

Question:

How can we understand and therefore present more of a Jewish understanding when it comes to the New Covenant writings, whether we are talking to a Jewish non-Believer or a Gentile Believer (Christian)? How do we counter anti-missionaries and Gentile believers who do not fully embrace either Messiah or the Jewishness of Messiah?

Response:

Matthew's Complex Understanding

A common tactic in denouncing the New Covenant writings by anti-missionaries is to refute the validity of its contents by defusing the basis of its conveyed understanding. In other words, more often than naught, you will hear the argument “that's not what that Scripture says / means”. The argument being made is that the author is “misquoting” or “misapplying” the verse and therefore is drawing a conclusion that can not be supported by that Scripture. By using this tactic brings into question not only the substance of the material, but also the validity of the author's understanding.

Anti-missionaries tend to focus their attack of the New Covenant writings solely based on the P'shat, the plain and direct meaning of the Scriptures. That being, what it says is what it means and therefore is how it is to be understood. Needless to say, within the Jewish world of understanding the Hebrew Scriptures, this is not the sole and exclusive method used. Other means by which those who have studied the Hebrew Scriptures over the centuries have employed include Remez, Sod and Drash / Midrashic methods, for which I believe are to be found within Matthew's Gospel.

What do we know about the one whose name appears on the first Gospel of the New Covenant?

In reality, there is very little written about him or further identified in other writings. However, I believe there is enough written that will help us to better understand more than we may truly realize. Call this a midrash about Matthew.

First, we must make the following statement in order to further convey the premise of this paper, that being Matthew's writings are extremely complex and convey an understanding of one who is quite learned. There are some who believe that Matthew's Gospel was authored not by Matthew but by someone else, therefore its author is unknown. However, I will assert and believe that Matthew is the writer of the Gospel that bears his name.

I believe the identity of the author to be important based on what we do know, because it will further establish the validity of the author, his command and understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures which are exceptional, ultimately on par with Sha'ul.

I believe Matthew identified himself in his own Gospel:

Mat 9:9 As Yeshua passed on from there he spotted a tax-collector named Mattityahu sitting in his collection booth. He said to him, "Follow me!" and he got up and followed him.

Here, he identifies himself as a tax collector. A profession that is not admired in Judea at the time of Roman occupation, yet in two parallel passages:

Luk 5:27 Later Yeshua went out and saw a tax-collector named Levi sitting in his tax-collection booth; and he said to him, "Follow me!"

Mar 2:14 As he passed on from there, he saw Levi Ben-Halfai sitting in his tax-collection booth and said to him, "Follow me!" And he got up and followed him.

Matthew is identified as Levi and Levi Ben-Halfai (Levi son of Halfai). In all likelihood, Matthew, also known as Levi is likely a descendant of Ya'akov's son Levi, making him a Levite. The Levites were given the

responsibility of administering the instructions of Adonai throughout Israel. It is therefore possible that Matthew's background could have also been as a Torah teacher, which would further substantiate his credentials and therefore provide us with further insight regarding his understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures. This would be in addition to the devotion to education within the Jewish community and the commitment to teach their children in Torah, as instructed in Deuteronomy 6:6 -7:

Deu 6:6 These words, which I am ordering you today, are to be on your heart;

Deu 6:7 and you are to teach them carefully to your children. You are to talk about them when you sit at home, when you are traveling on the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

This level of educational commitment towards children is what would be considered foundational for every child. As a Levite, Matthew likely receive additional education based on the responsibility afforded the Levites. What we are talking about would be considered by today's standard as a higher education or advanced degree. I believe this level of education would be on par with Sha'ul's education under Gamli'el:

Act 22:3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city and trained at the feet of Gamli'el in every detail of the Torah of our forefathers. I was a zealot for God, as all of you are today.

In other words, Matthew was no novice or uneducated “hick”.

The Gospel of Matthew is a very Jewish presentation of the Gospel of Yeshua. It is complex in its presentation when conveying Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel from a Jewish perspective. These complexities are interwoven into the text, offering subtle aspects in relating the Hebrew Scriptures to Yeshua not to mention bold statements. If Matthew is the author, the content of this Gospel would indicate him to be extremely well educated, for which I would parallel him to Sha'ul. Furthermore, we see Matthew using tools of the Rabbis of his day, remez, drash and sod in presenting the Good News of Yeshua. His writing is most certainly not of someone uneducated or unfamiliar to the tools available to the teachers of his time in

understanding the Hebrew Scriptures.

