



**Gutenberg College Summer Institute 2015
REUNION: Tanakh and the Gospel of Matthew**

Talk 5: Reunion of Isaiah 7:10–16 and Matthew 1:23

Jack Crabtree

I. Isaiah 7:10–16

- A. I deem it inescapable that the child being spoken of as a sign is a child who is contemporary with Isaiah and King Ahaz.
1. There is much precedent for Immanuel to be a son of Isaiah who, by divine instruction, was given a name that signified something to Isaiah's contemporaries.
 - a) Isaiah had several sons whose name bore a message to Isaiah's contemporaries. (Other prophets were instructed to give their son a message-name as well.)
 2. The prophetic message uses a point in the development of the child's life as a time-marker for locating in time certain events in the lives of Isaiah's contemporaries.
 - a) Most significantly, does Isaiah 7:15–16 not have to be referring to a boy in the time of Isaiah?
 - (1) How would the fact that Aram and Israel will be gone be relevant to the prediction that Jesus will eat curds and honey before he is old enough to engage in moral judgment? (They will be gone long before he is even born, let alone old enough to eat curds and honey.) How would the specific details of this prediction be informative or helpful? But if it is referring to a boy in the time of Isaiah, it is a very relevant, informative, and helpful statement.
 - b) Note the parallel between “Immanuel” and “Mahar-shalal-hash-baz” in Isaiah 8:3–4.
- B. An *'alma* is simply a woman of a particular stage in life (namely, a young, just-having-reached-marriageable-age female). It does not necessarily describe her marital status (that is, she is not necessarily unmarried). It does not necessarily describe her sexual experience (that is, she is not necessarily a virgin).
1. Like our word “teenager” (at least in earlier times), it may—due to cultural realities—lead one to assume that she is a virgin and/or unmarried. But the word describes the stage of biological maturation she is in, not her marital status or sexual experience. [An elderly woman with no sexual experience (a virgin) would not have the word *'alma* used of her.]
 2. The most likely meaning here is a new bride of Isaiah who has conceived and is going to have a son (presumably, Isaiah knows the child will be a son from

divine revelation). Isaiah's first son, Shear-jashub, was likely from a former wife who is deceased. Isaiah has taken a new wife.

- C. The word "sign" (*'ot*) does not have to denote a miraculous wonder. What makes a "sign" a sign is the fact that it signifies something, not that it involves some kind of miraculous wonder.
1. So, for example, in Genesis 17:11, the "sign" of the covenant between God and Abraham is circumcision.
 2. Use of the word "sign" does not require that the birth be a miraculous virgin birth.
 - a) Indeed, there is nothing to suggest that anything about the birth of Immanuel is remarkable in any way. The only reason Immanuel is significant is because, by divine instruction, his name *signifies* something to the people of Judah.
- D. Isaiah 7:14 is plural ("The Lord himself will give you [plural] a sign") because 7:13 is plural ("Is your trying men too slight a thing that you [plural] try God as well?"). For whatever reason, 7:13 is plural; the same reason pertains to 7:14.
- E. Critical background
1. From God's perspective—and that, I would argue is the perspective out of which he is dealing with King Ahaz, regardless of whether King Ahaz shares his perspective—the "problem" with Judah being threatened by Israel-Aram or by Assyria is the threat to the promise of the Davidic Covenant.
 - a) If God were to allow Judah to be defeated or destroyed, how then can the promise of a permanent, enduring kingdom with a son of David as king be truly realized?
- F. The meaning and significance of the "sign" to Ahaz embodied in Immanuel was this:
1. The promise of an everlasting kingdom ruled by a "son of David" was secure. God would ensure that his promise was kept. God would work to the favor of Judah (and Israel) in order to protect them and watch over their history so that the promise he made to them would never be made impossible to keep.
 - a) God expands on his promise to include the specific promise that Judah, while severely damaged, will not be destroyed by either the Aram-Israel alliance or by Assyria. So the short-term guarantee in God's promise is that Judah will survive the impending threat created by Aram-Israel and by Assyria.
 - b) In all likelihood, the promise embodied in the sign of Immanuel was of little value or comfort to Ahaz. He did not want God's promise to be guaranteed; he wanted his safety and prosperity to be guaranteed.
- G. The name "Immanuel" does not signify the ontological presence of God in the midst of Judah (or mankind). It is not spatial proximity that is being promised. Rather, "God with us" means "God is FOR us" (as opposed to being AGAINST us); that is, he is committed to the ultimate success and prospering of his people, Israel.

