

Sabbath School.

BIBLE LESSONS.

Lesson 1.—Jan. 1.
Mark 1: 1-14.

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL.
GOLDEN TEXT.

I will send my messenger, and
he shall prepare the way before me.—
Isaiah 40: 3. 1.
TOPIC.—Jesus Christ is the promised
Messiah.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Matt. 3: 1-12. Tuesday, Matt. 5: 2-12. Wednesday, Luke 3: 12-23. Thursday, Gen. 8: 1-5. Friday, Acts 2: 1-20. Saturday, Luke 4: 1-13. Sunday, Prov. 1: 8-19.

BY W. N. CLARKE, D.D.

Ch. 1: 1-8. MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. Parallels. Matt. 3: 1-2; Luke 3: 1-18. The earliest of the four Gospels begins latest in the order of our Lord, and concerns itself exclusively with his public ministry, the sole preface being a brief account of the work of his forerunner. This fact is partly, perhaps, to the fact that he was the earliest—for the first time would naturally be to gather the record of his words and deeds among men—but probably more to the fact that it was composed far from the land of the Jews, and for people who would have little interest in the genealogy of Jesus, or in anything but the work by which he had become precious to them. So, while John begins from eternity, Matthew from Abraham, and Luke from the events that preceded the birth of the forerunner, Mark finds the forerunner already at work, and introduces Jesus at the time of his baptism. It is noticeable, in view of the traditional belief that this Gospel was composed under the influence of Peter, that its limitation of time corresponds with those mentioned by Peter in Acts 1: 21, 22, where he says that the successor of Judas in the apostolate must be one who has been with them all the time, "beginning from the baptism for John."

Mark and Peter begin from the same point.

1-4. INTRODUCTION. ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The word "gospel" probably not yet used in the written record, as "the Gospel of Mark." It is here the good news of the kingdom, regarded as proclaimed, and "the beginning of the gospel" means, in its connection here, "the beginning of the glad tidings of Jesus Christ," as proclaimed by the prophets foretold: John came baptizing in the wilderness. The gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the substance. Jesus ("saviour") is the personal name, and Christ ("anointed") is the official title; but the two forms in Scripture virtually a double name, which is not exactly represented by "Jesus the Christ." It is a very significant fact, that his religion has taken its name, "Christian," from his official title and not from his personal name. In whatever way the name may first have been given it has been recognized as true to the facts; and the Founder of the faith has thus been accepted as not only the Son of God, but the Messenger of God, and his relation to the eternal purpose has been exalted even above his personality. If the words "the Son of God," which are omitted in some manuscripts, are genuine, they obtain a special significance and interest from the confession of Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16: 16).

As it is written, etc. is not to be connected grammatically with verse 1 ("as it is written, John did baptize, etc."), but rather with verse 11. It is an expansion of the idea of the beginning, or a statement of the way in which the beginning had been announced. Instead of in the prophets, the best texts reads "in the prophet of Isaiah." There are two quotations from the prophets placed in one paragraph, of which only the second is from Isaiah, the first being from Malachi (Mal. 3: 1; Isa. 40: 3). The quotation from Isaiah was perhaps the more prominent in the writer's mind, and in rapid style the one name is used instead of two. Possibly when he wrote the name he may have intended to make only one quotation but the other may then have flashed into his mind as a suitable introduction to the one of which he was thinking. Malachi had declared that before the sudden coming of Jehovah to his temple he would send a messenger who should prepare his way before him. In the conception of the evangelist the prediction is addressed to the Messiah himself. Before his face, who shall prepare the way.