The complex nature of Matthew's writing can be found throughout, but when he conveys significant importance in relation to Isaiah chapters 7 through 11 we truly see his level of understanding. By today's standards a great disservice is being conveyed. This disservice is based on a common aspect among believers who do not apply many of the Jewish tools when understanding Scripture. Many people are taught to in essence isolate Scripture from its greater context. For instance, Isaiah 7:14, pertaining to the "virgin birth" is over emphasized as a prophetic Scripture yet is only quote once in the New Covenant writings:

Mat 1:23 "The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and they will call him `Immanu El." (The name means, "God is with us.")

This is the only place where Isaiah 7:14 is quoted. Yet, based on its emphasis, you would think it would be found in several places. Even though this verse is important, when understanding Isaiah, there is important context that goes beyond this verse. When we look further at Matthew's presentation of not only this verse but also his reference to Isaiah 9:6 and 11:1, Matthew is utilizing the aspect of Remez, wherein a word, phrase or other element in the text hints at a truth not conveyed by the *p'shat* of that verse. In referencing these verses throughout his presentation, Matthew is conveying a much bigger picture, in relation to Yeshua, yet doing so in a subtle manner. So subtle that if you did not understand these methods being used, would never realize the connections Matthew is making.

Isaiah 9:6 is referenced by Matthew indirectly (subtly) through his reference of Isaiah 9:1:

Mat 4:14 This happened in order to fulfill what Yesha`yahu the prophet had said,

Mat 4:15 "Land of Z'vulun and land of Naftali, toward the lake, beyond the Yarden, Galil-of-the-Goyim —

Mat 4:16 the people living in darkness have seen a great light; upon those living in the region, in the shadow of death, light has dawned."

Ultimately providing a hint to the reader - “look at Isaiah 9”. Unfortunately, today, believers are not taught how to understand Scripture from a Jewish perspective. One might say, “what does this have to do with Isaiah 9:6:

Isa 9:6 (9:5) For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; dominion will rest on his shoulders, and he will be given the name Pele-Yo`etz El Gibbor Avi-`Ad Sar-Shalom [*Wonder of a Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace*],

How is Matthew connecting these verses? Believers tend to isolate and compartmentalize Scripture, yet by doing so, ultimately ignores context and therefore can hide important truths. For centuries, Jews have been taught to look at Scripture much differently. We have been taught that when a Scripture is quoted, not to look solely at the verse quoted but to look at the entire context of the passage that verse is from. Matthew is referencing verses based on this understanding and is expecting the reader to utilize this Jewish understanding of Scripture when reading his Gospel.

Why this expectation from Matthew? Why does he expect the readers to follow the clues. Simply put, he was writing to a Jewish audience. In some instances writers make assumptions about the audience they are writing to, therefore, his expectations are not unwarranted.

Therefore, when one realizes the methods being used by Matthew in his writing, the reader can follow the path presented out by the author. In doing so, a much greater understanding of these Scriptures is revealed. A significant message to the House of David is being conveyed.

Matthew further conveys the significance of Isaiah 7 – 11 with his reference to Isaiah 11:1:

Mat 2:23 and settled in a town called Natzeret, so that what had been spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he will be called a Natzrati.

Isa 11:1 But a branch will emerge from the trunk of Yishai, a shoot will grow from his roots.

Not only does Matthew understand these verses but is applying a midrashic technique in connecting these Scriptures in a precise and synergistic manner to convey a much bigger picture than if you were to isolate these Scriptures. Matthew's use of this verse in his Gospel, conveys an understanding that has long been understood, yet is doing so in a way that is also a very Jewish method...a play on words. The play on words occurs not in the English translation, but with the Hebrew.