II. Matthew 1:22–23

- A. Matthew is not suggesting that Isaiah 7 predicted the birth of Jesus, not to a "virgin" or otherwise.
 - 1. It would be exceedingly odd for Matthew to be saying this: Isaiah predicted that a virgin would have a son and name that son *Immanuel* and, lo and behold, it happened just like Isaiah said because the virgin Mary had a son and named that son *Jesus*.
 - a) If we take Isaiah's prediction in this way, do we not, in fact, find that Jesus' birth does not qualify as the event predicted by Isaiah?
- B. The NASV translated Matthew 1:22, "... to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet." It might just as aptly be translated "...with the result that that which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet was fulfilled, when he said..."
 - 1. Or, alternatively, "...with the result that that which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet who spoke (prophesied)."
- C. The fact that Matthew *translates* the meaning of "Immanuel" suggests strongly that it is the meaning of the name Immanuel (that is, it is what the name Immanuel signifies) that is fulfilled by the birth of Jesus. In other words, what the birth of Jesus fulfills is the promise signified by the name "Immanuel."
 - 1. Contrary to common perceptions, Matthew is not connecting Jesus with Immanuel because he is suggesting that Jesus is "God with us" in the sense that traditional conceptions of the incarnation suggest. (Traditionally, it is held that the divine nature came down from the heavens and dwelt WITHIN the baby Jesus—thereby making it the case that the divine nature itself was now WITH and AMONG us human beings.) Rather, Matthew is connecting Jesus with Immanuel because he is suggesting the Jesus is the most dramatic and significant embodiment of the truth that the name Immanuel was intended to signify: namely, the truth that God will never forsake his promise to Israel.
 - a) What more compelling sign can be given that God intends to keep his promise to Israel and establish the Kingdom of God than for him to bring into being the eventual King of that Kingdom?

III. Relationship of Matthew to Isaiah

- A. What are the logically possible relationships that could exist between a prophesy in Isaiah and an event described by Matthew?
1. Prediction > Event Predicted
 - a) No, not what Matthew is saying in 1:22.
 - b) This is most definitely not what Matthew is saying in Matthew 1:22.
 2. Prediction > Necessary concomitant of event predicted
 - a) No, not the way to understand what Matthew is saying in Matthew 1:22.
 - b) It is true that the birth of Jesus (the King) is a necessary prerequisite to God fulfilling the promise signified by Immanuel. However, Isaiah 7 is not predicting the birth of Jesus.
 3. Truth > Ordinary instantiation of this Truth
 - a) Arguably, this could be what Matthew is saying in Matthew 1:22.
 - b) The birth of Jesus (the eventual king of the Kingdom of God) is an expression of God's faithful commitment to Israel, his people, and his commitment to the promises he made to them. This truth is embodied in and expressed by the birth of Jesus no less than in his preservation of Judah in the time of Isaiah.
 - (1) While this is true, and it does capture some of what Matthew means; yet what Matthew means is better articulated by the fourth option below.
 4. Truth > Special or unique instantiation of this Truth
 - a) This is the best understanding of what Matthew is saying in Matthew 1:22.
 - b) The birth of Jesus (the eventual king of the Kingdom of God) is the most distinctive, dramatic, and significant expression of God's faithful commitment to Israel, his people, and his commitment to the promises he made to them. The truth that is embodied in and signified by the sign of Immanuel is quite dramatically and significantly embodied in the birth of Jesus. It is embodied in the birth of Jesus more so than any other embodiment of this truth.



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**The New Testament Use of Hebrew Scripture: Three Issues
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I. Relationship of a Hebrew Scriptural Text to Its New Testament Citation: The "Fulfillment" Relation

A. What are the logically possible relationships that could exist between a text of the Hebrew Scriptures and some event or truth described by a New Testament author?

1. Prediction > Event Predicted

a) The Hebrew text could predict a specific future event X; the New Testament text could narrate that very event X.

(1) In this case, the event narrated by the New Testament text can be said to "fulfill" the Hebrew text.

b) Hypothetical example: If a prophet predicted that Jesus of Nazareth would first ride a donkey at his third birthday party (A), and a New Testament author narrates an account of Jesus' third birthday party where he rides a donkey for the first time (B), then B fulfills A in the sense that A is the prediction of B.

2. Prediction > Necessary Concomitant of Event Predicted

a) The Hebrew text could predict a specific future event X; the New Testament text could narrate an event which constitutes a necessary concomitant of X—that is, an event that, in some way, requires that X will occur (or that X has occurred).

(1) The event described by the New Testament text (=Y) could be a sufficient condition or necessary consequence of X, such that if Y has occurred, then X must necessarily occur or must necessarily have already occurred.

(2) In this case, the event narrated by the New Testament text can be said to "fulfill" the Hebrew text.

b) Hypothetical examples:

(1) If a prophet predicted that God would appoint a Son to reign over Israel in the coming kingdom of God (A), and a New Testament author narrates the birth of the one whom God has created to be that Son (B), then B fulfills A in the sense that, since B is true, it must necessarily follow that A will be true.

