

The Ministry of John the Baptist

Level 1

For guidance on how to use these readings, [see here](#); for conventions, abbreviations and definitions, check [here](#). Answers to the Questions are at the end of these pages. The purpose of the Questions is not to test you, but to call your attention to significant features of the passage and so help you to improve your reading skills. If you can't answer some, don't worry: look at the answers and you'll learn! Boldface in the text indicates a direct quotation from the Old Testament. Proper names that you can easily guess by transliterating have not been glossed.

The passage presented below is a composite of the gospel narratives of the early ministry of John the Baptist. It is taken from the texts of the four gospels, with a few minor modifications, but blends and edits them into a single narrative. The advantages of this method are that more advanced forms, unusual vocabulary and verbal redundancies are reduced while allowing detail from all four accounts to appear. This also means that even if you are familiar with the content, you will not be able to rely solely on your memory of the English: you'll have to pay attention to the Greek. The disadvantage of course is that you cannot check your understanding by looking up a single passage in your English Bible. However below you'll find a listing of the original passages used, in order of their appearance in the composite passage, so that you can check a translation, if you wish, but the lining, chunking, glosses and Helps should be enough to make you confident that you've not only understood the meaning of the passage, but are actually reading the Greek and not regurgitating from memory without realising it.

Sources: Mt 3.1; Mk 1.4; Jn 1.19-23; Mk 1.5; Lk 3.7-11; Jn 1.24-26; Mt 3.11-12; Jn 1.28.

NB: § signals the beginning of a different book from the previous text.

Practice Passage 1

Ἐν δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκεῖναι

§ ἐγένετο Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτίζων

βαπτίζων: pres part > βαπτίζω, so 'baptising'
Helps 1

ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ

κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας
εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.

κηρύσσων: pres part > κηρύσσω
ἄφεσιν: forgiveness

§ ἀπέστειλαν

πρὸς αὐτὸν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι
ἱερεῖς καὶ Λευεῖτας.
ἠρώτησαν αὐτόν

ἐξ Ἱεροσολύμων

Λευεῖτης: Levite

Σὺ τίς εἶ;

ὡμολόγησεν καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσατο, καὶ ὡμολόγησεν

ὡμολόγησεν >

ὡμολόγέω, confess, admit

ὅτι Ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμὶ ὁ Χριστός.

Helps 2

καὶ ἠρώτησαν αὐτόν

Τί οὖν; σὺ Ἠλείας εἶ;
καὶ λέγει Οὐκ εἰμί.
Ὁ προφήτης εἶ σύ;
καὶ ἀπεκρίθη Οὐ.
εἶπαν οὖν αὐτῶ
Τίς εἶ;

Ἠλείας: Elijah

Οὐ: no

ἵνα ἀπόκρισιν δῶμεν
may give

ἵνα: so ἀπόκρισιν: answer δῶμεν: we

τοῖς πέμψασιν ἡμᾶς·

πέμψασιν, aor part: [who] have sent. See

Helps 1

τί λέγεις περὶ σεαυτοῦ;
ἔφη

Ἐγὼ φωνῆ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ,
shout

βοῶντος: pres part > βοάω, cry,

Εὐθύνατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου,
straighten

Εὐθύνατε > εὐθύνω:

καθὼς εἶπεν Ἡσαΐας ὁ προφήτης.

Helps

1. Greek can make a participle into a noun by slapping an article in front of it, so here that makes 'the one baptising'.
2. ὅτι: literally means 'that', 'since', 'because' or 'why' and here could be translated as 'that', but often it functions before a direct quotation as quotation marks do in English, and that's probably the best way to handle it here, i.e., just don't translate it at all.

