
LIFE BIBLE STUDY

SESSION OBJECTIVE: MATTHEW 1:18-25

To understand how New Testament people or events fulfill Old Testament prophecies through a method called, "Typology."

A Baby Changes Everything, Pt. 1

It's seems like one of those cliché sayings that everyone sort of tosses around whenever someone announces that they are expecting. "Oh just wait, you'll see. EVERYTHING will change." And of course, no one contests



Babies present all kinds of new experiences for families, but one baby presents a new experience for anyone who will receive Him (Jn 1:12-13).

this idea, because it seems rather common sense that introducing a brand new, human life that is completely incapable of caring for itself would cause quite a lot of change in the expectant parents lives. But then the baby comes, and the cliché becomes reality: a baby really *does* change everything.

While all babies make an incredible impact, no baby has ever changed the world like the one born of a virgin in Bethlehem, described in Matthew 1:18-25. Jesus the Messiah, wrapped in human flesh (Jn 1:14), was born of a virgin in a shockingly similar way to how the prophet Isaiah proclaimed (Is 7:14).

Because of how many small details are jam-packed into this passage, the birth narrative will be broken up into two parts. This week, the goal will be to understand how the Old Testament prophet Isaiah prophetically speaks of the birth of Jesus. Next week, the passage will be placed into its more immediate context and understood with the rest of the New Testament in mind.

What In the World Is Typology?

It's not uncommon for the New Testament to quote the Old Testament. It's also not uncommon for the New Testament to make the claim that whatever is being described is a fulfillment of something that was written in the Old Testament. Consider our text this morning, specifically verse 22: "Now, all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet." Verse 23 then gives a literal quote from Isaiah 7:14. Essentially, Matthew is saying that the birth of Jesus took place in a way that fulfilled something that Isaiah said would happen. This is called a *fulfillment text*. It seems simple enough, right? Whatever is happens in the New Testament is the fulfillment of whatever is being quoted from the Old Testament. While this is true, it's often oversimplified. Today's study will demonstrate some of these unique challenges, and a method to approach these difficulties with.

The method being proposed is one called, "Typology." Typology is a method developed from the Greek word, "tupos" (Heb 8:5, Rom 5:14), and it means, "type, copy, or pattern." Typology suggests *that there are persons and events in the Old Testament that serve as patterns or types of something more definite in the New Testament*. You could say it this way: the Old Testament person or event is the shadow and the New Testament person or event is the substance. Typology is often called the, "near view/far view" phenomenon, because in it we see both the immediate fulfillment of a prophecy, and also a much later, great fulfillment of the same prophecy.

However, we must use great constraint when dealing with typology. We cannot just say that anything from the Old Testament is a type of Christ or a type of something in the New Testament because we think it sounds good. There are rules to the game, after all. **Rule number one** states that the New Testament must actually dictate that typology is at play. In other words, we cannot look at the life of Joseph or Jonah and proclaim that they are, "types of Jesus." Why? Because although it may sound good and there might be similarities, the New Testament never says they are. This is *the rule of definition*. **Rule number two** states that the type must prefigure the fulfillment and have strong corresponding similarities. They have to have corresponding parts. This is *the rule of correspondence*. **Rule number three** states that there must be an increase in intensity from type to fulfillment. What do I mean by that? I mean that the fulfillment found in the New Testament must be greater than the type in the Old Testament. This is *the rule of escalation*. Now, let's see how these rule play into our text this morning.