(2) If a prophet predicted that God would assign his Son to suffer and die (A), and a New Testament author narrates the story of the Son's resurrection from the dead (B), then B fulfills A in the sense that, since B is true (that is, B has occurred), it must necessarily follow that A is true (that is, that A has already occurred).

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3. Truth > Ordinary Instantiation of This Truth
 - a) The Hebrew text could contain a specific Truth; the New Testament text could contain that very same Truth.
 - (1) The truth in view could be any element of the truth about God, mankind, history, God's purposes, God's promises, or any other aspect of reality.
 - (2) In this case, what is asserted by the New Testament text can be said to "fulfill" the Hebrew text.
 - b) Hypothetical example: If a Hebrew text reflects the truth that God is merciful (A), and a New Testament text also—in an entirely different set of circumstances—reflects the truth that God is merciful (B), then B fulfills A in the sense that B embodies exactly the same truth earlier embodied in A.
4. Truth > More Significant Instantiation of This Truth
 - a) The Hebrew text could contain a specific Truth; the New Testament text could contain that very same Truth, but contain it in such a way that it more fully, more perfectly, more dramatically, and/or more significantly reflects that Truth than does the Hebrew text.
 - (1) Again, the truth in view could be any element of the truth about God, mankind, history, God's purposes, God's promises, or any other aspect of reality.
 - (2) In this case, what is asserted by the New Testament text can be said to "fulfill" the Hebrew text.
 - b) Hypothetical example: If a Hebrew text reflects the truth that God is merciful (A), and a New Testament text—in an entirely different set of circumstances—reflects, in an even fuller, more significant, and more dramatic way, the truth that God is merciful (B), then B fulfills A in the sense that B embodies even more fully or more perfectly the same truth that was earlier embodied in A.
5. Event > Less Significant Foreshadowed Event
 - a) The Hebrew text could narrate a very significant historical event that the divine author of reality planned to recapitulate in some less significant future event; the New Testament narrates the particular future event that the divine author planned as a recapitulation of the earlier event. In this case, the event narrated by the New Testament Scriptures is significantly less important than the event narrated by the Hebrew scriptures.
 - (1) In such a case, the event narrated by the New Testament derives its meaning and significance from the fact that it recapitulates the event narrated by the Hebrew text.
 - (2) In this case, the event described by the New Testament text can be said to "fulfill" the event described by the Hebrew text.

b) TWO QUESTIONS:

- (1) Does this relationship allow a person to anticipate the event narrated by the New Testament on the basis of the event narrated by the Hebrew Scripture? Or, can it be observed only retrospectively?
- (2) How do I know whether I have discovered the creativity of the divine author rather than having exercised my own creativity as an intelligent observer?

c) Hypothetical example: If a Hebrew text narrates the event of God liberating his people from slavery in Egypt (A), and a New Testament text—in an entirely different set of circumstances—narrates an event about an individual being delivered from his bondage to a demon (B), then B perhaps fulfills A in the sense that B recapitulates the more important event A.

6. Event > More Significant Foreshadowed Event

a) The Hebrew text could narrate a historical event that the divine author of reality planned to recapitulate in some more significant future event; the New Testament narrates the particular future event that the divine author planned as a recapitulation of the earlier event. In this case, the event narrated by the New Testament Scriptures is significantly more important than the event narrated by the Hebrew Scriptures.

- (1) In such a case, the event narrated by the Hebrew text derives its meaning and significance from the fact that it foreshadows the event narrated by the New Testament text.
- (2) In this case, the event described by the New Testament text can be said to "fulfill" the event described by the Hebrew text.

b) TWO QUESTIONS:

- (1) Does this relationship allow a person to anticipate the event narrated by the New Testament on the basis of the event narrated by the Hebrew Scripture? Or, can it be observed only retrospectively?
- (2) How do I know whether I have discovered the creativity of the divine author rather than having exercised my own creativity as an intelligent observer?

c) Hypothetical example: If a Hebrew text narrates the event of God rescuing individuals from the bite of a serpent sent to judge them for their unbelief by some means of deliverance that God has provided for them (A), and a New Testament text narrates an event wherein God provides a means of deliverance whereby an individual can be rescued from eternal condemnation (B), then B fulfills A in the sense that A foreshadows and is recapitulated by the more important event B.

