

## GOSPEL WRITERS CONNECT JESUS TO THE OLD TESTAMENT IN BOTH TRANSPARENT AND ROUNDABOUT WAYS<sup>1</sup>

(Michael S. Heiser)

Since the New Testament begins with the Gospels, and Jesus is the focus of those first four books, we tend to think of Jesus exclusively in New Testament terms. That's too narrow a perspective. The coming of the Messiah, the Son of God, is rooted in the Old Testament, not only in terms of prophecy but also imagery.

We've already talked about the most obvious way the Gospel writers associate Jesus with the Old Testament: calling him the Anointed One ("Christ"). Other transparent correlations extend from that Messianic tide. The Gospel writers quote specific prophecies about the birthplace of the Messiah (Matt. 2:6; John 7:42; cf. Micah 5:2) and the lineage of the Messiah (Matt. 1:1; cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 132:11; Isa. 11:1).

Less obvious, but still familiar, connections are made between Jesus and the Old Testament in other ways. When John calls Jesus the "Word," that label is not original to him. The God of Israel appeared to people in the Old Testament as the "Word" (John 1:1,14; cf. Gen.15:1-6; Jer.1:1-9). And the title "Son of Man" had royal messianic meaning (Matt. 26:64; cf. Dan. 7:13-14).

But the Gospel writers tether Jesus to the Old Testament in cleverer, less overt ways. For example, Matthew wants readers to identify Jesus with the nation of Israel. He accomplishes that in his story of Jesus's childhood. After Joseph and Mary had to flee to Egypt to escape Herod, Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1 ("Out of Egypt I have called my son") to recount how they returned to the promised land. But God's son in Hosea 11:1 wasn't the Messiah; it was the nation of Israel. Matthew used the analogy for several reasons, but one of them was that Jesus had appeared on the scene supernaturally, just like Israel appeared as the result of divine intervention with Abraham and Sarah. Israel would later pass through the sea and then journey into the desert where the nation would be tried and tempted (Ex.14-15; Num.14:26ff.). After Jesus was baptized, he was driven into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan (Mark 1:9-13).

Jesus is also cast as a new Moses by the Gospel writers. When Moses was born, Pharaoh had all the infant boys killed (Ex. 1:22- 2:10), and Jesus was likewise threatened by Herod (Matt. 2:13-18). Moses went up on a mountain to receive the Law (Ex. 19:3): Jesus ascended a mountain to give his own "law," the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1).

Links back into the Old Testament are strewn throughout the Gospels. They also appear in other parts of the New Testament. Paying careful attention to how writers quote the Old Testament, where Jesus goes, and what he says at a given location will help you see them.



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<sup>1</sup> This is taken from a book I highly recommend, *Brief Insights on Mastering the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), pp.151-152.