Questions 1

1. ἐγένετο, a common, multi-purpose verb, comes from γίνομαι, to become, be done. How does it need to be translated here?
2. εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν: what would εἰς mean here?
3. What is the subject of ἀπέστειλαν?
4. What is the grammatical relation of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι to ἱερεῖς καὶ Λευεΐτας?
5. Σὺ τίς εἶ; : How is Σὺ functioning here?
6. ὡμολόγησεν καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσατο, καὶ ὡμολόγησεν: what do you make of the structure of this clause? How might its structure be significant?
7. What do you notice about Ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμί ὁ Χριστός?
8. What is different about the forms ὡμολόγησεν and ἠρώτησαν?
9. What is different about the two instances of σὺ in the last section and αὐτῶ?
10. From what verb does εἶ come?
11. What is the subject of ἔφη?
12. What is the relation of Ἡσαΐας to ὁ προφήτης?

Practice Passage 2

§ καὶ ἐξεπορεύετο πρὸς αὐτὸν

πᾶσα ἡ Ἰουδαία χώρα

καὶ οἱ Ἱεροσολυμεῖται πάντες,

καὶ ἐβαπτίζοντο ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ ποταμῷ ποταμῷ: river
 ἐξομολογούμενοι ἐξομολογούμενοι: pres part > ἐξομολογέω, confess
 τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν.

Questions 2

1. What is the subject of ἐβαπτίζοντο? What is its tense, voice, person and number?
2. What is the antecedent of αὐτοῦ (in ὑπ' αὐτοῦ)? What case is αὐτοῦ and why?
3. One reason to use the passive is to be coy about the agent of the action or because the agent is unknown ('The bus shelter was vandalised.'). When the agent is specified (as in 'The bus shelter was vandalised by pro-automobile activists.'), it is often because the writer wishes to emphasise the object, rather than the agent, of the action. How would you account for the use of the passive + specified agent here?
4. How is the use of ἐξομολογέω here different from its use in Passage 1?

Practice Passage 3

§ Ἐλεγεν οὖν

τοῖς ἐκπορευομένοις ὄχλοις ἐκπορευομένοις: pres part > ἐκπορεύομαι
 βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ

Γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν, Γεννήματα: offspring ἐχιδνῶν:
 vipers
 τίς ὑπέδειξεν ὑμῖν φυγεῖν ὑπέδειξεν > ὑπέδειξεν, to warn
 ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς; μελλούσης: pres part > μέλλω, be about to

ποιήσατε οὖν καρπούς ἀξίους τῆς μετανοίας· μετανοίας: repentance
 καὶ μὴ ἄρξησθε λέγειν ἄρξησθε aor subj m > ἄρχομαι, acting as impv
 ἐν ἑαυτοῖς
 Πατέρα ἔχομεν τὸν Ἀβραάμ·

λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν
 ὅτι δύναται ὁ Θεὸς
 ἐκ τῶν λίθων τούτων
 ἐγειραὶ τέκνα τῷ Ἀβραάμ. ἐγειραὶ: aor inf, so to raise

Questions 3

1. What tense, mood, person and number is ποιήσατε
2. What case is μετανοίας and why?
3. What does ἐν (ἐν ἑαυτοῖς) mean?
4. What is the relation of τὸν Ἀβραάμ to Πατέρα?!
5. δύναται ὁ Θεὸς . . . ἐγειραὶ τέκνα τῷ Ἀβραάμ: what is the finite verb in this sentence? To what nonfinite verb is it connected? What is the object of this verb cluster? What case is τῷ and what does it mean here? What's significant about the word order?

Practice Passage 4

ἤδη δὲ καὶ ἡ ἀξίνη

ἀξίνη: axe

πρὸς τὴν ῥίζαν τῶν δένδρων

ρίζαν: root

δένδρον: trees

κεῖται·

κεῖται: lies

πᾶν οὖν δένδρον μὴ ποιοῦν καρπὸν καλὸν

ποιοῦν: pres part: making

ἐκκόπτεται καὶ εἰς πῦρ

βάλλεται.

