

He That Cometh in Mark 1:7 and Matt 24:30

GORDON D. KIRCHHEVEL
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

According to Mark 1:7 John the Baptist expected the coming of someone perceived as predicted in Isa 5:26-27. According to Matt 24:30 Jesus expected to come as the individual perceived in Isa 5:26-30 and the Targum (Aramaic interpretation), and so the "sign" of his coming meant the "sign" in Isa 5:26, and the "clouds" meant the "clouds" in Isa 5:30 and Targumic tradition. Messianic Isa 11:10 and Aramaic tradition inspired John 14:2-3, and Mark 13:27 coheres dictionally with Tg. Isa 11:12. The messianic interpretation of Psalm 8 in Mark 2:10, 28 was preceded by one in 1 Cor 15:27, and the messianic interpretation of Isa 5:26-30 in Mark 13:26 was preceded by one in 1 Thess 4:13-18 ("the word of the Lord" = Isa 5:26-30).

Key Words: Parousia (Second Coming), Isaiah Targum (Aramaic tradition), prediction (prophecy), messianic interpretation (son of man).

Was Isa 5:26-30 understood in the first century to have predicted the Messiah's coming? This article briefly compares three predictions in Isaiah (5:26-30; 11:10, 12) with similar ones in the gospels (Mark 1:7; 8:38; 13:26-27; Matt 24:30; John 14:2-3). This is done with the aid of Aramaic tradition, as it is attested in the distinctive Aramaic interpretation (Targum) of Isaiah. The similarities tend to support the hypothesis that Mark 1:7 and Matt 24:30 expected the coming of a person perceived as predicted in Isa 5:26-30.

MT Isa 5:26-27

And he will raise a sign¹ to the peoples from a distance,
and he will whistle to someone from the end of the earth,
and behold, very fast he will come.
There will be no one weary and no one stumbling in him,

All English translations not identified are my own. Verbal similarities between Isaiah and the gospels are underlined.

1. "Sign" can also be translated as "standard, signal, ensign."

he will not slumber and he will not sleep,
and not loosed (will be) the cloth of his loins,
and not broken (will be) the thong of his sandals.

Mark 1:7

And he proclaimed, "He comes, the one stronger than I, after me, of whom I am not strong enough to bend down and break the thong of his sandals."

The subject of the first verb in Isa 5:26 is the LORD (v. 25). Mark 1:7 attributes to John the Baptist a prediction that is similar to one in Isa 5:26-27 in five ways: (1) someone (masculine singular) "comes/will come"; (2) he is strong (Isa 5:29 likens him to the lion); (3) the "thong" of his sandals is mentioned (the only other mention of a sandal-thong in the OT is in Gen 14:23); (4) poetic Isaiah has parallel verbs "loose" and "break," and prose Mark has "loose/break" (λῦ-σσαι); and (5) those verbs are negated with respect to the thong of his sandals. The agreement between Mark and Isaiah is less than verbatim, but without looking beyond the Hebrew text one can see that the distinctive description in Mark 1:7 fits the distinctive description in Isa 5:26-27. Other gospel passages have additional similarities to Isa 5:26, 30 and/or the Targum.

Tg. Isa 5:26

And he will raise a sign to the peoples from a distance,
and he will call to someone from the ends of the earth,
and behold, with speed a king will come with his camps like swift
clouds.²

MT Isa 5:30

. . . and light grows dark in his clouds.

Matt 24:3

. . . tell us . . . what will be the sign of your coming . . .

2. "With his camps" may have been deduced from plurals like "all his bows" in Isa 5:28. The Targum moved the "clouds" from v. 30 up to v. 26, where they were attached to "light/swift," perhaps by analogy with the "light/swift cloud(s)" in Isa 19:1. The Targum defined the indefinite personal subject of "will come" as "a king," presumably "the king" in *Tg. Isa* 11:1, who was called "the Messiah/Anointed." Mark 14:61-62 portrayed Jesus as acknowledging to the high priest that he was "the Christ/Messiah/Anointed," and 15:2 portrayed Pilate as verifying that Jesus claimed to be "the king." According to Mark 11:27-12:12 members of the Sanhedrin may have learned from the parable of the beloved son that Jesus considered himself to be the son of God. That parable may have portrayed "my beloved" from the similar parable of the beloved's vineyard (Isa 5:1b) as God's "beloved son" (Jesus), contrary to people-centered Targumic tradition.

