

Introduction:

Almost all Christians accept that the Old Testament in Scripture given by God. However, few Christians know what to make of the Old Testament. Some of this may be due to the fact that most preachers do not preach from the Old Testament much. The Old Testament though is important to understand as Christians. All Christians need to understand the Old Testament in order to understand the New Testament because the New Testament makes use of the Old Testament. Understanding how the New Testament uses the Old will enable to better understand how we need to read the Bible. By seeing Biblical hermeneutics modeled we may see the importance of reading God's word as it is intended. This will help us to apply the Bible better to our everyday lives. In this paper we will see what Matthew's use of the Old Testament is. I propose to show that Matthew's use of a generic fulfillment in the Old Testament text is used by Matthew to aid his apologetical purpose and his pastoral concerns.

Isaiah's Purpose of Writing and Audience:

The occasion for the writing of Isaiah is clearly given in 1:4, "They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged." Therefore, Isaiah writes to Judah and Jerusalem to call them to repentance from their rebellion against God. In calling back God's people to repentance Isaiah underlines the faithfulness of the covenant God Yahweh to His people.¹ The people have been utterly unfaithful to God. They have broken covenant. Yet despite their covenantal unfaithfulness God forgives and delivers. God Himself will deal with the

¹ Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd Ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991) 418.

covenant unfaithfulness of His people through His servant who will bear the sins of many in the new covenant (e.g. Isa. 53:12).

Context of Isaiah 6:

Isaiah 6 is most known for its description of the glory of the Lord appearing in the temple. It is also often understood in terms of Isaiah's call to prophetic ministry. Within the historical context of Isaiah verses 9-10 are verses of judgement on Israel. This judgement is the result of the obstinate resistance of the people who continually heard and continually saw, but still remained resistant toward God. As a result of their resistance "the Lord proceeded to shut the door of repentance against His people. Nevertheless He directed the prophet to preach repentance, because the judgement of hardness suspended over the people as a whole did not preclude the possibility of the salvation of individuals."² Isaiah asks how long this judgement is to last, to which God responded "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste." (Isa 6:11) The fulfillment of this prophecy was to begin with the Assyrian invasion, continue through the Babylonian exile, and did not end until there was a righteous people in the land again.³

Matthew's Purpose of Writing:

Matthew's purpose in writing was apologetical. Matthew wanted to show that Jesus is the Messiah. Central to this purpose is to show that Jesus fulfills the scriptures which attest to the

² Franz Delitzsh, *Biblical Commentary on The Prophecies of Isaiah*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eedrdmans Publishing Company, 1954) 201.

³ G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007) 47.

Messiah. Promise and fulfillment therefore plays a large role in his demonstrating this. Matthew is able to give an apology for things which may seem at first to contradict Matthew's claim that Jesus is the Messiah. For example, the messiah was to be from Bethlehem yet people knew that Jesus was from Nazareth. Matthew explains this seeming discrepancy by telling the story of Jesus' descent into Egypt. "The same might be said of the apologetic character of some of the details in the resurrection narrative which are peculiar to Matthew (.e.g. the story of the bribing of the guard, which would refute any allegation that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus)."⁴

There are several pastoral concerns that Matthew has in writing his gospel. Many of these concerns which he has is about Jewish to Gentile relations. He is concerned with the mission to Gentiles. He emphasizes that the Gentiles are now included in the people of God.⁵ Matthew confronts the "us" versus "them" mentality in the church.⁶ Finally, Matthew wanted his gospel to serve as instruction for the church as well as a history.⁷

Matthew's Audience:

The audience that Matthew is writing to is debated. Some have argued that Matthew's audience was predominately Gentile, some have argued that Matthew's gospel is like an evangelistic tract

⁴ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990) 33.

⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997) 130-131.

⁶ David A. Silva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Context, Methods, & Ministry Formation*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004) 236.

