

JOHN THE BAPTIST — HIS MISSION

Nobody who is a Christian has any doubt in his mind about John the Baptist and that fact that he had a tremendously important mission. But I think really what most people have in mind is somewhat superficial. Most people know that he was born in a miraculous manner. They know that Gabriel came and talked to his father and that his name was foretold. They know that he ate locusts and wild honey and he came and did some warning and condemned the Jews for the course of conduct they were pursuing and that he baptized the Lord and that he was beheaded. They just know these general things.

Well, this is fine as a beginning, but I hope that after our discussion, which, I repeat, only opens up the door into investigations and . . . approach. But as we begin to enlarge our concept about John the Baptist, that he did all these things that I recited, but from our standpoint and as far as us comprehending the gospel is concerned, that he did a great deal more and it is over here in this of his prophetic ministry. John the Baptist was one of the great doctrinal teachers. We will take an example or two of the doctrines that he taught and see if we cannot have a vision of what kind of a man he was, aside from the fact that he baptized the Lord. We have, and you are familiar with, the prophet's statement of his-greatness because of the fact that he baptized the Lord and being incident to that.

Let us start out just briefly then, here in the beginning. Obviously, he was one of the noble and great in pre-existence. He was chosen and selected and foreordained for the mission that he had. Let us look at 1 Nephi, the 10th chapter. Just to be reminded of how he . . . in the scheme of things in eternity, this is Nephi recording information that has come to him. Flip down to the 7th verse: "And [Lehi] spake also concerning a prophet who should come before the Messiah, to prepare the way of the Lord." And then this next language, it is almost the same as what is in the New Testament declaring the mission and ministry of Christ. "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight; for there standeth one among you whom ye know not; and he is mightier than I, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. And much spake my father concerning this thing." Well now if you note your footnote, this is between B.C. 600 and 592, and the only point we would like to make under this first heading is that here is a man who was foreordained to his ministry. Now I think that probably means that he was selected in pre-existence to be the forerunner of Christ and ordained possibly by the laying on of hands. I do not know. A man could be foreordained to something and just be told that this was going to be his ministry. But I would rather suppose that he gets told in somewhat formal way. He might get the equivalent of a patriarchal blessing. This would say, "John, your ministry and mission in mortality will be such and such. Thou shalt do this, thou shalt do that," so that it was designated and foretold and understood by him. This puts him along with Abraham and Enoch and the noble and great of all ages and dispensations. The fact that Lehi and Nephi were talking about him in a period before his birth identifies him specifically as an individual who is going to come. The Book of Mormon says almost nothing doctrinally about pre-existence, but there are quite a number of things in the

Book of Mormon that are like this, that indicate a knowledge of pre-existence, the fact that they saw John beforehand, the fact that they talk of John the Revelator by name, and so on. Individuals who are to come is an indication that these brethren were in the pre-existent sphere.