Matthew conveys that the Messiah will be called a Natzrati, yet there is no Hebrew Scripture that conveys He will originate from Natzeret, but will come from Beit Lechem (Micah 5:2) and is alluded to in Matthew 2:6. Matthew's intelligent use of this play on words relates to what is translated as trunk / stump and in Hebrew is netser. This term netser can also be translated as semach. It has long been understood that Messiah is the semach as conveyed in Jeremiah 23:5:

Jer 23:5 "The days are coming," says Adonai when I will raise a righteous Branch for David. He will reign as king and succeed, he will do what is just and right in the land.

Another subtle aspect to Matthew's wording in this verse is that he uses Prophets (plural), thus indicating that this concept, not verse, is conveyed by other Prophets as well. One can look at Zechariah for further confirmation towards the Semach being Messiah:

Zec 3:8 Listen, cohen gadol Y'hoshua, both you and your colleagues seated here before you, because these men are a sign that I am going to bring my servant Tzemach [*Sprout*].

So, Matthew's writing is extremely complex and uses many common Jewish tools in understanding the Hebrew Scriptures. To delve even further into Matthew's writing, the anti-missionaries accuse him of being sloppy when it comes to referencing Scripture and applying erroneous context in order to substantiate a claim that justifies his position in stating that Yeshua is the Messiah. One such passage the anti-missionaries use is Matthew 2:15:

Mat 2:15 where he stayed until Herod died. This happened in order to fulfill what Adonai had said through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

This verse references Hosea 11:1:

Hos 11:1 "When Isra'el was a child, I loved him; and out of Egypt I called my son."

The primary arguments made by the anti-missionaries regarding this verse are as follows:

1. Matthew is not quoting the entire verse, only part of it
2. Matthew is ignoring the context of this verse because it clearly speaks of Israel, not Messiah

Yet what Matthew is doing, is using the following methods used by the Rabbis that are accepted within the Jewish community when studying the Hebrew Scriptures...

1. Quoting part of a verse that “flags” it and prompts the reader to look at either the entire verse or passage of Scripture
2. Drawing a parallel (also known as Thematic Analysis)
3. Developing a midrashic conclusion through this parallel

In quoting a portion of Hosea 11:1, conveys to a Jewish reader – look at this passage. The Rabbis and Sages in their writings reference part of a verse with the understanding that the reader knows the verse / passage that is being referenced or will read it directly, as part of their studies. Consider this method to be a means to reference Scripture without having to quote the entire passage.

Matthew is doing something rather remarkable, yet requires a certain level of understanding by the reader. In quoting part of Hosea 11:1, in relation to Yeshua's earlier years does far more than can be read on the surface,

the p'shat. In order to comprehend what Matthew is doing, the reader must have a greater understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures and how they are studied. One could say that Matthew is applying both remez and sod with this verse.

Regarding the remez (hint), Matthew is hinting at a truth not conveyed by the p'shat, the connection between Yeshua and Israel, yet he is expecting the reader to make this connection. Should the reader make this connection they would in essence be revealing a sod (mystery) that was concealed in the Hebrew Scriptures regarding Messiah. Herein, by connecting Israel to Messiah, we can draw many parallels between Israel and Yeshua, based solely on Matthew's reference of Hosea 11:1:

- Israel goes to Egypt in its infancy years (Exodus 1:1 – 6), while Yeshua is recorded by Matthew as having gone to Egypt as an infant (Matthew 2:13).
- A decree to kill all the first born of Israel while they were in Egypt (Exodus 1:15 – 16), while a decree to kill all the infants at the time of Yeshua's birth was conveyed by King Herod (Matthew 2:8)

By being called out of Egypt, Matthew indicates that it is safe for Yeshua to return to Judea.

These two parallels that Matthew alludes to by referencing Hosea 11:1, establish an important connection, relating Israel to Yeshua as the Jewish Messiah. What the anti-missionaries consider to be erroneous is not only a valid method used by Rabbis but is extremely sophisticated in its execution. In drawing these two parallels, enables us to draw more parallels, therefore further establishing the validity of Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel.

Other parallels include:

- Israel crossed the Jordan while Yeshua was immersed in the Jordan (One could also draw this parallel to the Red Sea)

- Israel is called God's Son (Exodus 4:22), Yeshua is called God's Son
- Israel is tested for 40 years in the wilderness, Yeshua is tested for 40 days in the desert, quoting Deuteronomy 3 times (the book about the wilderness wanderings.)
- God gathering His people at the foot of a mountain to receive Torah - Sinai, Yeshua gathering the people at the foot of a mountain, Yeshua teaches Torah at the foot of the mountain (sermon on the mount)

What do all these parallels convey?