Matt 24:30

And then will appear the sign of the son of man in heaven, and then will mourn all the peoples of the earth, and they will see the son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with a force and great glory.³

Mark 8:38

For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the son of man will also be ashamed of him, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Mark 13:26

And then they will see the son of man coming in clouds with a great force and glory.⁴

Matt 24:30 attributes to Jesus a prediction that is similar to the one in both Isa 5:26 and the Targum in three ways: (1) there will be a "sign"; (2) the sign will be for "the peoples" "of the earth"; and (3) someone (masculine singular) will be coming. There is also one similarity only to the Targum: he will come "with his camps" (בְּמִשְׁרֵי תִידָה) in the Targum and "with a force" ([μετὰ δυνάμεως) in Matthew.⁵ "In clouds" in Mark 13:26 is similar to "in his clouds" (בְּעֵרֵי פִידָה) in Isa 5:30. In Mark 14:62 the scene perceived in Isa 5:26-30 is preceded by the scene perceived in Ps 110:1.

The messianic interpretation in Matthew could hardly have come from the Septuagint, which translated the masculine singular Hebrew verb as plural ("they come"). The tendency toward messianic interpretation that Matt 24:30 shares with the Targum is a significant instance of thematic coherence. By contrast, the Hebrew text of Isa 5:26 and the Greek version are so unmessianic that no one in this century has imagined that Isa 5:26 predicted any coming of Jesus. It was Isaiah's answer to the taunts attributed to his contemporaries in v. 19 in response to his criticism in vv. 12b-13a.

Why would Mark 1:7 believe that the speedy punishment predicted more than seven hundred years earlier (Isa 5:26-30) had

3. Compare "from the end of the earth" and "he will come" in Isa 5:26 to "for even as the brightness comes out (ἐξέρχεται) from the east and shines to the west, so will be the coming of the son of man" in Matt 24:27. Compare "their corpse" in Isa 5:25 to "the corpse" in Matt 24:28.

4. In Isa 36:2 "With a great force" (חֵיל כָּבֵד) refers to a military force. *Tg. Isa* 36:2 translated "force" as "camps." Compare "coming with a great force" in Mark 13:26 to "comes . . . with the holy angels" in 8:38 and to "with angels of his force" in 2 Thess 1:7. In Isa 5:26 the LORD will give the signal, and in Mark 13:32 neither "the angels in heaven" nor "the Son" knows when "the Father" will do that.

5. Other instances of dictional and thematic coherence with the Targum in dominical sayings are analyzed by Bruce D. Chilton (*A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible: Jesus' Use of the Interpreted Scripture of His Time* [GNS 8; Wilmington: Glazier, 1984]).

not yet come? Presumably because Mark 1:7 held a more specific messianic interpretation like 13:26. In Isa 5:19b the taunt was "let the counsel (feminine) of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come," but the Targum has masculine מַלְכֵיהּ, "the counsel/king of the Holy One of Israel." If the simplest explanation of the expectation attributed to John the Baptist in Mark 1:7 and to Jesus in 13:26 is that both passages expected the coming of a person perceived as predicted in Isa 5:26-30 and/or related Targumic tradition, that is the best working hypothesis. Targumic *tradition* is specified, because no claim is made that a *written* Isaiah Targum existed when the earliest gospel was written.

Tg. Isa 11:10

And in that time will be the son of the son of Jesse,
 who (is) destined that he will rise⁶ (as) a sign for the peoples.
 To him kingdoms will listen,
 and the place of the house of his resting-places will be in glory.

John 14:2-3

In the house of my Father are many staying-places; if not, would I have said to you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again and will take you to myself, in order that where I am you too may be.

John 14:2 is similar to both Isa 11:10 and the Targum in one way: each has a noun for place to rest/stay. There are also three similarities only to the Targum: (1) "staying-places" (μονᾶι) in John agrees in number with "resting-places" in the Targum against singular "resting-place" in the Hebrew text; (2) both the Targum and John have "the house"; and (3) both have "place."

