which affords the slightest reason to believe that he became darkened in his mind, or lost the knowledge that Jesus was the Christ. On the day that he was beheaded he held the keys of his Priest-