Well, look down to this one: John's miraculous birth. Now this is something that we know somewhat about. Look on page 78 in the text. That is what we have done so far. We will discuss portions of it and I think on 78 we ought to point attention to one thing in particular: "Gabriel reveals birth and mission of John." Now look in the fifteenth verse of the account from Luke. "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb." As far as I can think, here is the only prophet that had that kind of a promise—"filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb." Well, we will pick that up a little later. Now look in the 17th verse: "He shall go before him [Christ] 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." Now those two things, please note under this heading, that 17th verse is a paraphrase of what is in Malachi and leads in the world to a total miscomprehension of what Malachi was telling about, namely the coming of Elijah. You ought to read the commentary as to how this ought to be interpreted. Well, look over now to page 84; with that much introduction we are hurrying on to spend more time on other things. Elisabeth and her unborn child salute Mary. This account in Luke is one of the marvelous things, and it is a beginning fulfillment of this promise that he will have the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb. Verse 41: "And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost." And she spoke out and announced who Christ, who Mary was. Verse 44: "As soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy." Well, the thing about John the Baptist is that he was the witness for Christ for that day; the initial prophetic witness. But the prophet is one who bears testimony by the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ. By definition, a prophet is somebody who has a testimony of Jesus, meaning he has had" revelation from the Holy Ghost that tells him that Jesus is the Christ; that is the spirit of prophecy, which is the same thing as being a prophet. Well, here is the one man of whom we have record who had a total life of bearing witness of Christ, from his mother's womb (apparently every hour, all the time, as near at least as mortal man can have it) the constant companionship of the Spirit. He is getting this before baptism; he is having it all the time. Well, talk about miracles; talk about something that is out of the ordinary. Here he is six months in Elisabeth's womb, yet to be born, the spirit in the body, obviously, and in walks Mary, and the Holy Ghost falls on Elisabeth and Elisabeth gets a revelation, right on the spot here. The Spirit says to Elisabeth, "Here is the mother of the Lord." And so she becomes a witness of Christ, and the Holy Ghost speaks to the spirit, that is, John the Baptist that is in a six-month status in the womb—and says, "Here is the mother of the Lord. Here is the person who is going to be the mortal mother of the man that you came to be the forerunner of." And the babe leaps in the womb. Now you think, well, how do you know that this is a witness and direct admission? The mere fact that it is recited in the scripture in this way, is that sort of

an indication. This is a testimony being born by someone before he comes in to mortality and after he has left pre-existence.

Now one of the doctrinal sidelines of this, that is important to us, is the fact that it indicates when the spirit enters the body. Brigham Young's statement, as you may know is, that the spirit enters the body at the time of quickening when the mother feels life. Well, this is before six months at least, in the case of John the Baptist, with the explanation that is in the text about Jesus speaking the night before he was born to the Book of Mormon people and saying, "On the morrow come I into the world." That is, that statement was made by someone else in his name on this principle of divine investiture of authority. But here is the glorious beginning of the testimony of John concerning the Lord.

Now listen, taking slow enough to see that we are in agreement on what we are saying, to have a uniform understanding. Is there any comment or expression about this now, any question? We are just laying the foundation for a study of John's testimony of Christ. This is sort of background for the main part of our lesson today. Well, our next heading is this. We will not pay attention to this morning, except to call attention to the fact that the priesthood has continued in direct succession. You will be aware now, if you are not already, of how these things operate in this setting. It will help to see, if you do, upon page 77 and 78. In Luke the account says this: "And it came to pass, that while [Zacharias] executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course." Now look over at the Inspired Version and the way we have done is to put in boldface the changes. And while Zacharias "executed the priest's office before God in the order of his priest," that is what the prophet did to that, and we will see marvelous changes in the Inspired Version that we compare here, but the Aaronic Priesthood continued in direct succession from Aaron to John. The prophet says he was the last legal to have administrator.

Well, now let us come to what is really important here this morning, which is John's prophetic ministry. Every once in a while you hear it said that somebody stands at the crossroads of history or where is the crossroads, or something else, or you read in an editorial and they are talking about some great world event that has to be decided in one way or all history is going to be different. Well, there is always a grain of truth in these various things, but there is only one man who really stood at the crossroads of history as far as all things spiritual are concerned. That is this man John the Baptist. He just literally stood at the crossroads of history. He is right in the center of all things. For four thousand years the Lord has had legal administrators on earth, and he is the last of the old legal administrators. He is the last person on earth who by descent holds the rights and powers and correlatives of the priesthood, who is a natural inheritor of all that went before, who has the right to speak in the Lord's name as far as all the ancient law is concerned. This is particularly and specifically applicable to Mosaic dispensation. He comes as a legal administrator of the Mosaic dispensation and Joseph Smith says all of this, that the Jews were bound to heed and accept his testimony or, in the prophet's language, be damned by their own law. That is where he stood. And at the same time he was the first legal administrator of the new era. He was the opening and ushering in and forerunner of the Christian dispensation. So he came with the authority of the ages past and he was

endowed with the authority of all the ages to come. And he came at the high point of history. He is singled out to be the man who closes everything that went before and opens the door to everything that is going to do. So all the previous ages, their history, their doctrine, their philosophy, their way of life, except insofar as these things are reincorporated into the new Christian dispensation, these things end with John and he ushers in the new.