One Hebrew word ("his resting-place") was interpreted with three Aramaic words ("the place of the house of his resting-places") in the Targum.⁷ The Aramaic phrase is interpreted idiomatically ("his resting place") in a recent English translation of the Targum,⁸ but John 14:2 understood the phrase in Targumic tradition very liter-

6. The Hebrew text has "who (is) standing" but lacks "that he will rise." "Standing" in Acts 7:55-56 is consistent with the Hebrew text. It is conceivable that John 20:9 was inspired by Targumic tradition.

7. Variations of the singular form of this phrase occurring after "prepare" in the Aramaic translations of the Pentateuch are analyzed by M. McNamara ("To prepare a resting place for you.' A Targumic Expression and John 14:2f.," *Milltown Studies* 3 [1979] 100-108). The Targum of Deut 1:33 is analyzed by J. McCaffrey (*The House With Many Rooms: The Temple Theme of Jn. 14,2-3* [AnBib 114; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1988] 91-93).

8. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum: Introduction, Translation, Apparatus and Notes* (The Aramaic Bible 11; Wilmington: Glazier, 1987) 28.

ally, splitting it up into three undefined components. John 14:2-3 portrayed Jesus as expecting to go where Isa 11:10 said the king would rest, but the conviction that there are "many" staying-places sides with *plural* "his resting-places" (מִשְׁרָוֵיהֶי) in related Targumic tradition. On the dating of elements in messianic *Tg. Isa* 11:10 see the work of Bruce D. Chilton.⁹

Tg. Isa 11:12

And he will raise an ensign for the peoples,
and will assemble the outcasts of Israel,
and bring near the exile of Judah from the four winds of the earth.¹⁰

Mark 13:27 (NRSV)

Then he will send out the angels,¹¹ and gather his elect from the four
winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

If the "sign" in Isa 11:10 and the Targum was to be a person, the "sign" in v. 12 could be interpreted as a man and as the subject of "he will assemble." Mark 13:27 is similar to both Isa 11:12 and the Targum in one way: poetic Isaiah has two parallel verbs for "he will gather," and prose Mark has one. In one way Mark is more similar to the Targum; "from the four winds" in Mark agrees with the Targum against "from the four wings" in the Hebrew text and the Septuagint. This dictional coherence suggests that Mark 13:27 may have been inspired by Targumic tradition related to Isa 11:12, even as Mark 13:26 was inspired by the tradition related to Isa 5:26.

If predictive Mark 1:7 and predictive 8:38 both referred to the one perceived as predicted in Isa 5:26, it is appropriate to compare Mark 1:7 and 8:38. There is no confusion where John the Baptist retains the grammatical form of Isaiah's prediction (ἔρχεται "he comes") in Mark 1:7, since there Jesus is grammatically a third person. But where Jesus does the same (ἔλθῃ "he comes") in 8:38, there is an unavoidable grammatical mismatch between the grammatical third person in Isaiah ("he") and the grammatical first person (the speaker, Jesus) in Mark.

The same grammatical constraint affected also 13:26, where the participle "coming" modifies a third-person phrase. Similarly, in the next verse "he will gather" was under the grammatical constraint of the two third-masculine-singular verbs in Isa 11:12. Mark 9:12 was

9. Chilton, *The Glory of Israel: The Theology and Provenience of the Isaiah Targum* (JSOTSup 23; Sheffield: JSOT, 1982) 88.

10. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum*, 28. I have not reproduced the italics in his translation.

11. "The messengers/angels" in Mark 13:27 presumably belong to the "force" in the preceding verse.

explicitly constrained, possibly by the third-person usage in Isa 53:3. Mark portrayed Jesus as alluding to scriptures perceived as referring to Jesus, so that Jesus referred indirectly to himself.