ἐκκόπτεται > ἐκκόπτω, cut

off

Καὶ ἐπηρώτων

αὐτὸν

οἱ ὄχλοι

Τί οὖν ποιήσωμεν;

ποιήσωμεν: subj = shall/should we do?

ἔλεγεν

αὐτοῖς

Ὁ ἔχων

δύο χιτῶνας

ἔχων, pres part: having

χιτῶνας: shirts

μεταδότω

μεταδότω, subj as impv = let him give

τῷ μὴ ἔχοντι,

ἔχοντι, pres part: having

καὶ ὁ ἔχων βρώματα

ἔχων, pres part: having

βρώματα: food

ὁμοίως ποιεῖτω.

ποιεῖτω: subj functioning as impv: let him do

Questions 4

1. You probably learnt that the basic meaning of πᾶν is 'all', but that would sound silly as a translation of πᾶν δένδρον. What would you use instead?
2. Likewise, you may have learnt that καλὸν means 'beautiful'. Is that how you'd translate it here?
3. What are the subjects of ἐκκόπτεται and βάλλεται? What are the implied agents of the actions?
4. What clues can you find in ἐπηρώτων that signal its tense, mood, voice, number and gender?
5. What is the subject of ἐπηρώτων? What is its object and what is the antecedent of that object?
6. Τί can mean who, what or why (among other things). What does it mean here?
7. The gloss tells you that ἔχων is a present participle and here means 'having'. What does the Ὁ in front of it do?
8. In τῷ μὴ ἔχοντι, what case and number are the article and noun and why?
9. Why does ὁμοίως come before ποιεῖτω?

Practice Passage 5

§ Καὶ ἀπεσταλμένοι ἦσαν

ἀπεσταλμένοι ἦσαν: [some] were sent

ἐκ τῶν Φαρισαίων.

καὶ ἠρώτησαν αὐτὸν

Τί οὖν βαπτίζεις

εἰ σὺ οὐκ εἶ ὁ Χριστὸς

οὐδὲ Ἡλείας οὐδὲ ὁ προφήτης;

Questions 5

1. What sort of people were sent?

2. Τί οὖν βαπτίζεις: what does Τί mean here?
3. How is εἰ functioning here? How is the following εἶ functioning? What does it mean?
4. οὐκ . . . οὐδὲ . . . οὐδὲ: this is a string of three negatives. How should they be translated?

Practice Passage 6

ἀπεκρίθη αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰωάννης
 § ἐγὼ μὲν ὑμᾶς βαπτίζω ἐν ὕδατι
 εἰς μετάνοιαν· μετάνοιαν: repentance
 ὁ δὲ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος
 ἰσχυρότερός μου ἐστίν,
 οὗ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἰκανός τα ὑποδήματα ἰσχυρότερός: more powerful
 βαστάσαι·
 ὑποδήματα: sandal βαστάσαι: to remove
 αὐτὸς ὑμᾶς βαπτίσει ἐν Πνεύματι Ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρὶ·
 οὗ τὸ πτύον ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ, πτύον: winnowing fork
 καὶ συνάξει τὸν σῖτον αὐτοῦ σῖτον: wheat, grain
 εἰς τὴν ἀποθήκην, ἀποθήκην: barn
 τὸ δὲ ἄχυρον κατακαύσει ἄχυρον: chaff κατακαύσει > κατακαίω: burn up
 πυρὶ ἀσβέστῳ. ἀσβέστῳ: unquenchable

§ Ταῦτα ἐν Βηθανίᾳ ἐγένετο
 πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, πέραν: across
 ὅπου ἦν ὁ Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων. Helps 1

Helps

1. This is what is called a periphrastic construction. To a speaker of English, it seems natural, if you translate it word for word: ἦν = was, βαπτίζων = baptising. That's how a past continuous tense is formed in English. However in Greek, all you'd normally need to signal a past action that went on over a period of time is a simple imperfect. A periphrastic form is one which uses an auxiliary verb + a participle. It's not the usual way of doing things in Greek, but you'll encounter it from time to time in the NT.