Before thee" should probably be omitted. The authority for applying this prediction to John the Baptist is Jesus himself, in Matt. 11: 10; Luke 7: 27. The other passage that is cited here was quoted by the Baptist himself as descriptive of his office (John 1: 23), and is definitely applied to him by the other three evangelists, Luke quoted it at greater length than the others. In its original connection, it was not as definite an historical prediction as the one from Malachi, but beyond doubt the Divine Spirit in the prophet was looking forward to the advent of the Messiah and the preparation for it. As an Oriental king sent his herald before him, calling on all to make ready the way for his royal progress, and to build or put in order the roads through the country that he must pass, so the coming of the Messiah should be prepared by the summons to spiritual readiness. The grouping of these two passages makes a fine paragraph for the writer's purpose. He thus opens his book by connecting the glad tidings with the ancient Scriptures; but the destination of his book to gentile readers is plainly seen in the fact that these are the only quotations from the Old Testament that the evangelist himself makes in the whole book, chap. 15; 28 being omitted from his best text. He records citations by our Lord, but he makes none of his own.

Now comes the announcement of "the beginning" itself. John did baptize in the wilderness. Westcott and Hort's text reads "John the baptizer came (egeneto) in the wilderness" the definite article being inserted before the participle, making it virtually a proper name, and almost equivalent to the "Baptist." Mark omits all preliminary account of John as he does of Jesus, and introduces him thus abruptly as a well-known personage. His silence is compensated by the remarkable fullness of Luke's narrative concerning the birth of John and of Jesus. There is no reason to suppose that Mark was ignorant of the facts that he omitted. Throughout his book he is the evangelist of action, and the omission of all preliminaries is entirely characteristic. John was the near kinsman of Jesus, six months his senior, whose office it was (Luke 1: 17) "to make ready people prepared for the Lord." This preliminary work he was to accomplish by announcing the approach of the Messiah, calling the people to repentance, and pledging them through baptism to a new and holy life. Joseph speaks of him under the name of John the Baptist (Act. 18: 5, 2), saying of him, "He was a righteous man and called the Jews to be baptized and to practise virtue, exercising justice to men and piety to God." Abolutions for the purpose of purification were well known to the Jews, and the washing with water had long had among them its natural symbolic significance as a sign of spiritual cleansing. But it had been used by divine authority only in certain cases of ceremonial purification, as in the consecration of priests (Ex. 29: 4) and the purification of lepers (Lev. 14: 8). It has been claimed that such ablation, or immersion, was in use before John appeared, as an initiatory act for proselytes, but the historical evidence does not prove that the custom was established so early. The baptism of John attached itself to the idea of purification by ablation, and was popularly understood by the help of that idea; but it was peculiar in being detached from all other ritual forms, removed from all special occasions in the life, and enjoined upon all the people. To all comers it was proposed as an act of confession corresponding to an inward change of mind and purpose respecting sin. It is here described, as to its meaning, by two expressions: (1) It was a baptism of repentance—i. e. he solemnly pledged him who received it to repentance. Repentance is a deep change of mind and purpose respecting sin—a change that includes forsaking as well as regret, a change that will have, if genuine, its appropriate "fruits." John not only called the people to repentance, but gave them this outward act in which to profess it and pledge themselves to the corresponding life. (2) It was for the remission of sins—i. e. the obtaining of forgiveness for a sinful life was the end to which the submission to baptism was one of the means. Not that pardon was promised or expected upon submission to baptism, in itself regarded; but this act, in which repentance was confessed and reformation of life was promised, was evidently a suitable act for one who wished to forsake his sins and be forgiven. If a man honestly sought full remission, it was only right that he should perform this act; so Peter said on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 38); and so it could fitly be called a baptism for, or with reference to, the remission of sins.

Of the form of the act nothing is here said, except by the use of the word baptizo (baptizo). In Grimm's New Testament Lexicon, after the general definition of the word (which is 1. To immerse repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge; 2. To wash by immersing or submerging; 3. To overwhelm) the following statement of the New Testament use is given: "In the New Testament it is used principally of the solemn rite of sacred washing first instituted by John the Baptist, after he received the command of God by the Christ-

