

² As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,
"Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way,
³ the voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,'"

“As” could either refer to what’s been said (“the beginning of the Good News...” is a fulfillment of what was prophesied) or to what is about to come (“just as Scripture prophesied, so now John appeared”). Grammatically, the first option is preferable (it’s used this way in countless places in the New Testament (see Matt 26:24; Mark 9:13; 14:21; Luke 2:23; Acts 15:15; Rom 1:17; 2:24; 3:4, 10; 4:17; 8:36; etc.), but no matter which choice one makes, these Mark 1:1 and Mark 1:4 are being pulled together by this quotation of Scripture that refers both to the messenger and the Lord Himself.

Old Testament Quotations and Allusions:

Malachi 3:1; Exodus 23:20; and Isaiah 40:3

Malachi 3:1 הִנְנִי שְׁלַח מַלְאָכִי וּפְנֵה-דֶרֶךְ לִפְנֵי וּפְתָאֵם יְבוֹא אֶל־הֵיכָלִי
הָאֲדֹנָיִם אֲשֶׁר־אַתֶּם מְבַקְשִׁים וּמִלֵּאךְ הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר־אַתֶּם חֹפְצִים הִנֵּה־בָא
אֲמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:

Malachi 3:1 ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἐξαποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου καὶ ἐπιβλέψεται ὁδὸν πρὸ προσώπου μου καὶ ἐξαίφνης ἥξει εἰς τὸν ναὸν ἑαυτοῦ κύριος ὃν ὑμεῖς ζητεῖτε καὶ ὁ ἄγγελος τῆς διαθήκης ὃν ὑμεῖς θέλετε ἰδοὺ ἔρχεται λέγει κύριος παντοκράτωρ

Mal. 3:1 ESV "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord (Adonai) 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.

Mk. 1:2 BGT ἰδοὺ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου.

Main differences:

- Mark “before your face” vs. LXX Malachi “and he will prepare the way before me” (“καὶ ἐπιβλέψεται ὁδὸν πρὸ προσώπου μου”)
- Mark “who will prepare your way”, LXX Malachi “and he will oversee your way”

In the context of Malachi, the “I” (the one sending his messenger) is Yahweh Sabaoth (The LORD of Hosts/angel armies); the messenger named here is later identified as “Elijah the prophet” (Malachi 4:5 (3:23 in Hebrew)).

In the context of Malachi, the thing being talked about is the Day of the LORD, a time when God would act with justice to punish the wicked and avenge the faithful. To many

in the Old Testament, the Day of the LORD was thought to be “the end,” the final day of this world. The justice enacted would be a total and complete judgment upon all creation. The end would come when God Himself would come to reign visibly over all His creation. This prophecy says that before that day happens, He will send a messenger to prepare His way.

What are we waiting for? The arrival of Yahweh to judge the world and save His faithful people.

In the second part of the verse, Yahweh says that Adonai (the Lord) will come to His temple. The Lord doesn't appear to be the same person as the messenger of the first part of the verse, nor is he the same as Yahweh who speaks, but this Lord has more in common with Yahweh than He does with the messenger because the temple is called his! This is part of the complexity of God already revealed in the Old Testament: God is One, but here there is Yahweh who is God and the Lord (Adonai) who is not the same person as Yahweh, but also God.

What are we waiting for? The arrival of the Lord to His Temple and He will purify all of God's people and bring judgment on all sin/sinners (Malachi 3:2ff.).

As Mark “misquotes” this verse by saying “your face” (which refers to Jesus) rather than “me,” (which refers to the Heavenly Father) he is preparing the readers to see the identity of Jesus as the one who is the Lord (Adonai), but God/Yahweh as well (Psalm 110 makes this same connection). For the messenger was coming to prepare the way for Yahweh.

Mark very rightly quotes this verse which prophesies the messenger who was to come as “Elijah,” for later in the story, Jesus will explicitly call John the Baptizer the Elijah who was to come (Mark 9:13).

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Exod. 23:20 ESV "Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.

Exod. 23:20 καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου ἵνα φυλάξῃ σε ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ὅπως εἰσαγάγῃ σε εἰς τὴν γῆν ἣν ἡτοίμασά σοι

Mk. 1:2 ἰδοὺ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου.

On Messenger/angel - Note in both Malachi and in Exodus, the same Hebrew/Greek words are in play. Depending on the context the word used can be translated as “messenger” or “angel.” In English we have two very different pictures in mind when we use those words, but while we have two words, in Greek and Hebrew one word is used for both. Therefore, this verse from Exodus can also be translated, “Behold, I send a messenger before you...”