II. The Stakes

- A. What is at stake with respect to how we understand the relation of a Hebrew text to its use by a New Testament author?
 - 1. What is at stake is the credibility of the New Testament author, the credibility of the Scriptures, and the credibility of the gospel itself.
- B. A New Testament author is making some claim about the meaning and significance of a text of the Hebrew Scriptures.
 - 1. Upon what is the New Testament author's claim based? It would appear that the New Testament author is appealing to the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures. Is his claim based on a rational and valid reading of those Scriptures? Or is it based on a contrived, artificial, and fallacious reading of those Scriptures?
 - a) If the former, then my acceptance of the New Testament author's claim is supported, reinforced, and encouraged by the fact that he is making a claim that is congruent with what the Scriptures themselves actually claim or teach.
 - b) If the latter, then my acceptance of the New Testament author's claim is completely and utterly dependent upon the New Testament author's personal credibility and authority.
 - (1) But, then, I must grant the personal credibility and authority to the New Testament author in the face of empirical evidence of his lack of credibility.
 - (a) Why would I accept any claim he might make when the New Testament author has demonstrated his willingness to advance a contrived, artificial, and fallacious interpretation of the Scriptures? How does that encourage me to find him credible with respect to anything else he might say? If he is willing to be tendentious in his reading of the Scriptures, why would I trust him not to be tendentious in any other fact claims or in any interpretation of facts that he might offer?
- C. Any interpretation of what a New Testament author is doing that involves him in a contrived, artificial, and/or fallacious reading of the text of the Hebrew Scripture undermines and destroys that New Testament author's integrity and the integrity of his whole account regarding Jesus and/or the gospel.
 - 1. Some are tempted to maintain that, while his interpretive method is contrived, artificial, and fallacious, it is alright because the New Testament author is simply engaging in exegesis that is culturally accepted by his contemporaries.

- a) This does not solve the problem. Being a method widely accepted by his culture does not make what the New Testament author is doing acceptable. If it is fallacious, it is fallacious. It does not matter that his whole culture trades in fallacious arguments. Wide acceptance does not make it valid. For the New Testament author to have any credibility with you and me, he must not advance fallacious arguments based on fallacious interpretations.
 - b) This suggestion will have currency with people who view the Bible as just a human artifact. But for anyone who grants divine authority to the Bible and believes it to be inspired and inerrant, such a claim makes no sense. *Ad hominem* argument is something we might expect in the context of fallible human discourse; but it is unacceptable in the context of inspired, authoritative Scripture.
 - (1) In other words, we can expect biblical authors to have used fallacious arguments that were accepted by their contemporaries if the Bible is nothing other than a fallible human artifact. But, if the Bible is a divinely-inspired, authoritative revelation from God, then it would be completely incongruous to maintain that its authors employed inherently fallacious arguments.
2. Some are tempted to maintain that, while his interpretive method is contrived, artificial, and fallacious, it is nonetheless not problematic because the New Testament author is divinely inspired. Due to its origin, what he is saying can be known to be true even though he grounds it in fallacious reasoning and interpretation. His arguments may be nonsense, but they are inspired, and therefore, authoritative nonsense.
- a) This is an absurd position. The very notion of "inspired nonsense" is absurd—and perhaps blasphemous. Not only does this suggestion misunderstand the workings of God, but it also ignores the epistemological needs of mankind.
 - (1) God never asks us to believe truly irrational, absurd things simply because he is telling us to believe it.
 - (2) Contrary to popular conception, to believe totally irrational and absurd things because God, allegedly, tells us to believe them does not constitute what the Bible calls "faith." Rather, to do so would constitute intellectually irresponsible (and, therefore, evil) gullibility.

III. Methodological Priority

- A. Which is more sacrosanct: our understanding of the Greek language or our grasp of the rhetorical structure and meaning of a passage?
 - 1. Do we take our English translation as a given and assume that the English idiom used in that translation rightly captures the relation between the content of the Hebrew text and the content of the New Testament text?
 - a) That is, are we to accept the validity of our English translation (and its understanding of the Greek language) and then construct an understanding of the relation between the New Testament text and the Hebrew text in such a way that the validity of our English translation is preserved? Is this so

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important that, if necessary, we ought to violate commonsense rationality in order to do so?

2. Or, should we trust our ability to discern the connection that the New Testament author intends us to see between the Hebrew text and some New Testament event and then, as necessary, we modify our analysis of the Greek syntax, our understanding of New Testament Greek idiom, and our translation into English accordingly?
 - a) That is, are we to accept the validity of commonsense rationality (and what it requires with regard to how to understand the structure and meaning of a New Testament passage and its relation to the Hebrew Scriptures) and then derive an understanding of the language of the New Testament in such a way that the validity of our understanding of the structure and meaning of the New Testament passage and its relation to the Hebrew Scriptures is preserved? Is this so important that, if necessary, we ought to violate a traditional understanding of the Greek language (as reflected in grammars, lexicons, etc.) in order to do so?