Questions 6

1. What case is αὐτοῖς and why?
2. How would you translate ἐν ὕδατι?
3. And εἰς μετάνοιαν?
4. ὀπίσω μου: what case is μου and why?
5. ἰσχυρότερός μου: what case is μου and why?
6. οὗ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἰκανός: what part of speech is οὗ and what is its antecedent?
7. What are the subject, direct object and/or indirect object of βαπτίσει?
8. What tense is βαπτίσει?
9. Compare ἐν Πνεύματι Ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρὶ and ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ. What is the difference between the meanings of ἐν in these two phrases?
10. What tense is κατακαύσει? What are its subject and object?
11. How does πυρὶ ἀσβέστῳ relate grammatically to τὸ δὲ ἄχυρον κατακαύσει?

You did it! This was a substantial chunk of the Greek NT for a new-ish learner to take on, even with the glosses and lining/chunking. Now try reading over the whole passage, at least once, but preferably several times. Then you might want to look up the relevant passage in one or more gospel accounts (use the scripture references at the beginning of the text to find any one of them). You'll encounter words and forms you don't know, but that's no tragedy: you'll grasp a lot of any one of those accounts from your work with this composite passage. Your goal at this stage is not to open the NT at random and be able to sight-read anything on the page, but to be growing in your ability to see the significant units of the text and how they fit together. If you could mostly manage this text, you're well on your way with NT Greek. Congratulations!

Answers to Questions

Answers 1

1. The context requires 'came'.
2. The meaning is clearly not spatial in this context. Translate as 'for'.
3. The subject is οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι.
4. ἱερεῖς καὶ Λευεῖτας is accusative so these must be the object of the verb: the Jewish leaders send priests and Levites. If you didn't notice the accusative forms, it would be easy to misread and see the nouns as standing in apposition: 'The Jewish leaders of Jerusalem, priests and Levites sent'—but then of course, you would have no object for the transitive verb, ἀποστέλλω.
5. No pronoun is necessary in Greek, since the verb shows person and number. When a pronoun is used, it often signifies emphasis, as here: Who on earth are *you*? This emphasis is further underlined by the placement of Σὺ first in the sentence.
6. First, we have repetition of ὡμολόγησεν, completely unnecessary from the standpoint of communicating bare meaning. Second, we have οὐκ ἠρνήσατο sandwiched in between the two instances of ὡμολόγησεν. So we have an A-B-A structure. In classical Greek rhetoric (as in English), that signals a double stress on A, here ὡμολόγησεν: it's repeated and it encloses another term. Not only did John not deny, but he confessed, and we, the readers are being told this in the most emphatic terms.
7. First, the pronoun (Ἐγώ) is used even though it's not necessary. Second, it's fronted, placed at the head of the sentence, in a prominent position. Third, the next most prominent position, the end, is occupied by ὁ Χριστός. In the centre is οὐκ εἰμί, effectively a not-equals sign: ≠. Everything about this short statement serves to underline John's emphatic insistence that he is not the Anointed One—which must have left his listeners asking themselves: who is?
8. They are very similar but ὡμολόγησεν is third singular and ἠρώτησαν is third plural. Don't be fooled by the -ν on the end of ὡμολόγησεν: it's the optional/movable -ν and does not signify the plural. The basic ending of the aorist third singular is -ε. The third plural differs not only in the necessary -ν but also in the characteristic vowel of the aorist, the -α-.
9. Both σὺ and αὐτῷ are pronouns but αὐτῷ is necessary (they said *to him*), while σὺ in each case serves a rhetorical, rather than grammatical, purpose, namely emphasis.
10. εἶ is the present indicative active 3 sing of εἶμι.

11. The subject of ἔφη is he, John.
12. ὁ προφήτης is standing in apposition to Ἡσαΐας: both words designate the same thing and both are nominative because both are the subject of εἶπεν.