Now the whole history of the earth changes beginning with John and with Christ, and John is the fellow who turned the key of the history of the earth that has been going in one channel up to John. Everything that has been in the patriarchal system where the gospel was concerned. The Church had been limited to families. There was not any church on earth from Adam to Christ except in family units. The whole order and system was patriarchal. Adam and his descendants operated the Church in a family. You get down to Israel and the Church operated in the family of Israel. If you belong to the right family you belong to the Church. And if you did not belong to the family you were outside and did not get the blessings of the gospel. You might in instances be adopted into the family, and become an inheritor of the blessings of Abraham, but almost exclusively, it was a family affair. Well, John ended all that. He came in the Lord's name to say the past's book is closed, and the history of spiritual things has been going in one direction up to now; hereafter it will go in another direction and he will open up the gospel to all the world instead of exclusively to these selected families. This of course was possible because Israel had been scattered in all the world now. Well, here is the man that stands at the crossroads, literally, of spiritual things as far as this earth is concerned. Now, let us look at some of the things that this youth did. This first reference—we have seen him bearing record before he is born. Look at page 111. And here we will just read enough so that I can point out to you what the Inspired Version does. Now this 111 account, it is dealing with John as a forerunner of the Lord. Well, look in Luke's account of him being a forerunner on page 112 and look at verses 3 to 6. "And (John) came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." Now here is our point.

As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth;

And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

All right, that is what King James says that Luke wrote. Sometimes you have to have a little bit of sympathy for these poor sectarians who only have the King James Version before them, because there is an account that just is not true. That just is not so. Now you start with the fourth verse and part of it is true. "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." Excellent, that is perfect. That is what John the Baptist came to do. But then this fifth verse has absolutely no reference whatever to anything that John was going to do in his day and yet it just

follows right along what Isaiah did, like all prophets do, he prophesied of things that would happen in one day and the succeeding day then he just rattled it off, and that fifth verse has reference to the Second Coming of Christ. Well, no Protestant would know this from the account and here I am just pointing out some of the glory of the Inspired Version. Now look down at the Inspired Version account. "As it is written in the book of the prophet Esaias; and these are the words, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight." Perfect, that is what John's meaning was. Now John says this, independent conversation that is not in the King James Version:

For behold, and lo, he shall come, as it is written in the book of the prophets, to take away the sins of the world, and to bring salvation unto the heathen nations, to gather together those who are lost, who are of the sheepfold of Israel;

Yea, even the dispersed and afflicted; and also to prepare the way, and make possible the preaching of the gospel unto the Gentiles;

And to be a light unto all who sit in darkness, unto the uttermost parts of the earth; to bring to pass the resurrection from the dead, and to ascend up on high, to dwell on the right hand of the Father,

Until the fulness of time, and the law and the testimony shall be sealed, and the Keys of the Kingdom shall be delivered up again unto the Father;

To administer justice unto all; to come down in judgment upon all, and to convince all (it sounds like there should be an "of" there but there is not) the ungodly of (I guess not) their ungodly deeds, which they have committed; and all this in the day that he shall come.

Now, that is just pure revelation. There is a glorious summary, by revelation, of the ministry of Christ and John said it and it is not in our Bible, and then it comes back to that concept, "For it is a day of power; yea," in due course, it means, "every valley shall be filled." And he then finishes Isaiah's quotation, the portion of it that applies to the Second Coming. Well that is a sample, for one thing, of the prophetic insight and ministry and teaching of John and it is a sample also of how glorious it is to us to have the Inspired Version to add to and amplify what is involved. Well, yes.

