

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

RORATE COELI



Shower, O Heavens

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Roberto E. Rojas, Jr.

John 1:19-28 ESV

Author and Date:

John the Apostle around AD 90. This is the Testimony of John the Baptist concerning Jesus the Christ (John 1:19-28).

¹⁹ **And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?”**

- “Testimony” (Greek: *martyria*) – This word is used 27 times in Gospel of John, 3 times in his Epistles, and only 7 times in the rest of the New Testament. John uses this word specifically about the witness to Christ’s person and work.
- “The Jews” – This is the first reference in John where the term “Jews” (Greek: *Ioudaioi*) is used to describe the people who oppose Jesus. He also records accounts of Jews who believe in Jesus (11:45 and 19:38-39).
- “Priests and Levites” – These were descendants of Aaron who were ordained for service at the tabernacle and the temple (Leviticus 8). They oversaw the work of the Levites – the descendants of Levi, whom the Lord appointed as tabernacle/temple workers through Moses (Numbers 5:5-39).
- They question John because of his teaching on Baptism. The Jews had their own rites of ritual purification (See Mark 7:3-4).

²⁰ **He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.”**

- Though the Jews did not specifically ask him if he was the Christ, John understood that this was their intention. Luke 3:15 states that many believed John to be the Christ.

- “The Christ” (Greek: *Christos* – This literally means “the Anointed One” who would deliver God’s people. “Anointed” (Hbr., *Mashiach*) means “a chosen person,” distinguished by anointing with oil (See 1 Samuel 10:1). Prophets received this title (1 Chronicles 16:22; Isaiah 45:1). Yet, this title is most commonly used for kings Saul and David (1 and 2 Samuel). Furthermore, Hannah prayed that God would rule the earth through “His anointed” (1 Samuel 2:10). This is a prayer about the Savior coming from David’s lineage (Psalm 2:2; 45:7; Isaiah 61:1; Daniel 9:25-26).

²¹ **And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not. “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.”**

- “Elijah” – Elijah never died (2 Kings 2:11), and he was expected to return (Malachi 4:5) as the forerunner of the Messiah. The prophecy concerning Elijah was fulfilled by John the Baptist (Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:13), though John was not actually Elijah. John was not the Elijah that the Jews believed, but he *was* the Elijah of which Malachi 4:5 speaks (see Matthew 11:4).
- “The Prophet” – This is a reference to the “new Moses” (Deuteronomy 18:15-18). Moses was unique amongst the prophets (Deuteronomy 34:10; Numbers 12:6-8). He prophesied that the Lord would raise up a prophet like him from among the Jews. John was more than a prophet (Matthew 11:2-19), but he was not *The* Prophet, that is, the Christ (Deuteronomy 18:15). The Prophet of Deuteronomy 18 is a direct Messianic prophecy (Acts 3:22; 7:37; John 1:46; 6:14).

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- John’s answers grow shorter and are more abrupt: “I am not the Christ,” “I am not,” “No.” He has only provided negative answers to their questions.

²² So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

- Verse 24 states that these priests and Levites were sent by the Pharisees to question John.

²³ He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

- John now gives a positive answer to their question by speaking of his divine commission, not his own personal identity. He cites Holy Scripture on his calling, found in Isaiah 40:3, in order that the Jews might recognize the fulfillment of it.
- John points them away from his person, and to his office. He claims that his authority to do these things is inherent in his successor, the Christ, whom he anticipates.
- John speaks of himself the same way that his father, Zechariah, spoke of him: “*And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; you will go before the Lord in order to prepare His way.*” (Luke 1:16) Zechariah sang the prophecy from Malachi 3:1. Christ also refers to this office of John when He states that he was “a burning and shining light” (John 5:35).
- “John briefly sums all this up as he says that he was sent for the sole purpose to prepare the way for Christ...Just as prior to the Final Coming of Christ to Judgement angels shall be sent forth with trumpets (Matthew 24:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:16), so also prior to His First Coming, He sent this ‘angel’—sent John (Malachi 3:1)—who prepared the way for Christ with the trumpet of his preaching of repentance” (Johann Gerhard, *Postilla* 1:39).

²⁴ (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.)

- “Pharisees” – They are the chief Jewish sect and represent the Jewish authorities. They did not control the government or the temple, but they were a large group with great fame and popularity who observed the Torah strictly. In order to live under God’s favor, they needed to separate themselves

from the Gentiles and adhere to a strict observance of the Mosaic Law. Many of their man-made laws were observed even more than God’s.

²⁵ They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

- The Jews believed that he was either the Messiah (who would restore Israel to its worldly glory), or Elijah (the one who returned from the heavens), or the Prophet (the one who would come to fulfill the promise) (Deuteronomy 18:15). The Jews believed that only these figures had the authority to do these things.

²⁶ John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know,

- John indicts the Jews with the statement, “...you do not know.” The Jews failed to recognize the Christ and His Kingdom (see Luke 17:21). See the 2nd Petition of the Lord’s Prayer.

²⁷ “even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”

- “John the Baptist is greater and holier than all the popes; nevertheless, he says to the Jews: I do not know how to help or advise you, and I include myself here as well; but I know of one who is able to help you and me. I am not worthy of rendering him even the most menial service. Let’s all go to this man; he is among you; embrace him; I, too, am going to embrace him. Thus John the Baptist points the entire world away from himself to the man who is and is called Christ” (Martin Luther, *Luther’s House Postils: Fourth Sunday in Advent: First Sermon–1532*).

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

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