

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

of his lot. It will be more tolerable, Jesus says, for Tyre and Sidon, and for Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for those who have received and rejected better light.<sup>1</sup>

What Christianity does for man with its divine help will be considered later.

JAMES ORR.

### *THE LAMB OF GOD.*

AMONG all the haunting phrases of the Fourth Gospel few, if any, are so haunting as the two in chapter i. which bear upon the Lamb of God. Not only do they appear there all of a sudden, and then disappear, but they appear on the lips of a man, who, if we judge by what we learn in the Synoptic record, was wont to use a far more rugged and even ruthless form of speech: "Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matt. iii. 7). "He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear . . . Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor, and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire" (Matt. iii. 11, 12). The spirit of these burning words is clearly that of the old dispensation, "that which was passing away," and Jesus passed sentence upon it when He said, "Yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matt. xi. 11). If, then, we find in the Fourth Gospel coming from the same impetuous lips two such words as these, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!" and "Behold the Lamb of God!" words touched by what seems to be a very different spirit, breathing the air of another world, we cannot but admit that there is a problem, psychological and critical alike, of deep interest,

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xi. 20-24.

and one that deserves a little more attention than it has received.

It seems impossible to let the two sets of phrases—the Synoptic and Johannine—stand as they are and interpret them without relation to each other, and without any attempt to solve the difference. Are we then to follow the somewhat easy method of the majority of critics and say that the phrases in the Fourth Gospel are not historical, but are simply put into the mouth of the Baptist by the author, who, here as elsewhere, is giving voice to his own faith and the faith of the community, or are we to seek after a better understanding of the title Lamb of God and find perchance that there is a sense in which, as it stands, it is historical, and not impossible even to the thought and speech of the last of the prophets?

Keim, with his usual insight, has laid his hand upon the difficulty when he says that with these words (“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh,” etc.) the “baptizer with water,” we are to believe, had, after Isaiah pointed to the bloody death of the Servant of God who had now appeared; but we must say not only that a prevision that was wanting to Jesus Himself is still harder to assume in the case of the Baptist, and moreover that the whole earlier Jewish belief concerning the Messiah, even the belief of the disciples of Jesus, even the belief of Jesus Himself, could not brook this *via dolorosa* for the Messiah at all, or only with the greatest difficulty as it came in the course of history, but still more that the Baptist, with his expectation of the Strong One, the Mighty One, the fiery restorer of order in Israel, finally with his subsequent dismay at the path of humility, not to speak of the path of suffering which the Messiah trod, was quite inaccessible to the thought of a suffering Messiah. Thus, then, he cannot have spoken of Jesus as the Lamb of God in the character of a prophet

whose flight outstripped and put to shame himself and Jesus and the entire age.”<sup>1</sup> That is the difficulty, but no solution of it. And Keim has been followed by the majority of writers, among them Heitmüller, the able author of the Gospel of John in *Die Schriften*, who says, “The wonderful word of the Lamb of God could not have been intelligible to his hearers, they did not look for a suffering Messiah and had not learned to refer the song of the Servant of God in Isaiah liii. to the Messiah. Neither the comprehension of its content nor the coining of its form was possible to the Jewish prophet, who had not experienced the paradox of the Cross on Golgotha nor felt its sanctifying religious influences, and had not before him the laborious theological work which had been spent upon this paradox by the first community and Paul. It is the *Evangelist who speaks through the great prophet*. To him it is a sanctifying conviction that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Such is the boldness and fervour of his faith that it is a truth with no need of proof that this Jesus stood at the centre of things and was active in the world before John (Logos). Truth is always the same, the prophet John must have known it. Hence he puts it in his mouth.”

That may be said to be the ordinary critical view, and yet one critic of proved ability diverges from the already beaten track of Johannine criticism and supports another view which, to say the least, is full of interest and suggestion. Friedrich Spitta, in his recent volume entitled *Streitfragen der Geschichte Jesu*, presents us with what he calls a modest attempt to start discussion on the image Lamb as applied to Christ, an image which, as he says, is frequently used in literature and art but is obscure in its origin.

