

THE MESSIANIC PROPHECIES

Matthew, in his gospel, shows that there are prophecies in the Old Testament that foreshadow the coming of Jesus. Each Christmas time many of these Old Testament passages are read out in carol services. But which prophet said what, and when? This resource helps you to identify the main ones.

These prophecies can be puzzling because it's clear that the Old Testament prophets were talking about something closer to their own time. They weren't saying "This is a prophecy about the Messiah. I predict that, in many centuries' time, Israel will have an amazing leader who will also be the saviour of the world." Each prophet spoke about things in his own time but, without them being aware of it, the Holy Spirit speaking through them was pointing forward to Jesus. Christian eyes can see Jesus reflected all over the Old Testament. As Matthew writes his gospel, it's as if he invites us to play a kind of game of "Snap" as he points out the parallels between the events he describes and passages in the Old Testament.

It seems that sometimes prophecy can be multi-referencing. The prophetic word of God echoes down the centuries, ever creating new fulfilments. The prophet stands on a mountain top and sees other peaks stretching off into the distance, while the valleys between are hidden from his view. And then there are patterns that spring from the character of God and are repeated again and again because they are an expression of who God is, for example the barren woman who has a child.

This table will help you to reference some of the reflections of the Messiah that Matthew draws our attention to, especially those which have become so much part of Christmas.

Messianic Prophecies			
Prophecy	New Testament reference	Old Testament reference	Date and Explanation
I will open my mouth in parables	Mat 13 v 35	Psalm 78 v 2	About 1000 BC. David is speaking about himself but it is fulfilled as a prophecy in his Jesus, his descendant.
"Out of Egypt..."	Matthew 2 v 15	Hosea 11 v 1	About 800 BC. Hosea lived in Israel. His message was a warning from God that he would have to abandon Israel unless they changed their ways. But it's full of love. Hosea portrays God as the husband of an adulteress who loves her and wants her back in spite of what she has done. He also shows God as a loving father whose child has gone astray. He alludes to the time when the Israelites were slaves in Israel. Jesus goes into exile in Egypt when Herod kills the baby boys in Bethlehem but God brings him back. Matthew sees a

			link between Israel being in Egypt and Jesus being here. He's writing to Jews and he can say to them that this shows Jesus' complete identification with the nation.
The virgin shall conceive...	Matthew 2 V 23	Isaiah 7 v 12--17-	<p>Isaiah lived in Jerusalem. In 737 BC. Israel and Syria joined forces to invade Judah. God commanded Isaiah to go and meet King Ahaz, and to get him to ask God for a sign. Ahaz refuses and Isaiah gives this sign as God's reply</p> <p>The prophecy concerns "the (not 'a') young woman", in other words one known to the King. For Isaiah the prophecy might have referred to the birth of Ahaz's son, Hezekiah, in 729 BC. By 724, when Hezekiah was 5, The political map had totally changed both Syria and Israel had been wiped out by Assyria.</p> <p>Alternatively, the "young woman" may have referred to the city of Jerusalem (as in Isaiah 37 v 22).</p> <p>The Holy Spirit, however, was also pointing forward to Jesus. "Young woman" in the Hebrew became "virgin:" when translated into Greek.</p>
But you, Bethlehem...	Mathew 2 v 6	Micah 4 v 11-5 v 5	About 724 BC. Israel and Syria have been eaten up by the Assyrian empire (Nineveh), so fulfilling Isaiah's prediction. The Assyrians are now attacking Judah and Jerusalem in under siege. Micah prophesies the rise of a strong leader to rescue Judah in very similar terms as Isaiah. Again he might have thought it referred to Hezekiah but the Holy Spirit was pointing to someone greater.
The people walking in darkness	Mathew 4 v 15-16	Isaiah 9	<p>The land of Zebulun and Naphtali (Israelite tribes) lived in the area around Galilee. As the Assyrian invasion threatened, the people there turned to spiritualists and the like to try to get a message of hope but this only compounded their darkness as what they got was predictions of doom. But the people of Judah have hope because of the child who has been born (Hezekiah?). "As in the day of Midian's defeat" refers back to Gideon.</p> <p>These prophecies relate probably to Hezekiah who was one of the most godly kings of Judah. In his day the Assyrians came right up to Jerusalem</p>

			<p>and surrounded it. This event is reported in Kings Chronicles but also in Isaiah 36-39. In Isaiah 37 v 26 God says to Sennacherib "I planned from of old what I bring to pass. You've done this and done that but you've only been able to do those things because I let you and I let you do them because it's part of my plan.</p> <p>So the God who inspires prophecy is a God who has a plan. Prophecy is God through the Holy Spirit, making us aware of his plans. He was allowing Isaiah and Ahaz and Hezekiah a peek into his plans but we can see what they can't, which is that there was an even greater part of his plan to come which involved our salvation as a result of the birth, life, death, resurrection and enthronement of Jesus. Jesus' public ministry started in the Galilee area and this reminds Matthew of Isaiah's prophecy for the people of that region.</p>
"He shall be called a Nazarene"	Matthew 2 v 21-23	Perhaps Isaiah 11 v 1-9	There is no reference in the Old Testament to the Messiah being a Nazarene. However in Hebrew, Nazareth was spelled "Natsareth" Ancient Hebrew did not originally write vowels. The consonant sequence "ntsr" occurs in a noun that means "branch" and also in a verb that means to "hide" or "keep safe". Both of these occur in Isaiah 11. So Matthew may be referring to this prophecy, that dates from the same time when Judah was under attack from the Assyrians.
"Rachel weeping for her children"	Matthew 2 v 18	Jeremiah 31 v 15	The Assyrian threat was removed but, a couple of centuries later, a new army, threatened Judah - the Babylonians. Jeremiah warned that the God would let the Babylonians destroy Judah unless its inhabitants changed their ways. Judah was defeated in 586 BC and much of the population was deported to Babylon. Ramah was where they were herded together prior to deportation. Jeremiah imagines Rachel, the mother of the nation, weeping over its destruction. Matthew sees her weeping again in sympathy with the women of Bethlehem whose sons were slaughtered.
The voice of one crying in the wilderness	Matthew 3 v 3	Isaiah 40 v 3	After 70 years' exile in Babylonia the Jews are allowed if they wish to return to their country - and many do. The prophet, probably a disciple of Isaiah

			(who died before or during the exile) imagines God clearing the way before them by his command. Matthew sees John the Baptist as fulfilling the same prophetic role as he heralds the advent of God's kingdom in Jesus.
"He took up our infirmities"	Matthew 8 v 17	Isaiah 53	The Prophet is talking about someone in his own time. King Jehoiacin might fit the bill because the Babylonians ill-treated him but then gave him a place of honour at King Nebuchadnezzar's table. But Matthew sees the prophecy as a picture of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.
Riding on a donkey	Matthew 21 v 45	Zechariah 9 v 9	Babylon (modern day Iraq) was conquered by Persia (Iran). The Persian Emperor, Cyrus allowed the Jews to return home. Zechariah lived in this period, about 520BC when Jews were starting to drift back to Jerusalem. He was hoping for Judah to once more become a self-governing kingdom but the fulfilment had to wait until Jesus mounted the donkey to ride into Jerusalem, about 500 years later.