Comment: Could this part really be part of the original text of Isaiah rather than John's version?

BRM: I had not thought of that, that is conceivable, but I rather doubt it, because of just the way it is written, but that is a possibility. It is interesting in verse 5 says "Behold, and lo, he shall come, as it is written in the book of the prophets," and then I would assume that John is paraphrasing something that is in some revelations or book of the prophets.

Comment: The reason I ask is that Isaiah . . . (inaudible) . . . actually continues the . . . (inaudible) . . . as it does here.

BRM: That is exactly right. The chapter in Isaiah does that. Now, I do not know. Conceivably John might be quoting something that is not in our Old Testament, although I assume that John was saying this independently of himself.

Well, let us look at a couple more. There is one thing in particular we want to look at, these various things. This one on page 117 is John's teachings, the great and the warning voice . . . there are just two verses there to compare what is involved. Look at Matthew 3 and 9; here is another illustration of what he is talking about. He says to the Jews, "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." Well now, just really analyze that, and it does not quite say what it ought to say. Why would he just be summing out of a prayer book guide and saying to them, "Think not we have Abraham to our father." And now look over at the Inspired Version change in that, verse 36 on page 118, and see how the prophet does it. "Think not to say within yourselves, we are the children of Abraham and we only have power to bring seed unto our father Abraham: for I say unto you, that God is able of these [gentiles, as were] to raise up children unto Abraham." Now he is beginning, to get the concept that I mentioned. Here is the whole house of Abraham, and they think, and all their teaching is, that nobody can be saved unless of the house of Abraham. And this was true in their day and in Abraham's day and his dispensation. You could not go to the Kingdom of God unless you were a descendant of Abraham because the Church was a family affair and if somebody on the outside got converted they were adopted and brought into the family so that they would be a candidate for salvation. And the Jews knew this, and so these Jews are saying, "Well, we are the descendants of Abraham. Salvation is for the Jews. Nobody can be saved in the Kingdom of God but us, and our children are the only people that can be saved because we are in the family and God made the promises to the family." Well, John is standing at the crossroads now, and the whole course of spiritual events is going to be turned into another channel and it is no longer going to be strictly a family affair, but it is going to be a world affair. And so John says, "Do not think you are the only people that can bring souls into the world who can be saved, because God is able of these stones, these gentiles, whom Jews consider as little as the dust of the stones of the earth, to raise up seed unto Abraham." And the channel is going to turn. Well, this is what the Inspired Version does for us. Now we will not talk now about, he announces the coming of Jesus here, here is the baptism, we will pick that up in a later discussion, but let us talk about what is involved in a couple of readings here. Now, to do that, open your Doctrine and Covenants. Section 93, I really do not like the way that . . . (inaudible) . . . is saying that because it leads people astray, but look at Section 93 now. I do not know who did this; it was done long ago and it is true what it says here, but it leads people astray anyway. Look at the heading of Section 93. "Revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet, at Kirtland, Ohio, May 6, 1833. The Lord defines the relation between himself and the Father." And then it says, "The record of John, the Apostle and Revelator—" well, yes, that is true, and it is also false. It is true, strictly speaking. This is the record of John the Revelator, but John never wrote in the first instance, he just copied it. Now let us see if we cannot get the vision of what is

