

Luke 1:67-79

“John the Immerser Preparing the Way for the Lord”

“And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: ‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant—as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old—salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, and FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US [Psalm 106:10]; to show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS [Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1]; to give to His people *the* knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH [Isaiah 9:2; 58:8; 60:1-2], to guide our feet into the way of peace.’”

At the circumcision of John the Immerser/Baptist (Luke 1:59-66), a significant prophecy is issued by his father, Zecharias, about the anticipated activities of his newly-born son. Those, who hold to either a high or low Christology, will still agree that John the Baptist preceded Yeshua the Messiah, as a herald who would announce His arrival. What is stated by Zecharias about the calling that was upon his son John, is important to recognize, as there are some Christological assertions made by the narrator.

The bulk of Zecharias’ prophecy about John lauds various Tanach expectations about salvation coming to Israel, and they principally concern the anticipated restoration of its Kingdom (Luke 1:69-75). Various Tanach prophecies about the covenants made between God and the Patriarchs, and in particular King David, are being invoked. Luke 1:68 includes a specific praise issued to the LORD proper or YHWH: “Praised be *ADONAI*, the God of Isra’el, because he has visited and made a ransom to liberate his people” (CJB/CJSB).

John the Immerser/Baptist has come on the scene of history, in the same tradition as figures such as the Prophets of Israel before him, as his father declared, “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High” (Luke 1:76a). Following this, a significant quotation is recognized to be made from Isaiah 40:3 to be sure, and perhaps also Malachi 3:1¹⁰:

“A voice is calling, ‘Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God’” (Isaiah 40:3).

“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming;’ says the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 3:1).

Luke 1:76 in its entirety says, “And you, child, will be called a prophet of *Elyon*. For you will go before *ADONAI* to prepare His ways” (TLV), with a quotation from Isaiah 40:3, for sure, incorporated into Zechariah’s prophecy. Earlier in Luke 1:15-16, all which is stated of John the Immerser/Baptist, is, “he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb. And he will

¹⁰ Erwin Nestle and Kurt Aland, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland 27th Edition* (New York: American Bible Society, 1993), 155; Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1998), 199; Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece, 28th Revised Edition* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart, 2012), 183.

turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.” As the events come into greater focus at John’s circumcision and will progress, questions regarding who “the Lord” of Luke 1:76 is intended to be are necessarily raised. When it is properly recognized that John the Immerser/Baptist is to announce the arrival of the Messiah—as readers of the Gospel of Luke are well aware (Luke 3:1-20)—then key questions about Christology are present when Isaiah 40:3 is applied to Yeshua.

In his commentary on Luke, John Nolland is uncertain about the identity of “the Lord” in Luke 1:76, thinking that there is some ambiguity: “The imagery is primarily that of a coming of God for which preparation is to be made; but for Luke this visitation by God takes the form of the coming of Jesus (cf. Luke 7:16), and there may, therefore, be a happy ambiguity about the reference of ‘Lord’ (Κύριος [*Kurios*]) here.”¹¹ Robert H. Stein is more forthright in his commentary, in recognizing how John the Immerser/Baptist’s preceding arrival to that of “the Lord,” is indeed to be Yeshua or Jesus, to be slightly contrasted to that of the Lord God proper earlier in the word of Luke 1:15-16: “‘Lord’ (and ‘him’) is best understood in light of 3:4; 7:27 and John’s preparatory role, namely, as a reference to Jesus (cf. 1:43) rather than to God (Yahweh) as in 1:15-16.”¹²

What does it mean for Isaiah 40:3 to be applied to Yeshua? The Hebrew of Isaiah 40:3 reads with, *b’midbar pannu derekh YHWH* (בְּמִדְבָּר פָּנּוּ דֶרֶךְ יְהוָה), “Prepare in the desert a way for Yahweh” (New Jerusalem Bible). This is translated in the Septuagint as, *hetoimasate ten hodon Kuriou* (ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου), “Prepare the way of the Lord” (NETS), with the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH rendered with the title *Kurios*. Is it at all significant that “the Lord” of Luke 1:76—a reference to Yeshua the Messiah—is the same LORD or YHWH of Isaiah 40:3? In the estimation of Joel B. Green, in his Luke commentary, while not fully understood to the characters participating—the narrator of the Gospel does associate the title of “Lord” first clearly applied to YHWH in Luke 1:17¹³ preceding, with the Lord Yeshua:

