

Luke 20:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?

Analysis

The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? Jesus identifies the crux: is divine authority recognized when it appears, or only human credentials? "From heaven" (ἐξ οὐρανοῦ, ex ouranou) means God-authorized, divinely commissioned. "From men" (ἐξ ἀνθρώπων, ex anthrōpōn) means merely human initiative without divine sanction.

John's baptism represented his entire prophetic ministry—his call to repentance, his proclamation of the coming Messiah, his testimony to Jesus as "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29). By asking about John's authority, Jesus links His own authority to the prophetic witness God sent to prepare His way. If they acknowledge John was from God, they must accept John's testimony about Jesus. If they deny John, they admit ignoring obvious prophetic credentials—which would discredit their judgment about Jesus' authority. The question is perfectly designed to expose their hypocrisy.

Historical Context

John the Baptist attracted massive crowds to the Jordan River, calling Israel to repentance and baptizing those who confessed their sins. His ministry fulfilled Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3, preparing the way for Messiah. The Sanhedrin had sent a delegation to question John (John 1:19-28), but never officially endorsed him. The common people, however, regarded John as a prophet (Matthew 14:5, 21:26). John's execution by Herod Antipas made him a martyr, further cementing popular reverence for him.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does John the Baptist's ministry establish the pattern for recognizing divine authority?
2. Why is it impossible to accept Jesus' authority while rejecting the prophetic witnesses God sent?
3. What does this question reveal about the relationship between humility and recognizing truth?

Interlinear Text

Tὸ βάπτισμα Ἰωάννου ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἦν ἡ ἐξ
G3588 The baptism of John from heaven was it or from
G908 G2491 G1537 G3772 G2258 G2228 G1537

ἀνθρώπων

men
G444

Additional Cross-References

Luke 15:18 (Parallel theme): I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,