involved. And so you look at your Doctrine and Covenants verse 6, it does not say there John the Revelator. It says, “And John saw and bore record of the fulness of my glory, and the fulness of John’s record is hereafter to be revealed.” What John is it? What John saw the fulness of the glory of Christ? Well, somebody is reading this, looks at the heading of the section, and they think, well, it is John the Revelator. And somebody opens the King James Version and they look at the first chapter of John and they read it and then they read this thing in the 93rd Section and they say, “Sure, that is John the Revelator.” And that is true. But it is only a half truth. “And he bore record, saying,” and you think this is the Revelator, but actually this is John the Baptist, “I saw his glory, that he was in the beginning, before the world was; Therefore,” and this is how the book of John starts, “in the beginning the Word was, for he was the Word, even the messenger of salvation—The light and the Redeemer of the world; the Spirit of truth, who came into the world, because the world was made by him, and in him was the life of men and the light of men. The worlds were made by him; men were made by him; all things were made by him, and through him, and of him. And I, John, bear record that I beheld his glory, as the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, even the Spirit of truth, which came and dwelt in the flesh, and dwelt among us.” Now that is a paraphrase, almost, of the first chapter of the Book of John in the New Testament, isn’t it. “And I, John, saw that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace; And he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness; And thus he was called the Son of God, because he received not of the fulness at the first.” Well, here is the key, this next verse. “And I, John, bear record, and lo, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove, and sat upon him, and there came a voice out of heaven saying: This is my beloved Son.” Who is it? Well, it is John the Baptist. “And I, John, bear record that he received a fulness of the glory of the Father; And he received all power, both in heaven and on earth, and the glory of the Father was with him, for he dwelt in him. And it shall come to pass, that if you are faithful you shall receive the fulness of the record of John.” We have not received that up to now. Now, what do you think this is? Here is a revelation that the Prophet got (we are not talking initially here, at least, about the doctrine that it teaches). This is very deep, difficult, hard doctrine about Christ. But here is a revelation that says John wrote such and such. And the heading of the section says John the Revelator wrote such and such. And in effect and in substance, everything that is there is in this King James Version, in the first chapter of John, which begins, “In the beginning was the Word,” and so on, and it talks about the light and the life of the world. Then verse 6 says, “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light,” and so on, and John bare witness of him. Well, what have you got? Anybody figure out, or see what is involved there?

Comment: Is it not possible also that this John could be John the Revelator and he receives a vision as . . . (inaudible) . . . as it is in context?

BRM: That is conceivable, that is conceivable. But what would he have seen in vision?

Comment: (Inaudible.)

BRM: Yes, why would this say, “I saw the heavens open and the Spirit descend like a dove”? Who would be available to say that?

Comment: Verse 6, it says that if John saw and bore record of his fulness and glory and the fulness of John’s record, be real.

BRM: All right, what John is it talking about?

Comment: It is talking about another one.

BRM: Good. It sounds like one John is talking about another John.

Comment: Apparently John the Beloved has access to a record written by John the Baptist, which is . . .

BRM: It does seem almost self-evident to me that John the Baptist sat down and wrote a book. And he wrote what he saw. “I, John, saw the fulness of his glory.” “I, John, saw the heavens opened and the Holy Ghost descend upon him in the form of a dove and rest upon him.” And John the Revelator came around and he was going to write a gospel, and providentially, in his hands was the record that John the Baptist had written. You see, all these events here are events, insofar as we can tie them in, that were in the life of John the Baptist. Now, John the Baptist baptized him, John the Baptist saw the heavens open, and all of this happened before John the Revelator ever heard about Christ. So how does John the Revelator know to write these things about Christ unless the Lord reveals it to us, or unless he has before him the written account that his predecessor had left us.

Comment: Now Brother McConkie, not only do we have reference here to a written record of an experience, but verse 18 would be then a promise to the individual that they may obtain the same experience that John records, a fulness of the record of John being a personal experience with the Savior, which, is fully recorded in the record of John, but an experience not excluded to John, but to anyone who fulfills the conditions of the promise.

BRM: I had not thought of that before, but I think that makes sense. I read this 18th verse and I had interpreted it this way, “And it shall come to pass, that if you are faithful,” if you the Saints, are faithful, in due course you will get the whole account that John the Baptist wrote about the Lord. But I would go along with what you said, because it is a sound principle, that if anyone is fully faithful in all things, they can get to know, by personal revelation, anything that any prophet ever knew in any age. Now if you and I live the fulness of the law, we can see the vision of the 76th Section of the Doctrine of Covenants the same way the Prophet Joseph saw it. And on that same basis, if you and I live the fulness of the law because God is no respecter of persons, then we can see what John saw, meaning the fulness of the glory of Christ.