In the Apocalypse, as Spitta sets himself to show, the

<sup>1</sup> Keim, *Jesus of Nazara*, vol. ii. p. 302.

expression "lamb" is used of Jesus eight-and-twenty times. The actual word is *ἀρνίον*, not *ἀμνός* as in John i. 29, i. 36; Acts viii. 32; 1 Pet. i. 19; nor *πρόβατον* as in Acts viii. 32 in the quotation from Isaiah liii. 7. The word *ἀρνίον* is the diminutive from *ἀρήν*, a nominative which, as Thayer says, is not in use, and means a little ram or lambkin. Spitta thinks that the choice of the word *ἀρνίον* has something strange about it, since the kind of sheep it indicates does not answer to the diminutive form at all. The one passage in the Apocalypse in which *ἀρνίον* is not used of Jesus is chapter xiii. 11: "And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like unto a lamb, and he spake as a dragon," where *ἀρνίον* points to the grown horned ram.

When we turn to the first passage in which the term is applied to Jesus we find it impossible to render *ἀρνίον* as lambkin, chapter v. 6, "And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures . . . a Lamb standing as though it had been slain, *ὡς ἐσφαγμένον* (slain by cut in throat as in ancient and mediæval art), having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth." It is a more powerful creature and more capable of defending itself than the ram of Daniel viii. 3, which has two horns and is the symbol of the Persian Empire. The seven horns and seven eyes, far from suggesting a young or undeveloped animal tell of the highest development of knowledge and might. Thus the *ἀρνίον* of the Apocalypse bears certain traces which have faded into the background in the usual conception of "the innocent lamb." The creature with seven eyes and seven horns is the symbol of the ruler who sees everything, and before whom nought can stand. The fifth verse of the same chapter speaks of the lion that is of the tribe of Judah, and however these different forms may

be combined, it is certain that in both cases the war hero is symbolised. Chap. xvii. 14 is in keeping; "these (ten kings) shall war against the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings," and chapter xvi. 11, where men speak of hiding themselves "from the wrath of the Lamb."

Beside this group of qualities another appears as in chapter xiv. 1, where the *ἀρνίον* "stands upon Mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads." "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." In chapter vii. 16 we find the same idea, "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd," etc. The flock led to the pastures and watersprings, as in Psalm xxiii., has the lamb for its leader instead of the shepherd; it is a picture of a lord or ruler standing at the head of his people and directing them.

At the same time the words *ὡς ἐσφαγμένον*, used of the *ἀρνίον* in chapter v. 6, introduce another idea. The four-and-twenty elders in their song express what is meant by it: "Worthy art thou to take the book and to open the seals thereof, for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom of priests, and they reign upon the earth." Here, therefore, the lamb appears as victim (*opfertier*) as it does again in v. 12, xii. 11, xiii. 8.

Thus the apocalyptic picture of the lamb has two conceptions in it which cross, viz., that of the lamb as leader and that of the sheep as victim. The latter as applied to the Messiah, says Spitta, is conceivable only under Christian presuppositions; as for the former, it cannot have developed on Christian soil any more than that of the rider on the white horse (chap. xix. 11). It must have its source in Jewish representations of the Messiah.

Its connexion with the idea of the sheep as victim was one in which it did not thrive, since it got no support from the view of Jesus which prevailed in the Church. That it did spring from Jewish sources Spitta seeks to prove by an examination of the Ethiopic Book of Enoch, where, it is alleged, the Messiah appears as an *ἀρνίον* with one great horn. There are other features of resemblance to the lamb of the Apocalypse, and in Spitta's opinion there is no need of further witness of the fact that here we have the original of the *ἀρνίον* of the New Testament. The symbol of the lamb as leader and protector of his people has grown up on the soil of Jewish Apocalypse. There may be evidence for that, although, as we shall see, there is barely evidence enough to claim a positively Messianic use. Spitta maintains, however, that the evidence of the Book of Enoch is confirmed by the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, where the Messiah<sup>1</sup> is represented as Protector and Leader of the flock of Israel, the only difference being the use of the universal term *ἀμνός* instead of *ἀρνίον*.

In coming now to the Fourth Gospel itself we find that right at the beginning Jesus is described as "Lamb of God." This has been taken as proving clearly that the Fourth Gospel can make no claim to be an historical exhibition of the life of Jesus. If one sees in the description nothing but a reference to His atoning passion and death, then that judgment is justified. But from what has already

<sup>1</sup> Cp. *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. R. H. Charles, 1908. Of Josh. chap. xix. 7-9 Charles says, "When the interpolations in ver. 8 are removed and corruptions amended, it becomes probable that these verses refer to one and the same victorious leader, who symbolised at first by a 'bull calf' (*μῦσχος*), is subsequently denoted by a lamb (*ἀμνός*). This leader is in all probability one of the Maccabees." Verse 8, according to Charles, should read, "And I saw that in the midst of the horns a bull calf became a lamb; and on his right (was as it were a lion and) all the beasts and all the reptiles rushed against him) and the lamb overcame them and destroyed them."

been said, it may be seen that the term brings before us other points of view.

