

he speaks in parables (ch. 13 links to Isa. ch.6), shows his disdain for the traditions of the Pharisees, (ch.15 links to Isa. ch.29):

‘these people honour me with lip service only ..’

refers to Himself as the cornerstone (ch.21 links to Isa. ch. 28), foretells the destruction of Jerusalem by re-interpreting Daniel (ch.24 links to Daniel ch.9, 11, 12):

‘for then there will be great distress, unparalleled since the world began’

and foretells aspects of His capture with the scattering of the apostles after His arrest (ch.26 links to Zech. ch.13):

‘I shall strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’

and especially when addressing Himself as Son of Man in the context of the ‘end of time’ (ch.24 and 26 linked too Daniel ch.7):

‘.. sun darkened .. stars fall .. then the Son of Man will appear in heaven’

‘You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power coming on the clouds of Heaven’

An important prophecy Jesus addresses to Himself is from Isa. ch.61, after he had read it in the synagogue at Capernaum at the outset of His mission (Luke ch.4):

‘The spirit of the Lord is upon me .. he has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives .. this text is being fulfilled today even as you are listening’

All of the above are important for us to understand how Jesus saw Himself, how He interpreted the OT prophecies, His attitude to the Jewish hierarchy, and their response to Him.



Understanding The Bible and Our Faith

12

Fulfilment of Prophecies

How New Testament authors used OT prophecies



Questions for Reflection

1. Doesn't the New Testament prove that the classical prophets could foretell the future after all?
2. Why didn't all the Jews recognise that OT prophecies had been fulfilled in Jesus?
3. Can any of the prophecies claimed as fulfilled by NT authors be incorrect?

How Old Testament Prophecy is Used in the New Testament

Relevant Old Testament prophetic passages are used in the NT to emphasise that the time of their fulfilment had now arrived in the form of Jesus Christ.

In general, it is important, though, to notice the difference between those OT prophetic passages that are offering hope for the future and those that were originally intended for the prophets immediate audience. The former were used by NT writers as prophecies fulfilled in Christ (whether they were so intended or not at the time), while the latter were often used by Jesus and the NT writers (particularly St. Paul) either to admonish the Jews or to interpret Jewish history and/or beliefs in the context of the Covenant with God (Yahweh).

This booklet will concentrate only on those NT books that particularly use OT prophecy. These are:

- The Gospel of Matthew
- The Acts of the Apostles
- The Letter to the Romans

What these all have in common is their particular concern to convince and convert a Jewish audience; hence the importance given in them to the OT prophecies.

Rather than examining the above books in turn, a more valuable approach may be to consider the prophecies in the books under two headings:

- those used by *the writers* of the NT books as commentary on NT events in order to point to Jesus, prove the significance of the events and convert other Jews
- those *ascribed to Jesus* to describe Himself, or others, or particular events

Prophecies Used as Commentary

Matthew's Gospel is intended particularly for a Jewish audience, to persuade them that Jesus fulfils OT prophecy. Of great importance is to remember that Christianity started out as a Jewish sect, only later extending itself to Gentiles (non-Jews).

Matthew, therefore, wishes to show that everything about Jesus was foreseen, even details of His birth: the Virgin Birth (Isa. ch.7), His birth in Bethlehem (Micah ch.5), a connection to Egypt (Hosea ch.11), a reference to mourning over children (Jer. ch.31). Also, there is a claimed prophecy about Jesus



being from Nazareth (Matt. ch. 2) but this has no obvious OT source, but may have meant something to his Jewish audience. Later (ch.4) he includes a prophecy of Isaiah (ch.8 and 9) to explain Jesus' move to Capernaum.

All of the above are unique to Matthew, and several seem forced in the sense that their original context is clearly for their own time. For this reason, scholars would have reservations about their validity, particularly given Matthew's particular emphasis to portray Jesus as the Jewish Messiah.

Matthew elaborates the role of the Baptist (ch.3 links to Isa. ch.40), refers to Jesus as a miracle worker (ch.8 links to Isa. ch.53), and Jesus' concern not to be a celebrity (ch. 12 links to Isa. ch.42).

Matthew is also the only evangelist to include Zechariah's mention (Zech. ch.11) of 30 pieces of silver in the story of Judas (Matt. ch.26), but again the OT text is taken out of a different context and, in addition, by incorrectly attributing it to Jeremiah (Matthew ch.27), this all makes its association in the Judas betrayal story unlikely.

In Acts, the first chapters show how the message of salvation, the Kerygma, was spread to other Jews, especially in Jerusalem where Peter uses Joel (ch.3) to open his preaching.

Later in Acts, Philip explains to the Ethiopian how the 4th servant Song (Isa. ch.53) refers to Jesus.

At the end of Acts, Paul is shown in a state of desperation, having failed to convince the Roman Jews about Jesus despite arguing from the 'Law of Moses' and the prophets. He finally quotes Isaiah (ch.6) about:

'listening but never understanding, looking but never perceiving'

which, interestingly, is a reference used by Jesus for why he spoke in parables (Matthew ch.13).

In Romans, St. Paul (ch.4) uses the 4th Servant Song (Isa. ch.53) to show Jesus as Redeemer, as well as another prophecy from Trito Isaiah (ch.59) which he joins to a text from first Isaiah (ch.27) to proclaim the eventual conversion of the Jews (Romans ch.11).

Prophecies Used by Jesus and Their Importance

Although the Gospel references for these are taken from Matthew, significantly Mark and Luke parallel most of them. This is a strong indicator of their authenticity.

Jesus knows of the Baptist's special role (Matt. ch.11 links to Malachi ch.3), He explains why

