

Matthew's Typology in the Christmas Story

by Jeremiah Shawver
Youth Pastor

parksidevisalia.org

This week, I saw a YouTube video by Rabbi Tovia Singer; his goal was to show how Christians do not understand the Old Testament, specifically the book of Isaiah. In discussing the servant songs of Isaiah, he correctly pointed out that Isaiah 41 was about Israel as a nation. He contended that Jesus could not fulfill a prophecy about the people of Israel. The issue in his critique of the Christian view of scripture was that he failed to see the typology the New Testament authors use in their understanding of the Hebrew Bible.

What is Typology?

"A method of biblical interpretation by which a person, event, or institution ("type") in the Old Testament corresponds to another one ("antitype") in the New Testament within the framework of salvation history." [\[1\]](#)

As we approach Christmas this weekend, I wanted to demonstrate this framework in Matthew's birth narrative. This allows us to understand the Old Testament and to answer the question of Isaiah 41.

Matthew and Fulfillment

In the Gospel of Matthew, the Old Testament is seen as being fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He begins with the genealogy of Jesus, demonstrating that Jesus is both the son of Abraham and the son of David. The family line of Jesus sets him up to reestablish the kingdom

of the Davidic Covenant. Matthew, in contrast to Luke, focuses on Joseph throughout the birth narrative. Through this narrative, Jesus is shown to correspond to Moses, Israel, and Samson.

Matthew begins with Joseph having his first dream; an angel tells him of the birth of Jesus and that his name is going to be "Jesus because he will save his people from their sins." Here, Jesus' name is a demonstration of his fulfillment of the Old Testament. He saves people from their sins and fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that the name of the child born to the virgin will be called Immanuel. Here, it is clear that Matthew understands the name Immanuel is to be a part of the mission of Jesus as God with us. He will eventually conclude his Gospel with the words of Jesus: "I will be with you always to the end of the age."

Jesus and Moses

Following the birth of Jesus, the Magi came to worship him. Upon their arrival, they ask Herod the location of "the one born King of the Jews." In opposition to Herod – an appointed monarch – Jesus has a rightful claim to the throne in Jerusalem. After finding Jesus, The Magi escape from Herod, having been warned in a dream. Herod determines to get rid of this new king by killing the boys aged two and younger in Bethlehem. Jesus is seen as corresponding with Moses beginning in this passage. Jesus and Moses are delivered

(continued on back)

from the slaughter of infants, they go through the waters of baptism, they are tempted in the wilderness, and they both give the law. There are several more comparisons that could be made as one reads the Gospel of Matthew.

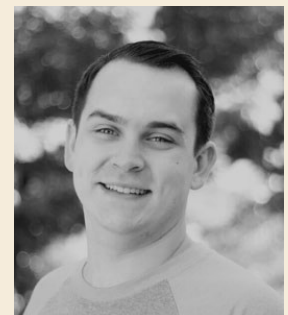
Jesus and Israel

To escape Herod's anger, Joseph is warned in another dream to flee to Egypt. In so doing, Matthew says that the words of Hosea are fulfilled: "Out of Egypt I called my son." Here, Jesus corresponds to the people of Israel – as with Moses, the life story of Jesus parallels the people of Israel. Jesus represents the people of Israel as the faithful son of God who is able to keep the law of Moses. So also in Isaiah 41, Jesus corresponds to the people of Israel as the servant of God.

Jesus and Samson

Finally, in the last passage of Matthew 2, Jesus and his family move to Nazareth because of Joseph's final dream. Matthew says this fulfilled the prophecy that the messiah "would be called a Nazarene." This is a difficult text with several possible interpretations. As I understand it, this is a reference to the final judge of the Book of Judges, who was a Nazarite. Samson was a deliverer of his people who were being oppressed by the Philistines. Joseph is told that Jesus would save his people from their sins. Both Samson and Jesus were set apart to be miraculous deliverers of the people of Israel. While Jesus does not keep the commands of the Nazarite vow, Jesus corresponds to Samson because of his miraculous birth, his separation as God's chosen judge, and His mission to rescue the people of God from their oppressors.

Rabbi Tovia Singer missed this understanding of the Old Testament. I wonder, as we approach Christmas, how often we, too, miss the prophecies about Christ, which show him as our prophet, priest, king, and judge. This Christmas season, I would challenge you to read through Matthew's birth narrative slowly and make note of the fulfillment language Matthew uses. What becomes clear is that Matthew presents the Old Testament as pointing in each instance to the advent, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.



Jeremiah Shawver, Youth Pastor
Email: Jeremiah@parksidevisalia.org

[1] Friedbert Ninow, "Typology," ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1341.