Now in dealing with the two verses in which the word *ἀμνός*, lamb, occurs (chap. i. 29 and i. 36), Spitta enters into a minute criticism of the text, following Usener to the point of admitting what he drew attention to, that the two verses stand in two parallel sections, viz., 19-31 and 32-36. But he differs from Usener in his analysis of these parallel sections or "doublets" and thinks that verses 31-32 stand over against verses 33-34.

And I knew Him not : but that He should be made manifest to Israel : for this cause came I baptizing with water. And John bare witness, saying, I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven and it abode upon him.

And I knew him not ; but He that sent me to baptize with water, he said unto me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending and abiding upon him, the same is he that baptizeth with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.

As it is no new section, however, that begins at verse 33 just as little as at verse 31, the question arises, with what does verse 33 connect ? In verse 33 occurs the phrase "The same is He that baptizeth with the Holy Spirit," drawing a contrast between Jesus and the person who baptizes with water and not with the Spirit. In verses 26 and 27 the same contrast is drawn: "John answered them, saying, I baptize with water : in the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not, even he that cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose." But it is striking to find appended to *these* words the geographical allusion, "These things were done in Bethany beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing" (ver. 28), instead of a concluding reference to Him who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and not, like him, with water. In all the three Synoptic parallel passages, Matt. iii. 11,



Mark i. 8, Luke iii. 16 the words, with minor variations, run, "I baptize you with water; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I . . . He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." Spitta is of opinion, therefore, that there is a break in the passage at verse 28, that verse 33 carries on verses 26 and 27, and that the passage, verses 28-32, has pushed into the other and is a "doublet."

But this is not all. It is possible to follow somewhat farther the relationship between these two reports. The geographical notice in verse 28 does not fit in with the preceding words of the Baptist but refers to a definite event. What is that? In verse 19 and verse 24 two embassies to the Baptist are spoken of. Verse 24 has simply *ἀπεσταλμένοι* without the article, translated in the margin of the R.V. "and certain had been sent from among the Pharisees." There is no connexion with verse 19, nor is there any connexion between verse 24 and verse 23.

Those sent from among the Pharisees in verse 24 bring a question which takes its place as a "parallel" beside the question of the priests and Levites. So that, according to Spitta, we have verses 19-23 and verses 28-32 forming one connected piece, and verses 24-27 (with the exception of the editorial additions in verse 25) and verses 33-36 forming another, "parallel to each other." And since in the Prologue, which contains a curious mixture of historic and dogmatic elements, stands verse 15, a parallel to verse 30, though with notable differences, Spitta connects it with the piece or passage ending at verse 36. We have thus two passages, the first composed of verse 15, verses 24-27, and verses 33-36, which tells how John reminds his disciples of the fact that he has already told them of Jesus ("this was he of whom I said"), who, coming after him, is of higher rank than he and how he acquaints those sent from the

Pharisees of Him who walks among them unknown, and of the divine witness given of Him at the baptism. That is the first day. On the second, with the words "Behold the Lamb of God," he refers two of his disciples to Jesus, and they go after Him. The second passage embraces verses 19-23 and verses 28-32, and has also two days. On the first there is the embassy from Judaea, on the second the word about the Lamb of God. There is no reference to the disciples of John. On the first day Jesus is not present. On the second He appears and John speaks of Him as the Lamb of God, as pre-existent, and as endowed at His baptism with the Holy Spirit.

The second passage bears all the traces of a later composition, as these three points in particular prove.

(1) The dove at the baptism, which is absent in the parallel.

(2) The idea of pre-existence, which is not found in verse 15, the counterpart of verse 30.

(3) The word about bearing the sin of the world by the Lamb of God, which does not appear in verse 36.

We are now in a position, says Spitta, to begin to examine the phrase *ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ* as it occurs in the Fourth Gospel. It is a mistake to make verse 29 the starting-point, as though verse 36 were but an abbreviation of verse 29. The right starting-point is verse 36<sup>1</sup> (simply, "Behold the Lamb of God"), and two questions demand an answer.

(1) Is it conceivable that the Baptist could designate Jesus as *ἀμνός*?

(2) Is this designation in keeping with the historical connexion in which it stands?

