

The Gospel According to Mark, 1:2-3

A Continued Examination of Mark's Use of Scripture: Exodus 23:20/Malachi 3:1

a. The sources of the quotation (correcting the previous handout):

In the last lesson, Mark 1:1-2 .6, I represented the blending of Exo 23:20 and Mal 3:1 in this way:

“Behold, I send my messenger” (Mal 3:1a)

“before your face,” (Exo 23:20)

“and he will prepare your way,” (Mal 3:1b)

Upon further review, this is incorrect. The following representation is more accurate: ⁽¹⁾

“Behold, I send my messenger” (Exo 23:20a)

“before your face,” (Exo 23:20b)

“and he will prepare your way,” (Mal 3:1, changing “my way” to “your way”)

b. Points of comparison

See accompanying hand-out. Exo 23:20 and Mal 3:1 are given in both Greek and Hebrew (transliterated using the English alphabet) with an interlinear English translation. The first line of each verse is nearly identical. There is an emphatic command to “behold”, or “look” or “pay attention” to what God is doing: sending an angel or messenger (same word). “The way” in both verses denotes the journey to the place where God will meet His people; the land of Canaan in Exo 23:20, and the temple in Mal 3:1.

c. Points of contrast

In the second line, Exo 23:20, the angel is sent before the Israelites to guard their path through the wilderness. There they are travelling to Canaan, where God has promised to dwell with them: “I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them” (Exo 29:45-46).

Mal 3:1 is post-exilic. The people of Judah are back in the land, and the temple has been rebuilt (though a shadow of the glory of Solomon's temple). But the people do not seem to exhibit the new heart promised by Jeremiah:

“I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart” (Jer 24:7).

Instead, the men of Judah have contracted idolatrous marriages (Mal 2:11) and divorce has become rampant (Mal 2:14-16). Some people have even accused God of sanctioning these evils by refusing to judge the people (Mal 2:17). But there will come a day when the Lord will come suddenly to His temple to judge and purify the people (3:1-4), and to make those who fear Him a treasured possession (3:16-18). He will bring with Him a refining fire (3:2-3; 4:1). A messenger will prepare the way for this judgment-coming (3:1), who is identified as Elijah (4:5). ⁽²⁾ It should not be missed that the point of the judgment is so that God may again dwell with His people and bless them (3:4; 11-12; 16-18; 4:2-3).

d. Teaching

1. Exodus 23:20 recalls that God freed the Israelites from their oppressors and brought them through the wilderness so He could be their God and they could be His people. No obstacle will separate God and the people upon whom He has set His love, not even sin and death (Rom. 8:31-39). He will guard the way of His people. Let us entrust our way to our Good Shepherd.
2. Malachi 3:1 (in context) recalls the holiness of God, that He cannot abide with sin. Though He may grant time for repentance, the day comes when He must judge every evil way. Let us fear the righteous Lord and esteem the Name of the Lord who spares us what we deserve and makes us His treasured possession (Mal 3:16-18).
3. God sent His messengers, the prophets to His people to warn them of His judgments and show them the wonders of His grace, in order to provoke repentance and restore them to Himself. We should heed the warnings of the prophets, repent of our sin, and cling to God in faith, who has promised to receive us in Christ.
4. The Malachi passage foretells that the Messenger of the Covenant (Jesus of the New Covenant) will come suddenly to His temple. This was literally fulfilled when Jesus cleansed the temple (John. 2:13-22). But it was also fulfilled in that He *became* the temple (v. 21). He “became flesh and dwelt [lit., ‘tabernacled’] among us”. Let us wonder and be grateful for the love and humility of our Savior, who “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:5-8). Let us embrace our Savior in faith. And as we are His people, let us also pray that He will form in us Christlikeness, so that we may radiate His light in a dark world.

Notes

1. So according to **C. S. Mann**: “The first part of the quotation is an almost exact duplication of the LXX of Exod 23:20. The second part depends on the Hebrew of Mal 3:1 rather than on LXX” (Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary [The Anchor Bible Commentary Series], p. 195). Also **Vincent Taylor**: “The first part of the quotation agrees verbatim with Ex. Xxiii. 20a ...; the second part with the Heb. of Mal. Iii. 1...” (The Gospel According to St. Mark, Second Edition [Thornapple Commentaries], p. 153). **Rikk E. Watts** argues that Malachi is the lead citation: “Traditionally, Mal. 3:1 LXX (which accurately renders the MT) is rightly regarded as the primary source. Mark is interested in its eschatological orientation and promise of ‘preparation’...” (Beale and Carson, eds. Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament, p. 113). The latter statement is certainly true, which is why Mark goes with Malachi 3:1 in the final clause of v. 2. The link to Malachi is also demonstrated by the description of John in terms of Elijah (Mark 1:6), echoing Mal 4:5. Nevertheless, Exo 23:20 cannot be set aside, as the rest of Mark’s quotation is much closer to the diction of Exo 23:20 than Mal 3:1. Also, the echo of Exo 23:20 is seen in John’s guiding of the people of Judea to Jesus, even as the Angel of the LORD guided the Israelites to Canaan. Watts concludes: “On the other hand, Mark 1:2b’s *apostellō*, with its modifying *pro prosōpou sou*, is found only in the messenger text of Exo. 23:20 LXX...and, more importantly perhaps, Mal. 3:1 is itself a close reworking of the Exodus text...and as such, both Exodus and Malachi are in view, with the latter providing the center of gravity” (p. 113).
2. As an illustration of Jewish belief in the identity of the messenger, **C. E. B. Cranfield** relates an ancient prayer from Rabbinical literature (*Sopherim* xix. 9): “May Elijah the prophet come to us soon; and King Messiah come forth in our days” (The Gospel According to St. Mark: [The Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary], p. 39).