Comment: This seems to be a personalized commentary, “it shall come to pass, that if you are faithful you shall receive the fulness of the record.” We cannot quite get a fulness from reading somebody else’s account because—

BRM: That is true, but look back at verse 6. “The fulness of John’s record is hereafter to be revealed.” Now maybe this means what you say, but it also certainly means that there is more of the record, whatever John is involved, to be revealed. And you talk about scriptures and so forth; if I analyze this correctly, here is a scripture that is yet to be revealed, and it is a writing of John the Baptist. I would think that John the Baptist would have written a great many things.

Here he goes out into Jordan, and he preaches. All right, we have a few dozen verses of what he says. How long did he preach? I do not know, but it was not just one sermon, he was there for days and for weeks. He preached the same sermon over and over again. He had different congregations every day. He said the same thing to different congregations, and he said it over and over again. He preached for hours and hours and hours. This is the writing of John the Revelator, but it seems apparent that John the Revelator was just writing down from the record of John that he had before him. I rather suspect that they were all guilty of that. I lean to the view that Paul did a lot of that too, and just for

instance, Paul wrote the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians, and he says this and this and this about charity, and by some strange coincidence Moroni was writing precisely the same thought content in almost the same language in the Book of Mormon about charity. What is Moroni doing writing this and Paul doing writing it? It sounds like somebody back in ancient Israel really wrote it, and that Paul had his scriptures before him and it was on the brass plates and Moroni had it, and both of them paraphrased what somebody else had written. And this of course, is the way that gospel records are preserved. We have the Book of Mormon account full of things where Nephi or somebody else paraphrases something that is in the Bible, paraphrases something that is in the Old Testament. Of course he would. There is a record before him; he has the brass plates. Well, any comment or expression about that? We are not getting quite as far as we might. I am not saying that this interpretation that I give of this is infallible, but I have told this out to you as a very interesting gospel concept, and it looks to me like this is what the situation is. We will not cover this much more, but just look at one thing in this, page 72 of our text. We read it here, in what we have just taken from the Doctrine and Covenants, verse 10 there. D&C 93:10, and I have written in my text that John the Baptist said this, to get things identified. “The worlds were made by him; men were made by him; all things were made by him, and through him, and of him.” Is that true, or is it false? That is a revelation. It is talking about Christ. It says men were made by him. Well, men were not made by him, were they? Men were made by the Father and not by Christ, and here is a revelation that says men were made by him. Now we will not discuss this, but I will throw that out to you as a gospel problem, and the answer obviously is, that this is one of those instances where Christ is speaking in the first person as though he were the Father, or John is speaking of him as though he were the Father. Our standard doctrine in the Church, that Christ is the Father in certain senses, one of which is being the Father by divine investiture of authority. Now that same thing is in the book of Ether, and in the book of Ether it quotes Christ as saying, “I created man.” Well, when Christ says “I

created men,” he is speaking by divine investiture of authority in the first person, as though he were the Father conveying thereby the voice of the Father.

Well, let us just take the remaining moments to say one thing more about something here. And if you would like a spiritual enterprise, a real problem in spiritual interpretation and analysis, here is something you can do. If you can take some of these New Testament passages and write them in some amplified, modern language, and see if you can figure out what they really mean. The New Testament is not the way these brethren said it. You just have to face up to this. Now, what is here in the New Testament is headlines. It is not really sermons, it is digests of sermons. It is writing down the salient things that they said. But in reality they said a good deal more, and these are just summaries, so to speak, just the way Jesus’ sermons are.