Isaiah's Immanuel

In order to make the connection between Matthew and Isaiah, the Immanuel figure of Isaiah must first be looked at more carefully. In Isaiah chapter 7, Isaiah speaks to Ahaz (735-715 BC) on God's behalf concerning Rezin and Pekah, the respective kings of Syria and Ephraim (also known as Israel). In the context of this passage, Rezin and Pekah have formed an alliance through which they plan to destroy Ahaz, and God instructs Ahaz to ask for a sign that that will encourage Ahaz to trust God instead of military alliance, but Ahaz foolishly and arrogantly refuses. God decides to give a sign anyway, and Isaiah says to Ahaz speaking on God's behalf, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall call his name Immanuel" (Is 7:14). This is the verse that Matthew says is being fulfilled, therefore, rule number one (the rule of definition)

has been met. There are some stipulations to this sign however, and they are problematic for a *direct prophetic fulfillment* in Matthew.

For one, according to the prophecy, it will be fulfilled during the lifetime of Ahaz. Isaiah describes a child named Immanuel who will not even, “know how to refuse the evil and choose the good” before both Syria and Ephraim are deserted (7:16), a claim that cannot be made about Jesus. An acceptable answer to understanding the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 is that this prophecy was fulfilled in part by Isaiah’s son in the next chapter, Maher-Shalel-Hash-Baz. Beyond that, as mentioned above, the sign given to Ahaz is one that will be realized by him in his lifetime, not even an estimated two years later. With that in mind, the view that Jesus fulfills Isaiah 7:14 prophetically *should be avoided*. It should be noted however, that in its context, there is little reason to think that this was interpreted to be a distant messianic sign in the first place. In fact there is very little early Jewish literature that records Isaiah 7:14, and it is *never* connected to the Messiah.

An important aspect of this passage is that while God’s people are facing the prospect of death at the hands of the alliance of Ephraim and Syria, God gives a sign that promises salvation through His presence with His people. *Immanuel is a guarantee that God’s presence will overcome the enemy that threatens to destroy them*. For the people of Isaiah’s time, the birth of this child would act as a sign that God was present among them in some way, most notably through the Temple in Jerusalem. God had dwelt in the midst of His people in many ways but His presence ultimately culminated in the Temple. However, it is the divine birth of Jesus the Messiah that is both a sign and an embodiment of the presence of God with His people. For God’s people, the sign is providential. It is not however, a providential sign for everyone. For Ahaz, Immanuel is a curse. It could be that Matthew is establishing the same type of relationship between Jesus and the people of God in that He will be a sign of providence for those believe, but a curse for those who reject Him. Despite the differences between the contexts of Isaiah and Matthew, there are strong corresponding parts in Isaiah and Matthew. Therefore rule number two, (the rule of correspondence) has also been met.

The Virgin

Another difficulty with interpreting Matthew 1:22-23 as *direct prophetic fulfillment* is the issue of the word, “virgin.” In the original Hebrew of Isaiah 7, the word, “almāh” is used which means, “a girl or marriageable age or young woman.” It, notably, does *not* mean an actual virgin. However, some hundreds of years later, the Hebrew Old Testament is translated into the common tongue of the day, Greek - the same language the New Testament is written in. And in this translation, often called the LXX (Septuagint), they employed the Greek word, “parthenos” for the word, “virgin.” And this word, on the other hand, does mean *an actual virgin*. It seems that by the time the LXX was translated, Jews began to see Isaiah 7:14 as something that perhaps *was* Messianic in nature. Once again, if viewed typologically, then the, “young woman giving birth to a boy who will remind people of God’s presence,” is a shadow of the substance that the New Testament declares: “An actual virgin giving birth to a boy who is the very embodiment of God’s presence, because He is God in the flesh.” This means that rule number three (the rule of escalation) has also been met.

How Is It Fulfilled?

One final note is on the word, “fulfilled.” Matthew employs the Greek word, “plēroō,” meaning, “to fill completely.” In other words, the type of fulfillment that Matthew has in mind is very specific. Imagine that a prophecy is a cup, and the fulfillment of that prophecy is water being poured into it. The prophecy is filling the cup. That is how direct prophecy works. Typology on the other hands suggests that the cup is already slightly

full, but that the typological fulfillment *fully* fills the cup. This means that typology anticipates *TWO fulfillments*: an historical fulfillment (near view) and a final fulfillment (far view). In our case, Isaiah 8 is the near view, historical fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, but Jesus is the far view, final fulfillment.

