

the harmless and lovely Son of God. With the abiding Spirit resting upon Him, Christ began both to preach and to perform miracles, neither of which He did prior to His baptism, His installation as God's great prophet, priest and king.

Remember, too, the frequency and significance of "remaining" and "abiding" in the Gospel According to John. It speaks of inward, enduring and personal communion. The Triune God, by His dove-like Spirit, abides in inward, enduring, personal, covenant communion with His harmless and beloved Son. Isn't this beautiful!

Fifth, God chose a dove as the sign of the Spirit at the Lord's baptism because, in the Bible, doves are, above all, birds for sacrifice (Gen. 15:9; Lev. 1:14-17; 5:7-10; 12:6-8; 14:22, 30-31; 15:14-15, 29-30; Luke 2:24; John 2:14, 16). It is easy to see why harmless and innocent doves were chosen by God as sacrifices prefiguring the removal of sin.

In connection with His testimony that the Spirit descended from heaven like a dove upon Christ (John 1:32), John the Baptist proclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (29). The Spirit, in the form of a sacrificial dove, called and equipped the beloved and harmless Messiah to be the sacrificial lamb who bore the punishment due to us for our transgressions.

Sixth, God chose a dove as the sign of the Spirit at Christ's baptism because a dove, better than any other bird, symbolizes the new world. At the first creation, "the Spirit of God moved [or hovered, as a bird] upon the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2). At the flood, a harmless and lovely dove was sent out of the ark three times and did not return the third time (Gen. 8:8-12)! The message is clear: God's wrath is now past; the new world awaits! This is the biblical association between the dove and the new creation.

The "world" (John 1:29) for which the Lamb of God died is the "world" of believers whose sins Christ propitiated and for whom He intercedes as advocate (John 3:16; I John 2:1-2). It is not the "world" which God judged at the cross and for which the Lord Jesus does not pray (John 12:31; 17:9).

Since the Lamb of God died for "the sin of the world" (John 1:29), redeeming His people "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. 5:9), the brute creation will also be "delivered from the bondage of corruption" (Rom. 8:21). Because man is the head of the creation, when man fell, the creation fell with him. With man's redemption and renewal in Christ, the world has been redeemed and will be renewed as the new heavens and the new earth. The Spirit, in the form of a lovely and harmless dove, descended and abode on the Lord Jesus at His baptism so that, through the Lamb of God's sacrifice, the new creation will come—a gloriously beautiful and perfectly safe world in which the lion will lie down with the lamb (Isa. 11:6-8; 65:25). *Rev. Stewart*

John the Baptist, who baptized the Lord Jesus Christ, is the subject of three box sets of CDs or DVDs by Rev. Stewart available from the CPRC (all prices include P&P): "John the Baptist's Birth and Preparation" (6 sermons for £8), "John the Baptist's Public Ministry (Vol. I)" (6 sermons for £8) and "John the Baptist's Public Ministry (Vol. II)" (12 sermons for £12). Special offer! Buy all three box sets for just £20!

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The Dove-Like Spirit at Christ's Baptism

Some six weeks or so after baptizing the Lord Jesus Christ at the River Jordan, John the Baptist's testimony regarding that highly significant event included the following: "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him" (John 1:32). All four evangelists speak of the Holy Spirit descending upon the Messiah at His baptism "like a dove" (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32). Why a dove?

First, a dove is a bird. God chose as the sign of the Spirit at Christ's baptism not an animal which moves on the land or a fish which swims in the sea but a bird which flies in the air (Gen. 1:20). The point is a simple one to grasp. The Spirit is God who dwells in heaven; birds fly above us in the heavens. The Spirit of God, represented by a bird of heaven, issued a heavenly call to office and equipped the Lord Jesus with divine gifts in His human nature for His public work as Messiah. John the Baptist, in his testimony concerning Christ at His baptism, declared that the Spirit, like a dove, a bird, "descended" (John 1:32, 33) from "heaven" (32).

Second, God chose a dove as the sign of the Spirit at the Lord Jesus' baptism because doves are harmless and innocent (unlike, say, a magpie). In a phrase that has since become proverbial, Christ told His disciples that they must be "harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16), for He was "holy, *harmless*, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26). By the power of the dove-like Spirit, the Lord Jesus was harmless, innocent, pure and holy in His human nature and in His office as our Saviour. Here we see the unity of the dove symbolism and the voice from heaven at Christ's baptism: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am *well pleased*" (Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). God is well pleased with His Son for He is as harmless and innocent as a dove.

Third, God chose a dove as the sign of the Spirit at Christ's baptism because doves are lovely, loving and beloved (unlike, say, an old, mangy vulture). Here one thinks especially of the dove imagery in the Song of Solomon which presents them as soft, with beautiful feathers and eyes, and affectionate and faithful to their mates (e.g., 1:15; 2:14; 4:1; 5:2, 12; 6:9). The lovely, loving and beloved dove from heaven and the voice of God from heaven say essentially the same thing: "This is my *beloved* Son."