Mark portrayed Jesus as referring indirectly to himself as "the son of man." "That you may know that 'the son of man' has authority" in Mark 2:10 is similar to "that the living may know that the Most High has authority/is lord" in Dan 4:14 (English 4:17). Dan 7:14, 27 dreamed that "the people of the holy ones of the Most High" would be served, but Jesus was portrayed in Mark 7:6-7 as criticizing "this people" and in 10:45 as declaring that "'the son of man' did not come to be served." "The son of man" (RSV) and causative *תַּמְשִׁילֵהוּ* ("you let him have authority/be lord") in Ps 8:5-7 (English 8:4-6) implied that "'the son of man' has authority/is lord" in assertive Mark 2:10, 28.¹² Formally "the son of man" in Mark (*ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*) coheres with *בְּרַשָׁא* in Psalm 8 in the Targum (Walton edition),¹³ which interpreted the Hebrew *בֶּן אָדָם*. That third-person was retained as the subject of the predictive verbs in Mark 8:38b¹⁴ and 13:27 in the belief that the individual perceived in Isaiah's predictions and the one perceived in Psalm 8 were the same person (Jesus). For the authors of Mark 2:10, 28 and John 5:27 "the son of man" was no modesty idiom. It is not safe to assume that the author of Mark 7:6-7 and altruistic 10:42-45 shared the nation-centered dream in Daniel 7. The person perceived as predicted in Isa 5:26-27 was not called "the son of man" by John the Baptist in Mark 1:7.

The messianic interpretation of Isa 5:26-30 in Mark was preceded by a similar one in a letter of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy. 1 Thess 4:16 interpreted "he will come" (*ἔρχεται*) in Isa 5:26 as "the Lord himself . . . will come down (*καταβήσεται*) from heaven" and interpreted "in him" (*ἐν αὐτῷ*) in v. 27 as "in Christ/Messiah/Anointed" (*ἐν Χριστῷ*). In Isa 5:30 "light grows dark in his clouds" was interpreted in the Targum as "the righteous who are (*יְהוֹנִי*) in that time will be covered from the evil" and was interpreted in 1 Thess 4:15, 17 as "we who are left (*οἱ περιλειπόμενοι*) alive until the coming of the Lord . . . will be snatched in clouds to meet the Lord in the air." From "in him he will not slumber and he will not sleep" in Isa 5:27 it was deduced that "those who have fallen asleep" (*τοὺς κοιμηθέντας*), "the dead in

12. In John 5:27 compare "he gave him authority . . . because he is the son of man" (*υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου* matches Ps 8:5b in the LXX).

13. An English translation of Psalm 8 in the Walton edition of the Targum is provided by F. J. Moloney ("The Re-interpretation of Psalm VIII and the Son of Man debate," *NTS* 27 [1981] 661). He discusses the date of the Targum on p. 660.

14. From "me" in Mark 8:38a I conclude that the verb ("is ashamed of") did not allude to any OT passage in which "the son of man" was perceived.

Christ," will rise before they are snatched in clouds in subsequent v. 30 with believers who are left alive.¹⁵ 1 Thess 4:15 characterized Isa 5:26-30 as "the word of the Lord" (λόγος κυρίου = דְּבַר יְהוָה). 1 Thess 4:16 and 1 Cor 15:27 perceived the same individual in Isa 5:26-30 and in Psalm 8 and called him Χριστός ("Christ /Messiah/Anointed").¹⁶ For anyone familiar with the OT, Mark introduced the Psalmic expression ("the son of man") in Mark 2:10, 28, presumably to indicate that Jesus was the Messiah perceived in the OT.

Evidence offered in this article supports the hypothesis that Mark 1:7 and Matt 24:30 expected the coming of a person perceived as predicted in Isa 5:26-30. That is ascertainable even without the helpful *Tg. Isaiah*. The saying in Mark 1:7 is virtually unchanged in parallel Luke 3:16, but Matt 3:11 and John 1:27 went their own ways.

15. Compare those who "have fallen asleep" in 1 Cor 11:30, where "sick and weak" were inspired by "faint" and "stumbling" in Isa 5:26. In the LXX ἀσθενεῖν (be sick) frequently translated כָּשַׁל (stumble).

16. On "the kingdom," "it is necessary that he/it (death!) rule," "he ends every . . ." and "death is ended" in 1 Cor 15:24-26 see *Tg. Isa* 25:6-8. Paul's use of "the kingdom" in 1 Cor 15:24 and "snatch" in 1 Thess 4:17 may aid in the interpretation of "that kingdom" and "snatch away" in Mark 3:23-27a.