

don't call these books the Law, Prophets and writings, as in Judaism. The whole collection is Old Testament, the very designation assumes that there is a New Testament revelation pointed to by the Old.

For Judaism scripture is complete with the Old Testament and one interprets this revelation as the rules of life today. In the Patristic tradition, the Old Testament is a preparation for the coming salvation in Christ. Throughout the Old Testament we find revelation that teaches spiritual truth. But at the same time, these truths are made perfect in Christ. In the Old Testament we find the shadow, in the New Testament the fullness of truth.

We see many parallels with the life of Christ and key figures in the history of Israel. This "typology" has an element of prophecy. But the reference is oblique and more poetic. Typology finds patterns in events and people in the Old Testament brought to perfection in the New Testament.

Steve Puluka
Steve@puluka.com
www.puluka.com

Another method of prophetic interpretation is allegory. Patristic literature is full of allegorical interpretations of scripture. Allegory helps us view life from multiple, often contradictory angles and find the truth. Allegory smoothes over the differences in point of view brings the mind many things to contemplate at the same time.

Rejoice, O Bethlehem; and prepare yourself, O Ephrathah! For the Mother of God comes to give birth in a wondrous manner to her divine Son, who lies in a manger in a cave. What an awesome mystery! Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, together with all the Prophets and Patriarchs, already celebrate his divine birth, and the angels rejoice with those on earth.

Matins Hymn of Light
Sunday of the Holy Fa-

In the preparation for the Nativity of Our Lord we see concrete examples of this type of interpretation. The Matins Hymn of Light cited here unites the Old Testament tradition under the umbrella of praise for Christ's birth. The Patriarchs and all the history of Israel are prophets to the birth of Christ. Israel on earth echoes the praise of the angels in heaven, proclaiming the incarnation of God's Son. Matthew opens the door to some specific examples of the prophets preparing us for the coming of Christ. By reading and praying the Old Testament we can see the fullness of God's mystery unfolding towards our own salvation.

For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.

Matthew 11:13-14

Jesus as Christ

When preaching during his public ministry Jesus points out the prophets and the law prophetically proclaiming the coming of Jesus as Messiah. In Matthew chapter 11 he connects John the Baptist with this tradition by calling him Elijah. Elijah was the first and greatest prophet in the land of Israel. Since Elijah never died, he was taken up into heaven on the fiery chariot, Jews expected him to return proclaiming the messiah. Jesus acknowledges this tradition and lets us know that John the Baptist fulfills this expectation. When John the Baptist points to Jesus as the Lamb of God, that makes Jesus the Messiah or Anointed one.

Jesus does not openly take the title Christ in the Gospel tradition. He alludes to the title in statements like the

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us).

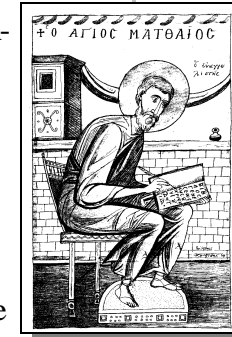
Matthew 1:22-23,
Isaiah 7:14

Messiah

The Prophetic Message on the coming of Christ

Messiah

Messiah is a Hebrew term meaning "Anointed One," in Greek the word is Christ. The practice of anointing a leader with oil as a sign of their office was common in the ancient Near East. In the Byzantine tradition we anoint the newly baptized with Chrism as a sign and seal of their office in the Church. Chrismation occurs immediately after Baptism.



above. On the road to the cross Jesus asks the apostles who he is. Peter responds with the open proclamation, "You are the Christ." Jesus acknowledges the title. He points out that Peter has this knowledge by God's gift. He then points to the need for the cross. Peter then objects. The image of torture and death does not fit with the image of Messiah. But Jesus insists the apostle's model of Messiah must adjust

to meet his new standard. Jesus takes the image of messiah current in Judaism and extends the role of the Christ to include his suffering and death.

Matthew

On November 17, the second day of the Philipian Fast, we commemorate the Evangelist Matthew. During the following weeks of the fast we will remember seven prophets, Obadiah (November 19), Nahum (December 1), Habakkuk (December 2), Zephaniah (December 3), Haggai (December 16) and Daniel (December 17). This series of figures reinforces the title of Christ for Jesus. Matthew clearly ties the birth of Jesus to the prophets of old by citing them five times during the infancy narrative. Matthew's commemoration stands at the opening of the Philipian Fast because he clearly illuminates the connection between the prophets of old and Jesus' birth.

Almost half of the Old Testament prophets have their feast day in this preparation pe-

riod. Normally, a person is placed onto the liturgical calendar on their heavenly birthday (the day they die). With figures from the Old Testament the Church selects the most appropriate season for their commemoration. The placing of so many prophets onto the calendar in this season reinforces the intrinsic connection between the prophets and the coming of Jesus Christ. We are reminded by these commemorations that Jesus is the Christ. That Jesus' coming is foretold. That we believe in Jesus' continuity with the tradition of the Old Testament.

They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: '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 govern my people Israel.'"

Matthew 2:5-6,
Micah 5:1 &
II Samuel 5:2

Formula Citations

In relating the infancy story of Jesus Matthew cites the Old Testament five times as prophetic.

This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt have I called my son."

Matthew 2:15
Hosea 11:1

Each in this series of prophetic citations highlights how a different aspect of the birth of Jesus is directly foretold in the Old Testament. These quotations reinforce our faith that Jesus is the Christ. As we search the scriptures we find more and more details in the life of Jesus' prophetically embedded in Old Testament revelation.

John Chrysostom expressed the process this way, "The angel makes reference to Isaiah, and not to Isaiah only but to God who speaks through Isaiah. For he does not refer this saying to Isaiah as such but to the God of all. Hence he did not say simply that 'All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by Isaiah' but 'All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.' The mouth indeed was Isaiah's, but the oracle was wafted from above." (Homily 5.2 on Matthew 1:22)

Because God is the ultimate source of revelation in scripture, the prophet Isaiah can proclaim an oracle to the king of ancient Israel that is fulfilled in both his own time and the birth of Jesus. The original purpose of the oracle was important and true. The ultimate fulfillment of the oracle is even more important and true.

Christians adopted this method of using scripture from the Jewish tradition of the Pharisees. The preaching of Jesus preserved in the Gospels and the work of Patristic authors use this same method of scripture fulfillment citations.

Naturally, rabbinical literature interprets the same texts differently, but this method is used by both Jews and Christians.

Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they were no more."

Matthew 2:17-18
Jeremiah 31:15
(LXX 38:15)

In Matthew we have examples of composite quotations as well. This is the pattern of joining two verses from different books to support a single theme or idea. This is possible because we know that God is the source of all scripture, so joining Micah and II Samuel in Matthew 2:5-8 is natural. Both books proceed from the same source.

Old Testament

Jesus' speech about John the Baptist from Matthew cited above demonstrates the role of Old Testament revelation for Christians. "All the prophets and the law prophesied," the law is the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, numbers and Deuteronomy. Starting from the mouth of Jesus, Christians see scripture as a sign pointing to revelation in Christ. We

And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Matthew 2:23,
Isaiah 4:3 &
Judges 16:17