To the reader that is not aware of these parallels, the intent of Matthew is still hidden to them, yet to the reader who has made these connections, further establishes the truth that Yeshua is the Messiah of Israel. He is ultimately the perfect representation and in essence is the fulfillment of Israel's purpose as conveyed by God to the Prophet Isaiah:

Isa 42:1 "Here is my servant, whom I support, my chosen one, in whom I take pleasure. I have put my Spirit on him; he will bring justice to the Goyim.

Isa 42:2 He will not cry or shout; no one will hear his voice in the streets.

Isa 42:3 He will not snap off a broken reed or snuff out a smoldering wick. He will bring forth justice according to truth;

Isa 42:4 he will not weaken or be crushed until he has established justice on the earth, and the coastlands wait for his Torah."

Isa 42:5 Thus says God, Adonai, who created the heavens and spread them out, who stretched out the earth and all that grows from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk on it:

Isa 42:6 "I, Adonai, called you righteously, I took hold of you by the hand, I shaped you and made you a covenant for the people, to be a light for the Goyim,

Isa 42:7 so that you can open blind eyes, free the prisoners from confinement, those living in darkness from the dungeon.

Isa 42:8 I am Adonai; that is my name. I yield my glory to no one else, nor my praise to any idol.

And Isaiah 49:

Isa 49:5 So now Adonai says — he formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Ya`akov back to him, to have Isra'el gathered to him, so that I will be honored in the sight of Adonai, my God having become my strength —

Isa 49:6 he has said, "It is not enough that you are merely my servant to raise up the tribes of Ya`akov and restore the offspring of Isra'el. I will also make you a light to the nations, so my salvation can spread to the ends of the earth."

Contrary to the arguments and accusations raised by the anti-missionaries in relation to Matthew and his Gospel, being erroneous, sloppy, out of context and amateurish, I have presented a rather contrary scenario. Matthew appears to be extremely well skilled in utilizing the tools for understanding the Hebrew Scriptures. These very same tools used by the Rabbis. Matthew's use of remez, midrash and to some extent sod, conveys a learned individual well versed in these methods and whose use of these tools is no less than exceptional. To further draw parallels in a midrashic manner connecting Yeshua with Israel further substantiates the sophisticated manner of Matthew's writing. His writing style, being comparable to the Rabbis in how they reference Scripture further conveys Matthew to be no ordinary individual.

For the Rabbis and anti-missionaries to rest solely on the p'shat as their primary argument against Matthew's Gospel is what I would consider to be amateurish itself. Through the centuries, Rabbis and Sages have used the same methods in establishing many viewpoints that are not nearly as valid as the truths that Matthew reveals to those who read his Gospel, yet, dismiss these very methods.

Matthew provides many deep truths in his Gospel relating Israel to Yeshua, yet when one is not aware of these dynamics is still drinking the milk. These deeper truths are the meat that leads to a much deeper and meaningful understanding of who Yeshua is. Had more attention been paid to these methods used by Matthew, there would likely be less talk over the centuries of the church replacing Israel. To ignore these very tools is ultimately to go into battle with less than the full armor of God.

Course Summary

Parallels between Yeshua and Israel, Yeshua and David

Relationship between netser and semach in relation to Matthew 2:23:

Mat 2:23 and settled in a town called Natzeret, so that what had been spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he will be called a Natzrati.

Principles in understanding prophecy:

1. Messianic prophecies are not clearly identified as such
2. Messianic hope in Israel developed gradually
3. Many biblical prophecies are fulfilled gradually
4. The Prophets saw the Messiah coming on the immediate horizon of history
5. It is important to read every prophecy in its overall context in Scripture
6. Messiah was to be both a priest and King
7. Messiah is ideal representative of His people.

Yeshua in relation to Torah – Matthew 5:17 – 20

A bigger picture similar to that of Isaiah 7 – 11

Prolog – Matthew 5:3 – 16

Primary subject matter – Matthew 5:17 – 7:12

Conclusion – Matthew 7:13 - 27