In Exodus, the immediate context is that Yahweh is speaking to Moses from Mt. Sinai. Earlier He gave Moses the Ten Commandments (Exo 20) and the people demanded that Moses

go and speak to Yahweh on their behalf, while they remained at a distance (Exo. 20:18-21). In that sequence, Yahweh gave more laws to Moses, including details about festivals, and concluded with this section (Exo. 23:20-33) in which God promised Moses that if the people would listen to Him and follow His ways, He would drive out all their enemies so that they would not dwell in the Promised Land to which He was leading them. So the “I” in this context is Yahweh, the “you (singular)” is the whole people of Israel considered as a collective whole. The messenger/angel is a figure known as “the angel of the LORD (Yahweh)”, a divine figure in the Old Testament who is often linked with the pre-incarnate Christ because He is described in divine terms, as God, not merely an angel (e.g. Gen 31:11-13 where the angel of the LORD calls Himself God or Exo. 3:2-6 where the angel of the LORD is called the LORD/Yahweh Himself).

What are we waiting for? Yahweh’s messenger/angel who will guard God’s people (Israel) and drive out their enemies so that they can enter the Promised Land.

In Mark’s Gospel, if this verse is also to be drawn upon as an Old Testament allusion to what is going on at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, an interesting juxtaposition happens. The “you” that the messenger whose way the messenger is preparing is not God’s way, but rather the people’s way. The connection seems to be that Jesus is not just being connected with God (the Malachi allusion) to say that He is God, but that He is also being connected with Israel (the people of God) as a whole.

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Isa. 40:3 ESV A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway *for our God*."

קוֹל קוֹרֵא בַּמִּדְבָּר פִּנּוּ דֶּרֶךְ יְהוָה יִשְׂרוּ בְּעֵרְבָה מְסִלָּה לֵאלֹהֵינוּ: Isaiah 40:3

^{BGT} **Isaiah 40:3** φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν

Main Differences:

- In Hebrew the verse reads, “A voice of one calling, “In the wilderness, prepare...”” but in Greek it reads, “A voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Prepare...’”. [The difference is where the words of the voice begin.]
- Mark’s Gospel follows the Greek Septuagint. In either case, the point is made that the wilderness is going to be the place of renewal, either the voice is heard from the wilderness calling people there or the voice is heard directing people to the wilderness. The Septuagint better emphasizes John’s ministry as taking place in the wilderness.
- In Hebrew, the verse reads, “Prepare the way of Yahweh (the LORD)”.

- In the Greek Septuagint, Yahweh is replaced with the Greek word for Lord (*Kyrios*). Mark follows this same convention, in this verse, with the result of yet another powerful confession of faith. For Mark, “Prepare the way of the Lord” (meaning Jesus) is a fulfillment of Isaiah’s words, “Prepare the way of Yahweh”! The Jesus we’re about to read about, whose way John the Baptizer is preparing is none other than God Himself!

In the context of Isaiah 40, we are hearkening back to the Exodus theme where God redeems His people by taking them from Egypt to the wilderness where He (and He alone) gives them life (see specifically Hosea 2:14-15 and in Ezek. 20:35-38 the wilderness is described not only as a place of judgment, which would connect well with the “day of the LORD” theme) and dwells with them (the pillar of fire and cloud and God’s glory both at Sinai and in their midst in the Tabernacle). In the wilderness they are tempted (another key theme that will be important shortly in Mark 1:12-13)), but the provision and protection from God come even in spite of their unfaithfulness as an act of sheer grace. This message of life and renewal in the wilderness also could be seen as being drawn from Genesis too. Once Adam and Eve were barred from the Garden of Eden, their whole life would now take place in the wilderness, but even in the wilderness God’s grace was promised and given to them. Isaiah pulls all of these ideas together. God’s people who are taken off into captivity will be redeemed, their lands which are destroyed will be renewed, God’s presence which had departed from them would return once more. When this happened there would be renewal, like life coming from death (see Isa. 41:18-19; 43:19-21; 44:3-4).

The wilderness then is full of all kinds of rich imagery in God’s interactions with His people: redemption and judgment, provision and protection, renewal and restoration. All of those themes are in play in this particular part of God’s story.

Preparation is seen as a necessary part of God’s arrival not because He needs any preparation but because the people need it. If God is coming for salvation/judgment, people need to “get right with God,” that is, repent of their sins so that they are not consumed by His Holiness (see Isa. 6, but this also leads us into John’s actual ministry).

It is perhaps worth asking how a person can really make a way for the LORD of all creation. Clearly since He is the one who is coming to save His people, we are already admitting our own feebleness. In Isaiah 40:4, hills, mountains, and valleys are to be levelled to make a smooth road for God. While we live in a time of great industrial power, the point seems to be that we cannot possibly do this, only God Himself can. The preparation necessary that people are called upon to make are still in the end work that only God can bring about. In this context, repentance is the work that John is calling for. But even in the Old Testament David testifies that it is God alone who brings about repentance in our hearts (Psalm 51:2, 4, 7 and see Ezek. 36:25).