“The relationship between John and Jesus is the focus of Zechariah’s description of John as one who goes ‘before the Lord to prepare his ways.’ Before, in 1:17, ‘Lord’ could only be understood as Yahweh. But the subsequent narrative has embodied a subtle shift in this identification, with the result that *God’s* visitation is now understood to take the form of the coming of *Jesus*—of whom the title ‘Lord’ is appropriate (1:43; cf. 2:11). We know, then, that John will go before the Lord Jesus to prepare his way. However, this is an identification that is unknown to the characters in Luke 2-23; although ‘Lord’ in its transcendent sense appears in the Gospel as a title for Jesus, it occurs this only in the words of the narrator, who thus give us his own assessment of Jesus’ identity and reveals his own status as a believer. Only in light of his exaltation is Jesus more widely acknowledged as ‘Lord’ (e.g., 24:34; Acts 2:36).”¹⁴

When Isaiah 40:3 is applied to the mission of John the Immerser/Baptist preparing the way for the Lord Yeshua, what does this say about the nature of the Messiah, from the perspective of the author? If Yeshua the Messiah is only a supernatural agent sent from God, but ultimately created, than to apply any Tanach passage where the subject is the LORD or YHWH to Yeshua, is not only irresponsible, but it would be tantamount to blasphemy. Far be it from Zechariah

¹¹ John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1:9-20*, Vol 35a (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 89.

¹² Robert H. Stein, *New American Commentary: Luke* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 101.

¹³ “It is he who will go as a *forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN [Malachi 4:5-6], and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17).

¹⁴ Joel B. Green, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 118.

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speaking via the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in this scene, he would be either self-delusioned or demon-possessed. But, if John the Immerser/Baptist preparing the way for the Isaiah 40:3 “Lord” is to be regarded as him legitimately preparing the way for Yeshua, then this is only possible if Yeshua is integrated into the Divine Identity.

Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:10-11

“The Child Born as God With Us”

“Now the birth of Yeshua the Messiah was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Yeshua, for He will save His people from their sins.’ Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL’ [Isaiah 7:14], which translated means, ‘GOD WITH US.’ And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary* as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Yeshua” (Matthew 1:18-25).

“But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord’” (Luke 2:10-11).

Adherents of either a high or a low Christology should recognize the significance of the nativity narratives in the Apostolic Scriptures, associating the birth of Yeshua the Messiah with a critical Tanach passage such as Isaiah 7:10-16. Yeshua is conceived by supernatural means (Matthew 1:20c), which was important to stress to Joseph, Mary’s betrothed, otherwise he would have dismissed her or put her away (Matthew 1:18-20b).

Messianic people are quite keen to emphasize that the original name, that Joseph and Mary were going to name their Spirit-conceived son, is not the English “Jesus.” Anyone who enters into a Messianic congregation or assembly, in the English speaking world, will most frequently hear the Messiah referred to as “Yeshua” (or “Y’shua”). The name *Yeshua* (יֵשׁוּעַ) is a contracted form of the name *Yehoshua* (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ) or Joshua, and is used numerous times in the Tanach to refer to Moses’ successor, the transliteration *Iēsous* (Ἰησοῦς)¹⁵ being employed in the Greek Septuagint, and hence also in the Apostolic Writings.¹⁶ The proper name Yeshua is related to the improper

¹⁵ Cf. B.T. Dahlberg, “Jeshua,” in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 2:867-868; also also *Thayer*, 300; *BDAG*, pp 471-472.

¹⁶ In various parts of the broad Messianic community, it may be heard that the Greek transliteration *Iēsous* (Ἰησοῦς) is related to the name of the pagan deity Zeus (which notably has a different spelling, Ζεὺς).

Transliteration is the process where one tries to communicate, as closely as possible, the sounds of one language into another language, often by representing words of one language in a different alphabet. This is extremely difficult when taking proper Hebrew names and communicating them in Greek. How we get from *Yeshua* to *Iēsous* (pronounced *Ee-ay-sooce*) to ultimately *Jesus* is a challenge to understand if one is armed with nothing more than a concordance, does not understand the difficulty of transliteration, and most importantly has not studied **both** Hebrew and Greek. When transliterating the Hebrew name יֵשׁוּעַ to Greek:

- י (*yud* – “ye”) becomes Ιη (*iota-ēta* – “ye” or “ee-ay”)
- שׁ (*shin* – “sh”) becomes σ (*sigma* – “s” - there is no “sh” sound in Greek)
- ו (*vuv* – “u”) becomes ου (*omicron-epsilon* – “oo”)
- It is necessary for a final sigma (ς) to be placed at the end of the word to distinguish that the name is masculine and for it to be declinable from the nominative case (indicating subject)