President McKay was talking to the Brethren and he was reading them the 17th chapter of John, this great intercessory prayer, and he said, “Oh, wouldn’t it be wonderful to know what this prayer really said?” He said, “This is just a digest of the prayer.” Well of course it is; just a very brief digest where someone has written the headlines down. Now that is somehow the way it is with John’s account here.

Now here, this heading says, “John the Baptist teaches Greeks in the Son.” You talk about a doctrinal teacher, here is the sermon that is just superlative. There is a page of material where John was teaching a sermon. I would speculate that this was a long sermon and that somebody digested it and what is here is just language that is the headline portions of it. Now just for fun, let us take a look at what is involved. Look at verses 27 to 29. John said, “A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.” Now here is this spiritual enterprise. If you would like to test your ability to infer and to analyze, you take something like that and rewrite it as though you were amplifying it and not just condensing it into the headlines, that it is condensed in here. And this is a real spiritual undertaking. Now on page 147. I did this, and I—it is satisfying and very interesting. That is, “I, John, came only as a promised Elias, but he came as the holy Messiah, of whom all the prophets have testified. Each of us has received only as the Father has given unto us. He, to be the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, I to announce his coming and prepare the way before him. It is not given to me to do his work, for he as the Son of an immortal Father is greater than I. Ye yourselves are witnesses that I have always said I was not the Christ, only his forerunner. He is the bridegroom, I his servant, and as the friend of the bridegroom, the one sent to make arrangements for the wedding. My reward is to be near him, to hear his voice, to know my mission was successful. In this my joy is full.” Now, that could be written many ways. But the problem involved is to take a New Testament passage, which digests sermon, and which is a headline only, and write it out in a paragraph that gives the concepts that the hearers actually got out of the sermon. Now to do this sort of thing you have to have a little overall knowledge of what the gospel is about, and what the setting is in which this is given. Now just take another illustration: look at verse 30 and 31. “He

must increase, but I must decrease. He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all.” Well, it is so briefly digested that it almost sounds like the platitudes being summarized. Now look over at the very middle paragraph on page 147. I would say that this sort of thing means that John said, “His mission is beginning, mine is ended. He must increase, I decrease. My counsel is, forsake me, follow him. He is the light of the world, who teaches the truth and makes salvation available to all men. He is the Lord Omniscient who coming from his Father in Heaven is superior to all men; I am as other men of the earth.” These things really do not make total sense as far as getting context out of them, the way they are written here, because of this fact that they are digested. Well, I just call your attention to that.

And look now at verse 36. Here is one of the great verses of all scripture, and it was John the Baptist that said it. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” That is a glorious, glorious statement. Do you begin to get the feel that this man called John had a ministry greater than you might have supposed? I hope out of this lesson today that we begin to think more of John than we ever thought before. I wish someday (here is a challenge for some of you, maybe), somebody would write a book and maybe call it *A Man Called John*, and do a little independent research and weave in the kind of a life that he would have lived in the desert when he was praying for his ministry and when he ate locusts and honey. Weave in the Jewish traditions and customs and make them part of it, and put John in that setting, and show where he stood as the last of the ancient prophets and the first of the coming prophets and how he just ascended to glorious heights as the prophetic forerunner of the Lord, to the point, as you know, that Jesus said of him, “Of them that are born of women, there is not a greater prophet than John.” Now, if we read that, we talk of all the prophets, about this, that, and the other thing, except what John did. Well, John is right up here with Enoch and Abraham. He happened to be the one who did this particular mission, but the reason he did it is because he was chosen in the councils of eternity to do it. What a dramatic book you could write if you could paint the story of how he was preaching and here were Andrew and John and others, and Christ comes and he says, “Behold, the lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world.” Now that is what he was sent into the world to do, to be a witness for Christ, to let his testimony stand to all ages, that this man, Jesus, the carpenter as they thought, was in fact the Son of God. You just cannot say too much for the mission and the ministry and the work of John the Baptist. What we have done now is open an avenue of investigations of the life of this great man.