⁷ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992) 390.

to non-Christian Jews, but most scholars recognize Matthew's audience as being Jewish.⁸ I think that a Jewish audience explains the data that we have. Reasons for thinking that Matthew's gospel is best seen as being written to Jewish-Christians include: (1) Matthew's use of "kingdom of heaven" as a circumlocution for "kingdom of God", (2) Matthew's emphasis on the ongoing validity of the Torah⁹, (3) Matthew compares Jesus with Moses¹⁰, and (4) the Jewish customs of wearing fringes and phylacteries is referenced without any explanation.¹¹

Context of Matthew 13:

In Matthew the quotation of Isaiah 6 follows Jesus' telling of the parable of the sower. The disciples approach Jesus asking him why he speaks in parables. Jesus replies that it is because what he is saying has been given to them but not to the people. He then quotes Isaiah 6:9-10. The historical context which Matthew sets Jesus' citation in is the same as the other Synoptics. However, Matthew's account here is the clearest and most complete account of Jesus' citation of Isaiah 6:9-10.¹² Matthew uses the unique verb *anaplhro/w* (*anaplēroō*) meaning "to completely fulfill" the prophecy. Gundry suggests that this word implies human responsibility and that Matthew's introductory formula is purposely phrased in such a way as to avoid any

⁸ Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997) 133.

⁹ David A. Silva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Context, Methods, & Ministry Formation*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004) 236.

¹⁰ Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994) 162.

¹¹ David A. Silva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Context, Methods, & Ministry Formation*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004) 236.

¹² Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament, 2nd Ed.*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008) 66.

thought of causation by God that might be taken in a way to lessen people's responsibility.¹³

Allison suggests that Matthew's 'that' clearly demonstrates that the text puts the responsibility on the people for not seeing and not hearing.¹⁴ The context of Isaiah is determinative for the context of Jesus' citation in Matthew.¹⁵ God's concealing His word from outsiders only occurs after people have hardened their hearts and repeatedly rejected it. However, His word can always be made known again to people if they will repent.

The Type of Hermeneutic Matthew Employs:

Though it is clear what Matthew's use is not (i.e. an allusion, development, analogy, etc.) it is not entirely clear what Matthew's use is. There are several different options as to what use of the Old Testament Matthew is employing. It is not as easy as one would at first expect to identify the use of the Old Testament here. In light of the categories given in class there are three uses which seem to most plausibly fit with what Matthew is doing here. These three are (1) typology, (2) peshet, and (3) promise and fulfillment. One might argue for each as follows:

Typology:

The way that Israel rejected God helps Matthew's audience to understand why Jesus speaks in parables. As Israel rejected God and the pronounced judgement was that "seeing they won't see" and "hearing they won't hear" so also Jesus speaks in parables to conceal His message to those

¹³ G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007) 46.

¹⁴ Dale C. Allison Jr., *Matthew: A Shorter Commentary*, (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2004) 213.

¹⁵ G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007) 47.

who have resisted God. Carson and Beale point out that Matthew's use of the New Testament here could be taken as such when they say, "Matthew's use here would seem to represent typology pure and simple. Jesus speaks in parables to confirm his opponents in their freely chosen rebellion, just as Isaiah had been sent to prophesy to reinforce his contemporaries' callous hard-heartedness (e.g. France 1971: 68)."¹⁶

Pesher:

The text does fit the form "This is That." If taken this way, this which Jesus is saying (i.e. the parable) is that which Isaiah prophesied would occur. Verse 13 would seem to confirm this when it says, "This is why I speak to them in parables because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." Then in verse 14 Jesus says that this speaking in parables is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. One might think that this option is given more credibility in light of the fact that there is an eschatological element in this passage. Keener confirms this when he says that, "Jesus spoke in parables *because the kingdom was an end-time "mystery" now being revealed to those with ears to hear.*"¹⁷

Promise and Fulfillment:

One might argue that people may have understood Isaiah 6:9-10 as providing a promise about where the the Biblical story is going. One might then identify Jesus' speaking in parables as the fulfillment of Isaiah's promise. This use of the Old Testament text also fits in with the rest of

¹⁶ G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007) 48.

¹⁷ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999) 379.

