



Matthew's Jesus: The Fulfillment



Holly Lazzaro

Jesus in the Gospels

Any study of the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) should always start with an understanding of how they relate to each other. As they are the biblical story of Jesus' time here on earth, we should consider them less four separate writings and more one story: the story of Jesus' life, told from four different perspectives.

While the book of John stands on its own in many ways, the first three gospels have striking similarities which are evident even to the casual reader. Scholars have determined that these three books write about the ministry of Jesus from a common point of view. This 'common view' has earned them the title 'Synoptic Gospels.'

There remain debates among scholars about how the relationship came to be: Which of the three Synoptic Gospels was written first? Did the other two use that first gospel to construct their own? Which gospel was written last and did that author use the first two? Is there another unknown or unidentified source that all three gospels used? Despite these questions, the relationship between the first three gospels is undeniable.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke structure the ministry of Jesus similarly, according to a general geographic sequence. Very little of this sequence is found in John, where the focus is on Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem during his periodic visits to the city.

In content, the first three evangelists narrate many of the same events, focusing on Jesus' healings, exorcisms, and teaching in parables. While John does include several significant healings, he includes exorcisms and no parables (at least of the type found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

Also, many of the events we think of as characteristic of the first three gospels, such as the sending out of the Twelve, the transfiguration, the Olivet Discourse, and the Last Supper narrative are not included in John. By having Jesus constantly on the move and by juxtaposing actions—miracles, especially—with (usually) brief teachings, the first three evangelists convey a tone of intense, rapid-fire action. John has a more meditative tone and narrates far fewer events than his synoptic counterparts. John prefers to present Jesus as speaking in long discourses rather than in brief parables.¹

Perhaps in another study we can examine the similarities and differences between the three Synoptic Gospels in greater detail but for the purposes of this study we are not diving in to all of the nuances of the Synoptics. www.para-gospel.com is a **great** resource to use if you would like to view the gospels side-by-side and see the similarities and differences for yourself. This site is simple and reliable, offering the side-by-side comparison in several translations. This website offers quite an interesting way to see how the four gospel writers approached the story of Jesus and it is worth reviewing.

¹ Carson, DA & Moo, DJ (2005) *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Second Edition, p. 77). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

God, in His perfect wisdom, included these three similar gospels in the Bible for a reason. If you look carefully at each you will see that some important differences rise up. These three gospels give us continuity and consistency in the truth of Jesus' ministry, and each of them also offers a unique perspective on Jesus Himself. For the purpose of this study/reading guide we will take a dominant theme from each gospel and allow it to provide us a fresh understanding of Jesus.



Matthew's Jesus: The Fulfillment

Matthew's gospel, like the other gospels, attests to the historical Jesus, provides insights to His teaching and His ministry, and provides a framework for the rest of the New Testament. However, one notable difference in Matthews gospel is his 'fulfillment quotations,' These function as evidence of Jesus' messianic identity, reminding us of the Old Testament prophecies and showing us that Jesus is the fulfillment. For Matthew, Jesus embodies Israel's story.

Before you begin, reflect on your own ideas about Jesus as the fulfillment. You might like to return to these reflections and add to them after you have completed the readings.

Examine each of Matthew's fulfillment quotations and note your fresh insights or understanding (all scripture is quoted from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted):

Matthew 1:18-23 (referencing Isaiah 7:14)

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,

and they shall call his name Immanuel"

(which means, God with us).

Consider what 'God with us' would have meant to an Old Testament believer. Now reflect on what 'God with us' means to a New Testament believer. How is this fulfillment important?

Matthew 2: 1-6 (referencing Micah 5:2)

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

**⁶ " 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.' "**

Consider the humble beginnings of Jesus' life and reflect on why you think God chose this way of bringing His son into the world. Why is this fulfillment important?

Matthew 2:13-15 (referencing Hosea 11:1)

¹³Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Consider the angry pursuit of the baby by the powerful Herod who was threatened by Him. Reflect on this, and add your own insights as a New Testament believer. Why do you think that God allowed this to happen? Why do you think this particular fulfillment was important?

Matthew 2:16-18 (referencing Jeremiah 31:15)

¹⁶Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

***¹⁸ "A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."***

Consider the brutality of this passage. Reflect on the radical nature of the gospel message as a whole. Why do you think this particular fulfillment is important?

Matthew 2:22-23 (referencing three possible verses. See below)

22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. 23 And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

This one is a little tricky. Nazareth didn't even exist in Old Testament times, so there's no way an OT prophet would have said the Messiah would be from Nazareth by way of referring to him as a Nazarene. However, there are some viable options to investigate.

It could be that Matthew was referring to Isaiah 11:1 which says 'There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.' Some scholars speculate this is the referenced verse because the Hebrew word 'branch' here is *netser*. Since Hebrew was written with only consonants the word *netser* would have appeared as NZR-the same main consonants as Nazareth. In fact, in Aramaic (the common language of Jesus' day) the word for 'Nazareth' and the Hebrew word for 'branch' sounded very much alike. So some scholars speculate the reference in Matthew 2:23 is to the word *branch* in Isaiah 11:1.

Others speculate that Matthew was referring to the concept of a Nazarene in reference to a person who is despised and rejected. In the first century Nazareth was a small town with a negative reputation, generally looked down upon (see John 1:46 'can anything good come out of Nazareth?'). If this is what Matthew had in mind, two passages about the Messiah could be the reference point: Psalm 22:6-7

6 But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. 7 All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;

or Isaiah 53:3

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

While the first possibility is valid, the second seems to ring with greater depth into the character and experience that we now know Jesus had here on earth. He was indeed despised and rejected.