Answers 2

1. The subject of ἐβαπτίζοντο is 'they', i.e., all the people of the surrounding countryside and Jerusalem (there's clearly a bit of hyperbole going on here). It's impf m/p 3 pl.
2. αὐτοῦ = John. αὐτοῦ is genitive because it is dependent on ὑπ' (= ὑπό, the omicron gets elided because of the following vowel). ὑπό takes the genitive when it means 'by' and the accusative when it means 'under', so here both grammar and context indicate it means 'by'.
3. Mark went to some length to specify how many people came to John to be baptised. He doesn't conceal that John is baptising, but he seems to want to stress that folk were *getting baptised*.
4. Here ἐξομολογέω ('confess') is used by Mark as it is in modern English, to mean 'admitting guilt'. In Passage 1, John used it to mean 'to acknowledge' (with no overtone of guilt's being what is acknowledged). The use of 'confess' to mean 'acknowledge' was common in older English. For example, saints can be called 'martyrs' (they died so as to be true to their faith) or 'confessors', which means they are honoured for their proclamation of the faith, even though it didn't lead them to their deaths. It's usually best translation practice to use the same word in the target language to translate a given word in the source language. What would you do, if you were translating both John's gospel and Mark's?

Answers 3

1. ποιήσατε is aorist imperative second person plural.
2. μετανοίας is genitive, because of its relation with ἀξιούς. ἀξιούς (worthy) implies a genitive noun (X is worthy of Y). So the whole clause means: produce fruits. (What sort of fruits?) Fruits that are worthy. (Worthy of what?) Worthy of repentance.
3. In this context, ἐν means 'among'. Don't forget that prepositions almost always have more than one meaning. While ἐν very often means 'in', it can also mean 'on', 'among', 'before', among other things.
4. τὸν Ἀβραάμ stands in apposition to Πατέρα, that is, both denote the same person: Abraham, our father. Notice the way the nouns enclose the verb. It's more usual for a noun standing in apposition to be close to the first noun, but here the case of these nouns makes their relation clear.
5. The finite verb is δύναται, whose complement is the infinitive ἐγγεῖραι. The object is τέκνα τῷ Ἀβραάμ. τῷ is dative and in this context means 'for': [children] for Abraham. Putting δύναται first stresses what God can do: the point is that God is able to raise up Abraham's offspring in any way he wants to (as indeed he did, with the birth of Isaac when Abraham and Sarah were old), so there is no grounds for being haughty about one's status.

Answers 4

1. 'Every'.

2. In this context, 'good' would be preferable. The issue is whether the fruit is edible, not whether it's worthy of taking centre stage on a still life painting.
3. The subject is πᾶν δένδρον, but the tree can't cut itself down. The verb is passive and one of the functions of the passive can be to avoid stating exactly who an agent is. In this case, a general principle is being articulated so the agent is simply unspecified tree choppers. The same holds true of βάλλεται.
4. ἐπηρώτων: the lexical form of the verb is ἐπερωτάω. The prefix ἐπι- has had the iota elided because it collided with the ε- of ερωτάω. The -η- of ἐπηρώτων is the sign of the augment. The personal ending -ων is the result of contraction, an -άω verb + -ον, the ending of a 3 pl imperfect or 2 aorist. Since contraction only occurs in the present and imperfect, this must be a 3 pl impf ind act. The complicating factors are the prepositional prefix on the front of a verb beginning with a vowel and the combination of an imperfect and a contract verb. Don't worry at all if you didn't figure this out for yourself: try to follow the reasoning above and bit by bit, you'll learn the logic.
5. The subject is οἱ ὄχλοι. The object is αὐτόν and its antecedent is John.
6. Here it means 'What?'
7. An article + a participle turns the participle into a noun, so here, 'the one having' or 'the one who has'.
8. τῷ μὴ ἔχοντι: the article is clearly a dative singular, because it's the indirect object of μεταδότη, 'let him/her give', so: 'let him/her give to the one who does not have [clothing]'.
9. ὁμοίως is an adverb ('likewise') and in Greek, as in English, adverbs are highly mobile: they can usually go in many places in a sentence. Here, the fronting of the adverb (placing it early in a sentence, clause or phrase) highlights it. 'That's what you should do!'