Putting It Together

So now, let's put this together. Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14 and tells us that the birth of Jesus fulfills that passage in some way. That passage has a historical fulfillment that took place in Isaiah 8, but as time progressed, Jews began to believe that there was more left to this prophecy. Historically, a young, marriageable woman gave birth to a boy that would serve as a sign to the people of God that God had not forsaken them. But typologically, an *actual* virgin gave birth to a boy that would serve as a sign to everyone that God had not forsaken them. Historically, Immanuel was the presence of God through the sign. Typologically, Immanuel Himself is the sign, the very presence of God in human flesh. There is definition, correspondence, and escalation. Therefore, this is a prophecy that is not only fulfilled by direct prophecy in Isaiah 8, but typologically in Matthew 1.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read verses 18-21. In your own words, write down the events described here. Who all is involved in this story? Write the characters down and what they are doing in this passage. Note anything that stands out as unusual to you.
2. Have you ever had to have a hard conversation that stressed you out? Put yourself in either Mary's or Joseph's shoes, and write a few sentences down about how you would handle these events if you were them. What do you suppose Joseph was feeling after Mary told him she was pregnant? What do you suppose he was feeling after the angel spoke to him? What kind of stress do you think Mary felt, knowing she would have to talk to Joseph about what was happening? About the public opinion of her?

Day Two

1. Read Isaiah 7:10-20. Summarize the events described in this passage. Note any names or places you aren't familiar with.
2. Read Isaiah 8:1-4, 16-18. How does this fulfill the prophecy in chapter 7? Who is the Immanuel figure in Isaiah 8? What keywords suggest this (hint: verse 18)?

Day Three

1. Read Isaiah 7:10-17. Write down the parts of this prophecy that are compatible with Jesus fulfilling it *directly* (not typologically).
2. Now, write down the parts of this prophecy that incompatible with Jesus fulfilling it directly. Make sure to refer back to this lesson as well for ideas on the parts that are incompatible.

Day Four

1. What have you learned from this study this week? What was confusing? Write down the parts you didn't understand and share them in class on Sunday.
2. How are the rules of definition, correspondence, and escalation met in Matthew 1 and Isaiah 7?

Week 2 Discussion: The Promise of Presence

The presence of God in the lives of His people is an important theme throughout Scripture. The Immanuel prophecy in Isaiah 7 would have been understood very differently to Isaiah and his contemporaries to how people of Jesus' time would have understood it, but both of them promise God's presence. For the Christian today, the presence of God is a promise to us as well, through the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; John 14:16).

1. How is the promise of God's presence in Christianity different from any other religion?
2. Why is God's presence so important? Consider a loved one in your life, and imagine if your only connection to that person was merely knowing *about* them, but never really talking to them personally. How would that change the way you feel about that person?
3. How does the birth of Jesus fulfilling an Old Testament prophecy strengthen your belief in the claims of the Bible?
4. The promise of Immanuel (God with us) to God's people during a particularly challenging circumstance in Isaiah 7 is an even greater promise for all believers, because Jesus is our Immanuel. Talk about a time this year where you have felt the presence of Immanuel in your life in a particularly challenging circumstance. How did it make enduring that circumstance easier?
5. When you share the Gospel, how important is this birth narrative? In other words, how much does the finely tuned details of Jesus birth fulfilling Old Testament prophecy impact the rest of the Gospel story? Share your thoughts with the group on this.

Takeaways:

1. Typology explains how some of the New Testament passages fulfill the Old Testament prophecies, especially when all the details don't line up for a literal fulfillment.
2. God's presence is a promise to all Christ followers. Jesus is not just a perfect Savior, but a *present* Savior. He is Immanuel, "God with us."

PRAYER REQUESTS: