

Mark 1:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

Analysis

John 'was baptizing in the wilderness' (ἐγένετο βαπτίζων ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ)—the imperfect tense indicates ongoing ministry over time. The wilderness location symbolizes return to Israel's origins, calling Israel to covenant faithfulness. He preached 'baptism of repentance for remission of sins' (βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἀφεσιν ἀμαρτιῶν). Baptisma signifies ritual washing—immersion symbolizing cleansing. Metanoias indicates radical reorientation from sin to God—not merely regret but transformation of mind and life. The phrase 'for remission of sins' expresses purpose—baptism accompanied by repentance leads to forgiveness. John's baptism didn't mechanically confer forgiveness but demonstrated the penitent heart God requires.

Historical Context

John's ministry began around AD 27-29. Ritual washing was familiar in Judaism (proselyte baptism, priestly washings, Essene purification), but John's baptism was revolutionary: he called Jews (God's covenant people) to repentance as though outside the covenant, challenging assumptions that Jewish identity and Torah observance guaranteed divine favor. The wilderness evoked Elijah, fulfilling Malachi 4:5. Early church distinguished John's baptism (of repentance) from Christian baptism (in Jesus' name, incorporating believers into Christ's death and resurrection).

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does John's call for Jewish people to repent challenge presumption of spiritual privilege based on religious heritage or church attendance?
2. What does the connection between repentance and forgiveness teach about necessity of genuine heart change beyond external ritual?

Interlinear Text

ἐγένετο Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ καὶ
did John baptize in G3588 the wilderness and
G1096 G2491 G907 G1722 G2048 G2532

κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἀμαρτιῶν
preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins
G2784 G908 G3341 G1519 G859 G266

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 3:6 (Sin): And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

John 3:23 (Baptism): And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.

Luke 1:77 (Sin): To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,