Fourth, the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, not only descended from heaven upon Christ at His baptism but also *remained* upon Him. This struck John the Baptist, who announced that the dove-like Spirit "abode upon him" (John 1:32) and remained on Him (33). The idea is that the Spirit calls and equips the Messiah for His public ministry permanently, bestowing upon His human nature divine gifts and graces as

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Fire From Heaven

A reader has submitted the following: “In II Kings 1, Elijah calls down fire from heaven to consume two bands of fifty men and their captains. In Luke 9:54-56, James and John were forbidden by Jesus to do the same thing to a Samaritan village where He had not been received. The Lord’s explanation was, ‘Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.’ Their desire does seem very vindictive but surely they were of the same spirit as Elijah?”

This question is a rather interesting one and underscores, in my judgment, a truth that is still applicable today.

Briefly, as far as the question itself is concerned, the answer is that the two events took place under entirely different circumstances.

The two bands of soldiers that were burned to a crisp were sent by wicked Ahaziah, king of the Northern Kingdom. King Ahaziah had fallen through a lattice in his upper chamber (II Kings 1:2) and had apparently hurt himself so seriously that the possibility of death, because of his injuries, was real. But, although he knew that Elijah was Jehovah’s prophet who brought the Word of God to the Northern Kingdom, he did not send messengers to Elijah to learn God’s will but sent men to Baalzebub, an idol of the Philistines. This was an intolerable sin, a calculated insult to the Most High and a defiant rejection of Israel’s God, Jehovah.

Ahaziah knew that Jehovah was God alone. He knew Israel’s history. He knew Elijah, for he was the son of Ahab and knew what had happened on Mount Carmel (I Kings 18:17-46). He knew that Jehovah was a jealous God who visited the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, as the second commandment says. And he knew God’s judgments in all their horror, for he had lived through the years of famine (I Kings 17:1; James 5:17). But he rejected all this and blatantly told his people that the god of the Philistines was wiser and more knowledgeable than the God of Israel.

But his sin was yet greater. When his plan to inquire at Baalzebub was frustrated, he resolved to kill Elijah who was reminding him of his calling before Israel’s God. Ahaziah sent soldiers to capture Elijah and bring him to the palace to be slain. His sin was the measure of the terrible apostasy in the Northern Kingdom, begun by Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, and culminating in the captivity that destroyed forever the Northern Kingdom.

The sin of the Samaritans in Luke 9 was quite different. They were not Israelites. They were people from other nations who had been put in the land of Canaan by the general of the Assyrian armies, which had destroyed Israel. They did not know Jehovah, although they had learned something of the religion of the Jews (II Kings 17:24-41). So Samaria was populated with people who had never, in all their generations, been in God’s covenant. Their sin was far less than the sin of Ahaziah (Matt. 11:20-24).

In fact, when in the new dispensation God ordained that the gospel would now be brought to the Gentiles, Samaria was the first country to which He would turn (Acts

1:8; 8:5-24).

God works in the salvation of His church in an orderly way. Israel was His covenant people. They rejected Jehovah their God and worshipped the golden calves. God’s judgment comes upon a nation that knew Him, confessed His name and then rejected Him in their sin. God had determined judgment on Israel. Elijah, whose name means, “My God is Jehovah,” stood alone in the nation to proclaim by his work and name that though all Israel might say, “Our God is Baal,” he would insist, “My God is Jehovah.” If Israel rejected that, they would be destroyed.

Let us not forget that God does not return again and again to a nation that has rejected Him. Europe and America had the gospel, confessed it and held to it. Now they are rejecting it with monstrous sins and with bitter hatred against God and His Christ and people. Prayers for revival are hopeless whistling in the wind, made in ignorance of God’s organic working. God is turning to the Orient where many doors are opening to the preaching of the gospel. After all, not only election, but also reprobation is in the line of continuing generations. There is a time when God puts a roof on His temple, which is built on the foundation of the prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20-22).

After Pentecost, the gospel went from Jerusalem and even away from Jerusalem to return there never again. It went to Judaea, then to Samaria and then to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). In its progress, it has moved westward. It conquered Europe and America. But now these nations are rejecting Christ. It will soon move to the ends of the earth, and is doing so already. But the judgment of the fury of God’s wrath that burns to a cinder the disobedient will not come on these nations until they too have received the gospel and then rejected it.

When Jesus and His disciples were on earth, Samaria could not yet be destroyed, for the elect had yet to be saved. The time would come—as it has come before our day, when Samaria would become ripe from destruction. But also Europe and America! Do Europe and America think, in their haughtiness, that they are better than Israel? They do! Judgment, they reckon, will never come. But fire will pour from heaven and burn them as surely as it did Ahaziah’s captains and their fifties.

But the elect are safe and will be delivered as Lot was, for Jehovah God is our refuge and hiding place in Jesus Christ.

Prof. Hanko

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