

### A Brief Look At The New Testament Use of The Old Testament

In my time of studying the Bible I have often wondered about the New Testament use of the Old Testament. Of special concern were Matthew 2:11-15 and Galatians 3:16. Did the New Testament writers use some sort of Holy Ghost exegesis that led them to their conclusions? Did they simply impose their doctrine upon the Old Testament texts? Neither of these things truly seemed to be in keeping with the integrity of a Christian character, nor did they seem to be consistent with Divine inspiration. What was I to do, then? What was I to believe about this issue? This short paper is my effort to come to a conclusion based upon the two texts above.

In this article I shall begin in Genesis and work my way through several Old Testament texts in an effort to show that the New Testament writers were actually using the texts in a manner that would be consistent with the understanding of the Old Testament writers.

The passage in Matthew 2 reads:

*“And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.”* (Matthew 2:13–15, KJV)

The Galatians 3 reads:

*“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”* (Galatians 3:16, KJV)

It is my contention that the Old Testament writers did indeed have Christ in mind as they wrote.

The expectation of the people of God in the OT was that there would come a deliver. God's promise in Genesis explicitly promises a son to come.

*“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”* (Genesis 3:15, KJV)

Not only does God promise a son, He promises a seed (singular). Thus, in the very beginning, the expectation of the savior would that one who is both seed (singular) and son.

The expectation of the people no doubt grew when Jacob prophesied of the coming Messiah saying:

*“The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”* (Genesis 49:10, KJV)

Later, the LORD would speak of the nation of Israel as “my son” when He sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt (cf Exodus 4:22). Later the nation of Israel would be spoken of again in the singular in a reference that is no doubt Messianic in nature:

*“He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn. Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought! Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain.”* (Numbers 23:21–24, KJV)

In verse 24 the prophecy moves from “the people” to “he shall rise up as a great lion...” This lion-like man will conquer his enemies.

Balaam prophesied again of the coming Messiah saying:

*“I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children*

*of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city.* ” (Numbers 24:17–19, KJV)

Note that the expectation is that there will be a seed out of Jacob. Though he does not use the word “seed”, yet the Messiah, the coming King shall be a descendant of Jacob. Not only that, but the prophecy speaks of one man, not many just as Paul shall later do in Galatians 3:16.

Later a prophet like Moses would be promised (Deuteronomy 18:15-19) and that would lead the people even further in their expectation of this one man who would come to be their deliverer.

David had an especially significant event in his life when he realized the this deliverer would be a descendant of his.

*“And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee.”* (2 Samuel 7:12–15, KJV)

*“And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods? For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever: and thou, LORD, art become their God. And now, O LORD God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said. And let thy name be magnified for ever, saying, The LORD of hosts is the God over Israel: and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee.”* (2 Samuel 7:23–26, KJV)

Again, the prophecy is regarding one seed who shall be king. This seed is the seed of David, yet he is to be the son of God. (cf Psalm 2:6-12;89:19-29;Isaiah 9:6-7)

Later, Isaiah would speak further of Him (Isaiah 11:1-10), as would Jeremiah (Jeremiah 23:5-6;33:15-16), and Daniel would have a vision of Him coming to rule the world:

*“I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”* (Daniel 7:13–14, KJV)

*“And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.”* (Daniel 7:27, KJV)

Having seen the development of the expectation of the Messiah as one who is the seed of Abraham, the seed of David, the son of God, and the king of all, I am not surprised to see the following verse used in reference to Jesus the Christ being the son of God:

*“When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.”* (Hosea 11:1, KJV) (cf Matthew 2:13-15)

After all, the people of Israel looked for this One who is the seed of Abraham (cf Genesis 22:18) and

the embodiment of all that God expected Israel as a nation to be, and Jesus is the ultimate Israelite. He is the Son of God and the son of man. The seed of the woman (cf Galatians 4:1-5), the seed of Abraham, and the Son of God. Through the years the people knew that their Messiah would be what they were not – perfect. He would rule over all as the ultimate Israelite/descendant of Abraham, and the One to whom all of Israel's history was leading them. Thus the prophecy of Israel coming out of Egypt could indeed apply to the Messiah as the Son of God.

Considering the Galatian passage we find that it, too, is interpreting the Old Testament text correctly, because the Old Testament prophecies clearly anticipated the coming Christ, the seed of Abraham.

As we read the New Testament we find that there was a very well developed Christological expectation in existence at the time of the birth of Jesus. The reader will recall that Simeon spoke to Mary about Jesus and even hinted that His work would actually be one that would bring grief to His mother (See Luke 2:25-35). In so speaking, it is obvious that Simeon's expectation of Jesus' work was not simply that of an exalted king who would rule over all. Simeon evidently understood somewhat of the suffering that was to come to Jesus. It is most likely that he had this understanding based upon the Old Testament Scriptures and not solely on the basis of any spiritual experience he may have had.

As the Baptizer came on the scene we find that there was much musing about him. He was questioned whether he were the Messiah or not, showing us that there was a Messianic expectation. John's response was to preach Jesus as one who would be a sacrificial lamb given as a sin offering: *“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”* (John 1:29, KJV) For this to have made any sense to anyone listening there would have of necessity been an expectation of a suffering Christ who would forgive sins. Again, that expectation would have had its roots in the Old Testament prophecies and promises.

Jesus, Himself, testified to this expectation when He told the people that the Scriptures testified of Him (See John 5:39), that Abraham rejoiced because he saw the day of Christ (See John 8:56), and when He rebuked the disciples because they did not believe the Old Testament Scriptures which prophesied of His coming, suffering, and subsequent glory: *“Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”* (Luke 24:25–27, KJV) The Old Testament prophecies of Jesus were so clear that Jesus rebuked them for not believing them. This would have been impossible if the prophecies were vague, imprecise, and could only have been interpreted in light of the New Testament after Jesus' ascension into Heaven.

When we come to an Old Testament quotation in our New Testament which gives us pause to think that there is a difference between the NT writer's meaning and the OT meaning, then we should seriously consider what the body of OT truth has to say about the matter before we hastily declare that the NT writers were inspired to use the OT in a way inconsistent with the intent of the OT writers, or that the NT writers added meaning to the OT texts. When writing inspired Scripture the NT writers did not miss anything about the OT texts, but we may very well be missing much. I am sure that we are. I trust that this study will help us to consider how we must carefully approach the Scriptures when we study them, and that we should certainly appreciate the richness of the OT texts more than we do.