

with God, his Father. Jesus' deity is a major theme in John's gospel, affirmed in 1:1; 5:17-18; 8:58; 10:30-36; 14:9-11; and 20:28."⁴¹

The Johannine Prologue of John 1:1-18 is a classic text employed to affirm not only the pre-existence of Yeshua the Messiah, but also His integration into the Divine Identity as God. Indeed, there are details within John 1:1-18 that cannot be made of any created being. But our understanding of the nature of the Messiah hardly begins and ends at John 1:1-18, as there are many more statements appearing in the Gospel of John, which do require investigation and analysis, many of which will indeed uphold a high Christology of Yeshua being God.

John 1:19-24

"John the Immerser Preparing the Way for the Lord"

"This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' They asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' And he said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' And he answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, "MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD" [Isaiah 40:3], as Isaiah the prophet said.' Now they had been sent from the Pharisees."

Contextually in John 1:19, *hoi Ioudaioi* (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) or literally "the Jews," is to be regarded as those who "had been sent from the Pharisees" (John 1:24), so it is not improper for some versions to have the slight paraphrase "the Judean leaders" (TLV) or "the Jewish leaders" (NLT, TNIV). Various priests and Levites go out into the wilderness, and inquire of John the Immerser/Baptist as to his identity (John 1:19). It is narrated, "he was very straightforward and stated clearly, 'I am not the Messiah'" (John 1:20, CJB/CJSB), which the source text records as *egō ouk eimi ho Christos* (ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμὶ ὁ χριστός). **What did being the Messiah mean for many of the Jewish people in the Second Temple period?** Bruce Milne offers the following, useful thoughts:

"Due to the Roman occupation many cast him in a military role and saw him as leading the overthrow of the Roman yoke and, beyond that, securing the world-wide prominence of the Jewish nation. For some he would be a clearly supernatural visitant from God, for others a human prince from David's line."⁴²

When further inquired as to perhaps being the Prophet Elijah, or some other anticipated prophet, John the Immerser responds in the negative: "'Then who are you?' they asked him. 'Are you Elijah?' 'No, I am not,' he said. 'Are you 'the prophet,' the one we're expecting?' 'No,' he replied" (John 1:21, CJB/CJSB). The Jewish religious leaders who went out to encounter John, are then recorded as asking him to give them some indication as to who he actually was, which they could then report back to their superiors in Jerusalem: "So they said to him, 'Who are you? Give us an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?'" (John 1:22, TLV). The response issued by John the Immerser/Baptist to these priests and Levites, is that he associates himself with the prophetic voice speaking in Isaiah 40:3. As Isaiah 40:3 appears within the wider context of Isaiah 40:1-5,

"'Comfort, O comfort My people,' says your God. Speak kindly to Jerusalem; and call out to her, that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity has been removed, that she has received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins.' **A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the LORD in the**

⁴¹ Ibid., 256.

⁴² Bruce Milne, *The Message of John* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 52.

The Nature of Yeshua in the Gospel of John

wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley; then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

John the Immerser’s appeal to Isaiah 40:3, with him being a voice crying in the wilderness, obviously represents that his work is preparatory to something rather big and significant. As will be detailed further on, readers know that John’s work preceded the arrival of Yeshua the Messiah on the scene. But what cannot escape readers of Isaiah 40:3 and John 1:23, is factoring in whether any assertions about the nature of the Messiah are being made here—the same Messiah who has just been called “God” (John 1:1) and “the only begotten God” (John 1:18).

The Hebrew statement of interest in Isaiah 40:3 is, *b’midbar pannu derekh YHWH* (יְהוָה יִהְיֶה פָּנֵינוּ בְּמִדְבָּר פָּנֵינוּ), “Prepare in the desert a way for Yahweh” (New Jerusalem Bible). This is translated in the Septuagint as, *hetoimasate tēn hodon Kurīou* (ἑτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου), “Prepare the way of the Lord” (NETS), with the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH rendered with the title *Kurios*. Is “the Lord” or *Kurios* of Isaiah 40:3, a reference to the arrival of the Messiah? There are a variety of commentators on the Gospel of John, who would absolutely affirm that “the LORD” of Isaiah 40:3, is to be associated with Yeshua the Messiah in John 1:23:

- D.A. Carson: “[T]he voice of John the Baptist...cried in the desert, preparing a way for the Lord, and thereby announcing the coming of Jesus Messiah.”⁴³
- Colin G. Kruse: “John saw himself, like Isaiah did, as a voice calling in the desert, in John’s case calling upon people to ‘make straight the way of the Lord’, i.e. to ready themselves for the coming of the Messiah.”⁴⁴
- J. Ramsey Michaels: “To the delegation, ‘the Lord’ is simply the God of Israel, but John will soon alert them that someone else is in the picture (vv. 26-27).”⁴⁵

It would not have been out of place at all, if in his quotation of Isaiah 40:3, the verse had been adapted slightly to read “Make straight the way of the Lord’s *Messiah*.” In this case, then, the entity which would be arriving on the scene, in the person of Yeshua, could be approached as a supernatural agent sent from Heaven, which could be a created being, enacting the expectations foretold by Isaiah 40:1-5. Instead, “the Lord” or *Kurios* being spoken of is contextually the One arriving, described by John the Immerser/Baptist as follows:

“I baptize in water, *but* among you stands One whom you do not know. *It is* He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie” (John 1:26-27).

J. Ramsey Michaels issues the further, critical indication,

“That Jesus is ‘Lord’ (κύριος [*Kurios*]) is the view not only of the Gospel writer at several points in the narrative (4:1; 6:23; 11:2; 20:20; 21:12), but of Jesus’ disciples (13:13; compare the repeated address κύριε [*kurie*]), above all in the setting of Jesus’ resurrection (20:2, 13, 18, 25, 28; 21:7).”⁴⁶

If Yeshua is the *Kurios* of Isaiah 40:3, quoted in John 1:23, then the underlying Hebrew of Isaiah 40:3 serves as evidence that He is to be regarded as YHWH/YHVH, integrated to the Divine Identity.

⁴³ Carson, *John*, 144.

⁴⁴ Colin G. Kruse, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp 76-77.

⁴⁵ J. Ramsey Michaels, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 101.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 101 fn#26.