Consider the way that Jesus was despised and rejected. Write your reflections here. (Don't be afraid to move past intellectual reflections to the emotional response you may have on this particular fulfillment quotation.)

Matthew 4:12-17 (referencing Isaiah 9:1-2)

12 Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. 13 And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

15 "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,

the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,

Galilee of the Gentiles—

16 the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light,

and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,

on them a light has dawned."

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Why do you think Matthew included this fulfillment quotation in his gospel account of Jesus' life? How does this passage influence you today?

Matthew 8:15-17 (referencing Isaiah 53:4)

¹⁵ He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him.

¹⁶ That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

This passage reminds us that Jesus was willing and able to heal the sick and wounded and also that this was well known in His time. What is your impression of how Jesus is known in our time? Why do you think that Matthew included this fulfillment quotation in his gospel?

Matthew 12:10-20 (referencing Isaiah 42:1-3)

¹⁰ And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse him. ¹¹ He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." ¹³ Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. ¹⁴ But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him. ¹⁵ Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all ¹⁶ and ordered them not to make him known. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁸
"Behold, my servant whom I have chosen,
my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.

I will put my Spirit upon him,
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

¹⁹
He will not quarrel or cry aloud,
nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets;

²⁰
a bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not quench,
until he brings justice to victory;

There are many facets to this passage and a guiding question would do you a disservice. Write your reflections on this passage and why Matthew chose to include it.

Matthew 13:10-17 (referencing Isaiah 6:9-10)

¹⁰ Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?"

¹¹ And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:

***"You will indeed hear but never understand,
and you will indeed see but never perceive."***

***¹⁵ For this people's heart has grown dull,
and with their ears they can barely hear,
and their eyes they have closed,
lest they should see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them.'***

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷ For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

There are three distinct sections in this passage. Identify and reflect upon them here:

Matthew 13:34-35 (referencing Psalm 78:2)

³⁴ All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. ³⁵ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world."

This passage reiterates Matthew 13:10-17 in some ways. Why do you think Matthew included it? Do you see anything new in this reference to parables?

Matthew 21:1-5 (referencing Zechariah 9:9)

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." ⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ⁵ "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

This prophecy is very specific, so it is pretty clear why Matthew includes it. What other observations do you want to make about this passage?

Matthew 26:50-56

⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do." Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. ⁵¹ And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and

cut off his ear. ⁵² Then Jesus said to him, **“Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?”** ⁵⁵ At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, **“Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. ⁵⁶ But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.”** Then all the disciples left him and fled.

In the previous passages Matthew shows exactly what fulfillment he is referring to, either by naming the author or the concept. What is different about this passage and why is it significant?

Matthew 27:3-10 (referencing Zechariah 11:13).

³Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴ saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” ⁵ And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. ⁶ But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money.” ⁷ So they took counsel and bought with them the potter’s field as a burial place for strangers. ⁸ Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹ Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, ¹⁰ and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me.”

There are several notes worth reflecting upon here. First, Judas’ guilty confession. Second, the specificity again of this prophecy, naming the exact amount of silver that would be paid. What are your thoughts on this?

Did you detect a 'mistake' in this particular fulfillment quotation? Matthew says 'then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah' but the passage is quoting the book of Zechariah. What's up with that?

As I am sure you can imagine, scholars have debated several different ways to explain this reference. Here are a few:

"It was common to combine quotations from the prophets in . . . chains of quotations"², with only one writer being mentioned by name. For example, both Malachi and Isaiah are quoted in Mark 1:2-3, but only Isaiah is named. It is entirely possible that Matthew is combining prophecies from both Jeremiah and Zechariah, while citing only the latter by name³.

While the Zechariah passage is cited as the cross-reference to this passage by most major bible translations, in order to reconcile the issue, some argue that Jeremiah 32:6-9 or Jeremiah 19:1-13 is more likely to be the source of Matthew's reference⁴

One of the most obvious possibilities, however, is to focus on the precise wording of the passage. Matthew does not say that the prophecy was written by the prophet Jeremiah; rather, the text reads: "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah." Who can presume to say that Jeremiah did not utter this prophecy if the Holy Spirit, through the inspired apostle, said that he did? Zechariah suggested that at least some of his message was a reflection of what the "former prophets" had spoken: "*Were not these the words that the Lord proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous, with her cities around her, and the South and the lowland were inhabited?*" (7:7). So there is evidence that Zechariah did rehearse the testimony of Jeremiah.

You can decide for yourself which of these reasons (or others posited by scholars) is most satisfactory to you

Matthew was decidedly intentional about painting a picture of Jesus that shows His fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. His writing gives us a rich and beautiful tapestry of reasons to believe that Jesus was who He said he was. We, like Matthew, can be sure that we have rested our belief in the Truth.

²Robertson, A. T. 1930. *Word Pictures In The New Testament*. Vol. 1. Nashville, TN: Broadman, p 252.

³Arndt, William. 1955. *Does The Bible Contradict Itself?* St. Louis, Mo: Concordia Publishing House, p 51-53.

⁴Carson, D. A. 1984. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, p 563.

Write new reflections on your own ideas about Jesus as the fulfillment. You might want to refer back to those which you wrote at the beginning of the readings and see if/how your understanding of Jesus has deepened.

While Jesus is much more than just a fulfillment, sometimes by focusing on one facet of who He is we can gain a richer intimacy with Him. In the next part of this series 'Jesus in the Gospels' we will look at Mark's Jesus: The Suffering Servant.