tians and adapted to the subject-matter and character of their religion—i. e. immersion performed in water, in order that it might be a sign of the removal of sins removed (abstersorum), received by those who, led by the desire of salvation, wished to be admitted to the benefits of the Messianic kingdom." It formerly seemed necessary to prove that John's baptism was immersion; but now no writer touches the subject without assuming that fact, and one may be pardoned for passing lightly over the evidence. The time has fully come when the form of John's baptism should no longer need to be discussed. In the wilderness. Matthew, "in the wilderness of Judaea." No place is more closely specified as the chief seat of John's labors. He doubtless baptized in several places, but probably the only one that would be found in "the wilderness of Judaea" was at the lower ford of the Jordan, or near it, not far from Jericho. That "wilderness" included the wild country on the west of the Jordan and north of the Dead Sea. This would be a convenient place for the multitudes from Judaea and Jerusalem who flocked to him. On the place where Jesus was baptized, see notes on v. 9.

5. EFFECT OF JOHN'S WORK.—The preaching of John was the beginning of the gospel as Mark proposed to tell of it, and the result was a great popular movement. They went out to him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem and were all baptized of him. So the best text. Hyperbolic language which means that men of all classes, in great numbers, went out to him. Such expressions are too common among men of all lands to occasion any difficulty. Were baptized of him. He was the only administrator. He was alone in his office, and there is no evidence that he ever divided his work with any. After his death others may have taken up his preaching of repentance, not knowing or not accepting Jesus, and may have baptized under his name (Acts 19: 3). "Of his manner in immersing, probably, Western practice would give us very little correct conception. In Oriental hands such a rite would be less formal and deliberate than with us.—Baptized in the river of Jordan. A definite statement corresponding exactly with the meaning of the word "baptizo"—immersed in the river. Perhaps we have in the word "river" one of the explanations that Mark added for the benefit of Gentile readers not familiar with the localities of which he wrote. Confessing their sins. A somewhat emphatic expression in the Greek which apparently refers to something more than an indeterminate "peccavi."—"I have sinned." John was thoroughly practical, and probably he drew out from those who came to him a practical confession. Yet not all who came confessed and were baptized; some refused, and some were refused. Not all who were baptized were truly penitent; but the approved disciples of John, as a class, were truly penitent men before they left him to follow the greater Master. The effect of his teaching is seen in the readiness with which some of his disciples turned from him to Jesus. (See John 1: 35-51, but not Matt. 4: 18-22). When baptism was first proclaimed, there was no one to question that it must be an intelligent and deliberate act. To propose the baptism of unconscious human beings, or of one person in view of another's repentance would have been too plain a contradiction of the whole spirit and aim of John's mission. Yet surely his mission was not more distinctly spiritual than that of his Master.

6. Clothed with Camel's hair, that is, with a cloth made of Camel's hair. A girdle of skin, a girdle was a regular part of the dress, and was often made of valuable material, but the poor class had them made of leather. Locusts, winged insects resembling the grasshopper. Wild honey, the actual product of the bee which is found abundantly in Palestine. Preached, proclaimed. There cometh one mightier than I. To convince them that he was not the Christ. Scoop down and unloose. It was the meanest work of the slave to unloose his master's sandals.

Verse 8 illustrates that surpassing spiritual power of the Messiah before which John stands in reverence. The means of illustrating it John finds in his own baptism. I have baptized you with water, Aorist, not perfect. Matthew and Luke, "I baptize you," present tense. Mark conceives of John as addressing those whom he has already baptized. But he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. As baptism, administered by John, is an overwhelming in water, so shall that which the Messiah imparts be an overwhelming in holy, spiritual influences. He shall merge and overwhelm as John has done, and that too, in a cleansing element; but not in water. Mightier is he, and mightier cleansing influences attend him. He shall do by the Holy Spirit that actual work of renewal and purification of which the baptism of John has only been the symbol. "His works shall surpass mine," says John, "as far as the Holy Spirit surpasses

water in actual power to purify." This is to predict for the Messiah a real work, an actual overwhelming of men in the life-giving, holy influences of the Divine Spirit. The fulfillment of this prediction is not to be found in any gift or gifts peculiar to the apostles: the language of the passage forbids that, as well as the prediction. The object of the verb in both clauses is the indefinite "you"—"I baptized you, he will baptize you"—and the natural reference is to all who receive his influences. This is a general description of the spiritual work of Christ. The baptizing in the Holy Spirit is not any single act or event in the history of Christ's kingdom; the figure is a noble characterization of the quality and power of his work. It was illustrated on the day of Pentecost, and in the miraculous gifts of the apostolic age (Acts 1: 16, where Peter recognized an illustration of it), and in the graces that were better than miraculous gifts (1 Cor. 15). It is illustrated still whenever Christ through the Holy Spirit makes new creatures of men and sanctifies his people. Christ is still, as "John the baptizer" called him (John 1: 33), "the baptizer in the Holy Spirit" (ho baptizon en pn. hag). Luke (3: 16) omits *en* before *hudati* and reads "I baptize you with water," instead of "in water," the dative (*being*) the instrumental dative. On this difference Winer remarks (Grammar of the N. T., Thayer's edition, p. 412): "Sometimes we find in parallel passages a preposition now inserted and now omitted. This difference of phraseology does not effect the sense, but each form of expression rose from a different conception. *Baptizon en hudati* signifies 'baptize in water' (immersing), *baptizerin hudati*, 'baptize with water.' Here the identity of the two expressions in sense is manifest; yet we must not consider one as put for the other." Observe, however, that, with *pneumati*, *en* is always used; it is always "baptize in the Holy Spirit," never "with." Mark omits the baptism by fire by which in Matthew and Luke the Baptists completes the representation of the superior might of the Messiah.

9.11. THE BAPTISM OF JESUS. Parallels. Matt. 3: 13-17; Luke 3: 21-22. Matthew alone tells of the hesitation of the Baptist; otherwise, the three reports differ but very slightly.

9 In those days. The time is indefinite nor is it plainly identified in the other records. The place of the baptism is indicated by John 1: 28, says John was at that time baptizing at Bethabara—or by the best text Bethania, "beyond Jordan." The Palestine Exploration Fund identifies this as one of the upper fords of the Jordan, still known as "Abarah," within a day's journey of the early home of Jesus. It is thought that Bethania is meant for Batanea, a name given to the district on the east of the river. *Jesus came.* Thus informally does Mark introduce in his story the One but for whom it would never have been written. He writes for those who already know him; but so do those who prepare more elaborately for his entrance to their story. Mark is pressing forward to the story of action. From Nazareth of Galilee. His quiet home for nearly thirty years. The impression made by the record is that he came alone, not in a caravan of comers, and directly from his own abode. The moment of his withdrawal from the long retirement was determined in his own heart, which was guided, no doubt, partly by what he heard of the work of the Baptist. In the great movement of godly reformation, when the people were awakened somewhat to holy things, he was drawn to go out and cast his lot and life with the work and so to take his appointed place. There is no wrong in thus recognizing the influence of the movement in calling him out. But why was he baptized? Nor with the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, but with the baptism of consecration to the work that lay before him. He was a man and was living under the limitations of humanity, and he would not fail to "fulfill all righteousness"—i. e. to do all that a man ought who was going forth to a great work for God and his kingdom. He was "made like unto his brethren" (Heb. 12: 17), and the step that was suitable to a man was suitable to him—not arbitrarily, but because what had a meaning to a man had a meaning to him. As men could consecrate themselves to a holy life, and work in baptism, so could he; and so he did, pledging himself to the higher activity of that Messianic life on which he was only then entering. Moreover as men would seek strength for work that is before them by "fulfilling all righteousness"—i. e. by obediently submitting to the ordinances of God—so could he, and so he did, taking this as one step in the way by which he was to be "made perfect"—"Captain of salvation." The difficulties that have been suggested by the fact that he submitted to baptism are due, in great measure, to the instinctive but erroneous and unsartorial impression that the Son of God must have been separated in some way

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