Matthew and his purpose to demonstrate that Jesus fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Of these options perhaps ‘promise and fulfillment’ best fits Matthew’s use. However, there is an option suggested by D.A. Carson and G.K. Beale that is consistent with saying Matthew uses “promise and fulfillment” here but is more specific. Carson and Beale suggests that, “...*it is perhaps better to classify this as “generic fulfillment”--a prediction that has come true repeatedly, almost continuously, from the time of its utterance to the time of Christ in the first century. Obdurate hearts among some of God’s people seem to characterize some in every generation. McLaughlin (1994) demonstrates the recurrence of this pattern in all three major parts of Isaiah (29:9-10; 44:18; 63:17). The chronological gaps between these passages support the idea that Isaiah understood an ongoing fulfillment to his prophecy concerning Israel’s obduracy.*”¹⁸

I think that Carson and Beale are right to suggest that Matthew’s use of the Old Testament here is a “generic fulfillment”. ‘Promise and fulfillment’ at first looks plausible but in the context of Isaiah, Isaiah is not promising anything so much as he is prophesying what is the result of the peoples sins. Although the form of the passage can be taken in a way that a pesher passage this may be to make too much of the form. The reason I want to take Matthew’s use as a “generic fulfillment” is because I favor the progressive aspect of the prophecy which Carson and Beale suggests. I like it best because it seems to best take into account both the present historical

¹⁸ G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007) 48.

context which Isaiah was addressing as well as the on going redemptive story to the time of Jesus. As was seen in the discussion of the historical context of Isaiah, Isaiah is here addressing an issue specific to his time. He is addressing the issue of Judah's and Jerusalem's hard-heartedness, and resistance toward God. God's people had broken covenant with Him. Isaiah intended this saying specifically for his own time. Yet this is not the only time to which this applies. What Isaiah prophesied characterizes all generation not just his time and Jesus'. I think that Carson's argument for a "generic fulfillment" from the recurrence of the pattern throughout Isaiah is good enough to prove the progressive aspect of this prophecy.

Matthew's Hermeneutical Principles in the Citation of Isaiah:

Matthew respects the historical context of the verses he quotes from Isaiah. We have now seen that Isaiah was writing in the context of Judah and Jerusalem's rebellion toward God. The people hardened their hearts and stubbornly resisted God. The citation from Isaiah was also given in the context of judgement. The consequence of the people's sin was that God would conceal His word from them. Matthew respects this context in Isaiah by applying it to the same situation. The people in Jesus' day also hardened their hearts and resisted God. God's judgement for the hardening of heart is that He concealed the meaning of what he said by speaking in parables. Again, as Carson and Beale pointed out the context of Isaiah is determinative for Matthew. Hence, no one say that Matthew has not adequately considered and applied the historical context of Isaiah 6:9-10.

Matthew also respects the authorial intention of Isaiah. He applies the citation to the context which was intended by Isaiah. Matthew does not say anything outside of Isaiah's intentions. Isaiah intended to communicate the God is no longer disclosing His word to people because they have rejected Him. Isaiah intended to communicate that God judges those who resist Him. Isaiah intended to communicate that if God's people will repent of their sins then God would no longer hide His word from them. Matthew communicates all of these truths as well.

Continuity and Discontinuity:

Isaiah's citation occurs in the context of the judgement of God's people for their rebellious hearts. The judgement which Isaiah prophesied about was fulfilled in the Assyrian invasion and Babylonian exile. Matthew respects this context of the people being rebellious but places it within a new eschatological situation which does not see God's people coming under judgement by invasion or exile. Instead of judgement, Matthew places the eschatological situation in Jesus' fulfillment of the Isaiah's prophecy. By citing Isaiah Matthew accomplishes his apologetic purpose of showing that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament Scriptures. He also accomplishes his pastoral aim of instructing the Christians in the church.

Why Matthew Quotes Isaiah:

I think that Matthew quotes Isaiah to accomplish his apologetical purpose as well as instructing the church. By quoting Isaiah Matthew demonstrates that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament Scriptures and undermines claims that try to deny that Jesus is the Messiah. He quotes Isaiah to

instruct the church. He informs them that God does not give the ability to understand His word to those who obstinately resist and reject Him.