As to the former question, Spitta thinks that he has already given the answer. If the Baptist saw in Jesus the Messiah, he might designate Him as *ἀμνός*, but of course

only in the sense in which in Israel the Messiah was represented by the image of a masterful sheep, not, therefore, as victim, but as lord and leader of His people. What John meant by the metaphor may be gathered with certainty from the expressions of those who were induced to follow Jesus by their master's word, "Behold the Lamb of God." "We have found the Messiah," says Andrew to Peter (ver. 41). Corresponding with that is the word of Philip to Nathanael, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write" (ver. 45), and also the word of Nathanael to Jesus, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art King of Israel." Considering all this, we must admit that the Lamb as lord and leader alone agrees with the context, that on the other hand the Lamb as victim has not the slightest connexion with it at all.

But now there are those who think that the conception of the suffering lamb is one that is characteristic of the Fourth Gospel, and stands not only at the beginning, but also at the end, inasmuch as xix. 36 contains a reference to the body of Jesus preserved from the hands of the destroyer: "These things came to pass, that the scripture might be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken." This passage is found in Exodus xii. 46, where it refers to the paschal lamb, "neither shall ye break a bone thereof." But from another side Psalm xxxiv. 20 may be compared, as Thayer also points out, where the reference is to the righteous man. "He keepeth all his bones; not one of them is broken." Spitta thinks that the Christian community must have seen in the righteous man, suffering much yet kept and cared for by the Lord so that not a bone of him is broken, a more direct anticipation of Christ than in the paschal lamb. Besides, in the Fourth Gospel the Last Supper does not appear as the paschal meal. To date the Last Supper on 13th Nisan and to give as the reason of

this that the death of Jesus coincides with the slaying of the paschal lambs and so bears out the doctrine of "Christ our Passover" (1 Cor. v. 7), this, in Spitta's opinion, is without critical weight. Everything seems to show that xix. 36 agrees far more with what is related of the experience of the righteous man than with what is laid down as to the correct liturgical way of dealing with the paschal lamb; and if this be so, then the whole idea that the Gospel of John is controlled by the conception of the lamb of sacrifice falls to the ground.

But even if it were possible to relate xix. 36 to the paschal lamb and regard the Johannine chronology of the day of Jesus' death as determined by this thought, still the passage i. 29 would not tally with it. For the paschal lamb was in no case a propitiation taking away the sin of the world. One would have to think rather of Isaiah liii., where in verse 7 the servant of Jahwe, in virtue of his dumb and patient suffering, is compared to a sheep, and in verse 12 it is said of him "he bare the sins of many." But in Spitta's opinion the thought of Isaiah liii. has nothing to do with the narrative of Jesus' appearance in John i. and with the words of the Baptist and his disciples concerning Him. In verse 29 the purely Jewish conception of the strong sheep as the symbol of Messiah, King and Deliverer of Israel, has become transformed into the Christian conception of the pure lamb of sacrifice as the symbol of the suffering Christ, the Saviour of the Gentiles and Israel. The Baptist's "Behold the Lamb of God" in verse 36 knows nothing of the thought of the forgiveness of sins.

There is still the Old Testament, and Spitta now proceeds to ask if there is anything in the Old Testament which helps to explain or elucidate the phrase "Lamb of God." Ingeniously he points to a passage which, as he says, has left its mark on mediaeval poetry and on the Catholic Church

even in the present, Isaiah xvi. i, which reads in the Vulgate as follows, "Send forth, O Lord, the lamb, the ruler of the earth, from Petra of the desert to the mount of the daughter of Zion." Here God is entreated to send forth a lamb who is the ruler of the earth to the mount of the daughter of Zion. This lamb sent forth by God could without hesitation be designated *ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ*. Only the question is, has Isaiah xvi. 1 become not merely for mediaeval hymns and the later Church, but also for Messianic thought in the time of Jesus, the basis of the conception of the Lamb of God? Spitta thinks that this question leads to a problem—the Messianic import of Isaiah xvi. 1, which has not been seriously faced, and in the discussion of which he admits he is open to correction. In Isaiah xv. 9 we read, "I will bring a lion upon him that escapeth of Moab," where the lion, according to Delitzsch, is the lion out of Judah (Gen. xlix. 9), the Messiah. The Targum agrees, and so does the conclusion of the passage Isaiah xvi. 5, as Delitzsch says, in which the thing there described is the lion out of Judah, the menace of Moab. Now Isaiah xvi. 1 is to be estimated accordingly; it is a Messianic passage. The proximity of lion and lamb recalls the passage in Revelation v. 5-6, where there is the same proximity of lion and lamb. Revelation xiv. 1, "And I saw, and behold, a lamb standing on Mount Zion" is equally in touch with the thought of the lamb sent to the mount of the daughter of Zion. Even more important for the determination of our passage is the application made of Isaiah xvi. 1 in Luke xiii. 34-35 (Matt. xxiii. 37-39); Justin, *Dial. c. Tryph.*, 114; Barn. xi. 2 f. The word *ἀφίεται*, "is left desolate," has nothing to do with the destruction of the city by the Romans; it means, desolate is the place where the Messiah, the Deliverer of Israel, does not abide and work. In Jesus' lips the word can only signify that He now abandons Jerusalem, and therefore leaves it