Answers 5

1. They were sent ἐκ τῶν Φαρισαίων. ἐκ implies they belonged to this group, rather than being sent by it, so they're Pharisees.
2. Here τί clearly means 'Why?'
3. εἰ is a conjunction, 'if'. You could be forgiven for having read εἶ as the same word, but the accent distinguishes them. This one is the finite verb, from εἶμι, and means '[you] are'.
4. Translate 'neither . . . nor . . . nor'. Translating οὐκ as 'not' in this case wouldn't sound idiomatic in English.

Answers 6

1. αὐτοῖς is dative, because ἀποκρίνομαι takes the dative. In English, we say 'John answered them'. Greek says 'John answered to them'.
2. ἐν, like most prepositions, can be translated in more than one way. Most often it means 'in' but it can also mean 'with'. The Greek here is simply ambiguous, so don't try to import later debates over baptism by immersion or aspersion into this text. The point of the passage is John's contrast between his own aqueous baptism and Jesus' coming baptism by fire and the Holy Spirit.

3. Here's another preposition with multiple meanings. The most common is in/into, but that wouldn't make for a natural translation here. English translations often engage in quite elaborate renderings, such as 'as a token of repentance' or more simply 'for'.
4. μου is genitive, because the preposition ὀπίσω is followed by the genitive.
5. Here, μου is genitive because it's part of a comparative expression: the one coming after John is 'stronger than me'.
6. οὗ is a relative pronoun. It's genitive and means 'of whom' or 'whose'. It refers back to 'the one coming after me', i.e., Jesus.
7. The subject is αὐτός and the direct object is ὑμᾶς. Although the verb by itself expresses the subject ('he will baptise'), αὐτός emphasises the subject, contrasting 'he' with the earlier 'I' (John). That contrast is further stressed by the difference between ἐν ὕδατι and ἐν Πνεύματι Ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρὶ. There is no indirect object: the datives of Πνεύματι Ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρὶ reflect the preceding ἐν, so are part of a prepositional phrase rather than functioning as an indirect object.
8. The tense of βαπτίσει is future (the present is βαπτίζω). Here is a good example of why, when you're looking at a verb, it's often worth asking 'Is this the present tense or something else?' βαπτίσει might look like the present 3rd sing of a verb whose stem ends in a sigma, but if you knew this verb, you'd know its present stem ends in a zeta and so βαπτίσει must be something else; the sigma, lack of augment and personal ending indicate it could only be future.
9. In the first phrase, ἐν Πνεύματι Ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρὶ, ἐν means 'with'. In the second, it means in'. Never forget that prepositions very often have more than one meaning: they don't map exactly from one language to another.
10. κατακαύσει is a future: the sigma and personal ending indicate this. It's 3 sing, so 'he', whose antecedent is the unnamed one who comes after John. The object is τὸ ἄχυρον. Determining this could be a bit tricky for a beginner: the object comes before the verb and since it's neuter, the nom and acc are indistinguishable. There are two clues to help you: first, the δὲ (τὸ δὲ ἄχυρον). Here δὲ signals a contrast between what was just asserted and what will be asserted next. The context indicates the *object* of the verb must be what is being contrasted. Second, κατακαύσει is a transitive verb: X has to burn up Y. In Greek, the subject can be folded into the verb, without being specifically expressed, but a transitive verb must have an object and here the only possibility for that is the chaff.
11. πυρὶ ἀσβέστω is dative and explains or qualifies the verb: how does the burning up take place? Not by the normal means, the way a log burns on the fire: the log ends up in ashes and the fire goes out. No, with fire that just burns and burns.