desolate until He comes again ; it must have been uttered in a situation like that of John x. 22-39, where Jesus departs from Jerusalem and first appears again at the feast where He dies ; " Until ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Isaiah xvi. 1, therefore, Spitta thinks, is understood in a Messianic sense by Jesus Himself. The position is well established that in Jewish literature the sheep became the symbol of the Messiah, the champion and defender of His people in face of the enemy. It is the lamb (אֵז) which God will send at the end of the days, when the might of the enemy will be crushed and the throne of a ruler planted upon Zion, one ruling by right and with righteousness.

If, then, *ἀμνός τοῦ θεοῦ* may be said to be connected with Isaiah xvi. 1, the question arises, what led John to refer to Jesus in this way ? To answer this question Spitta again sets out upon an ingenious line of criticism.

At the Baptist's word, i. 36, " Behold the lamb of God," two of his disciples go after Jesus and ask Him, " Rabbi where abidest thou ? " One of the two is not named, the other is Andrew, the brother of Peter, of whom it is recorded in verse 41, " he findeth first is own brother Simon." If *πρῶτος* be the reading, it means that of the two who followed Jesus, Andrew was the first to find his brother and bring him to Jesus, while the unnamed later found his brother, who could be no other than James the son of Zebedee. John is the unnamed disciple, although of that it is admitted there is no proof. If, on the other hand, *πρῶτον* be the reading, it refers to the finding of Simon as the first of a series of events which are repeated in regard to other persons. Thus in verse 43 Spitta follows Delff in thinking that Andrew is the subject of *εὕρισκει*, " Andrew findeth Philip." The idea that Jesus found Philip instead of his own countryman Andrew finding him, agrees neither with

what is told of Andrew in verse 41 nor with what in verse 45 is told of Philip. The chain in which one disciple reaches out the hand to the other in order to lead him to Jesus is broken in the middle. One may consider this also, that as Andrew in verse 41 says to Simon, "We have found the Messiah," so Philip says to Nathanael in verse 45, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write." How does the latter agree if Andrew has not come with Philip to Jesus but Jesus has found Philip? If, then, we must understand "Andrew findeth Philip," we must suppose that the words "He was minded to go forth into Galilee and" are a later insertion. Only when they are removed is the connexion clear.

But the question is, why were they inserted? The answer can be none other than this, that they are required to prepare the way for the introduction of the narrative of the marriage at Cana in Galilee. Spitta works hard to show that this narrative originally stood in another connexion, which he thinks is proved for one thing by the time references "the third day." There are other points over which one cannot linger by which Spitta labours to show that the Cana incident falls out of connexion with John i. Like much else in what cannot but be described as a most ingenious bit of criticism, his points and proofs are not always convincing. But they all lead up to the position that in the original of the Fourth Gospel Jesus did not leave the Baptist in order to make a hurried journey to the marriage at Cana, and then after a few days go again to Jerusalem to the Passover; but from *John in the wilderness Jesus betook Himself straight to Jerusalem*. When, then, the Baptist called after Jesus, who had lingered in his company a while (i. 14-16), and now undertook the journey to Jerusalem, "Behold the Lamb of God," it is scarcely possible to mistake the connexion with Isaiah xvi. 1, where a lamb is

spoken of who is sent from the rock of the wilderness to the mountain of the daughter of Zion. It is in keeping with this that the Baptist, after Isaiah xl. 3, spoke of himself as the voice of one crying in the wilderness. What more natural to the Baptist than to apply this Messianic passage, Isaiah xvi. 1, to Jesus, regarded as the Messiah, who turned His face from the wilderness to Jerusalem? If this be so, then the last question as to the ἀμνός τοῦ θεοῦ in John is answered and proof is brought that the use of the title in that situation at the beginning of the public life of Jesus is not only in no way unhistorical or premature, but is in its historically rightful place.

JAMES ROBERTSON-CAMERON.

*(To be concluded.)*