

Thus far in our journey, we have delved deep into the Messianic prophecies found in the Hebrew scriptures and their fulfillment in Christ. We have explored the overarching promise of a Deliverer, scrutinized His prophesied lineage, and celebrated His miraculous birth. In the previous chapter, we engaged with His promised nature and characteristics. Now we shift our focus to the prophesied ministry and teachings of the Messiah. Until now, we have been exploring the question of "who" the Messiah is. Now, we will turn to the question of "what" the Messiah will say and do.

PSALM 78:2

I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old (Ps. 78:2)

Psalm 78:2 initially seems to convey God's testimony of giving the Torah and revealing its mysteries. However, Matthew 13:35 applies these words to Jesus, encouraging us to reevaluate.

Matthew 13:34 marks Jesus' transition to only using parables. Verse 35 refers to this shift, fulfilling Psalm 78:2's messianic prophecy, which was not identifiable until later.

Two key aspects of Matthew's revelation include referring to the Psalm as "spoken by the prophet." Despite being composed by Asaph, King David's choir director, Asaph can broadly be considered a "prophet," as he directly received and conveyed God's revelation, evidenced in the Psalm.

In Acts 2:29-31, Peter refers to David as a prophet discussing Psalm 16, highlighting that any divine revelation recipient could be seen as a prophet. Despite her "prophecy" in 1 Samuel 25 not being new, David's wife Abigail is often recognized as a prophetess in Jewish interpretations.

Second, while the Psalm states "I will utter dark sayings of old," Matthew interprets it as "I will utter things kept secret since the world's foundation" (Matt. 13:35). This exemplifies how minor wording changes don't negate Scripture's truth, and one passage can illuminate another, enabling Scripture to interpret itself. Like a dictionary not using the defined word in its definition, the Bible exemplifies self-reference without using a word to define a word.

Psalm 78:2's "dark sayings of old" might be misunderstood as unclear ancient sayings. However, according to the New Testament, these are truths kept secret since the world's foundation, which could be different than the initial interpretation.

The Hebrew word "קִדְמוֹת" (qēdem) translated as "of old" has multiple meanings including "from the east", "old", "ancient", "eternal", and "from everlasting". As it's used to describe things predating the world's creation (like God), it's interpreted as "from the foundation of the world", a definition backed by God in Matthew 13:35.

This distinction becomes important as the parables have a singular purpose: *exposing and revealing the secrets of the Kingdom*. This is clearly stated in response to the disciples' question about why Jesus spoke in parables. Jesus replied, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13:11). A mystery is not a "dark saying of old" in the sense of something difficult to understand, but rather something "kept secret from the foundation of the world." Therefore, while the Psalm may be vague about what a "dark saying" is, the book of Matthew defines it for us in a way that is crucial for understanding the concept of "mystery." The parables reveal things "kept secret from the foundation of the world."

How secretive were the teachings Jesus shared in parables? Jesus stated, "many prophets and righteous men have longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it" (Matthew 13:17).

All of this helps us understand a mystery. Jesus states that His teachings in parables are revealing "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13:11). He also mentions that these teachings were "things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 13:35). This definition of mystery should also apply to Paul, who describes his mystery as something "which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men" (Eph. 3:5, see also Col. 1:26, Rom. 1:25). Many people insist that Paul's mystery was already known or that Jesus was merely repeating what others had previously revealed.

Psalms 78:2 suggests that any Messianic claimants who do not reveal previously secret information cannot be the Messiah.

ISAIAH 9:1-2

Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. (Isa. 9:1-2)

Isaiah 9:1-2 (often cited as 8:23-9:1 in Jewish translations), is part of a larger section that promises deliverance and hope to the northern kingdom of Israel, which had suffered under Assyrian invasions and was facing existential threats. The "great light" in its simplest and "near fulfillment" form represents relief, redemption, and the restoration of God's favor. In its immediate context, it promises an end to the suffering and oppression experienced by the inhabitants of the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, areas that were particularly devastated by Assyrian campaigns.

That Isaiah 9 is Messianic is no surprise, since we saw this in chapter 1, concerning Isaiah 9:6, in relation to the promise of a deliverer. Just like verse 6 is given explicit Messianic testimony in the Gospel of Matthew, so verses 1-2 are assigned to Jesus in Matthew 4:13-16.

Making the connection of these verses to Jesus, therefore, we see that it was prophesied that his ministry would be in "Galilee of the nations" (Is. 9:1) and would be characterized as a "great light" (Is. 9:2). Matthew 5:15 defines "of the nations" as "of the Gentiles," but in neither place should it be understood that Gentiles were the inhabitants of Galilee. Rather, it is "the attraction of the nations," as translated in "The Complete Jewish Bible."¹

Interpreted from a Messianic perspective, we should anticipate the Messiah to be a "great light." One would be hard-pressed to find anyone who was more of a "great light" than Jesus of Nazareth. In addition to His miracles, Jesus' teachings, particularly the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), offer moral and spiritual enlightenment, guiding people towards the "light" of righteousness and kingdom living. Jesus describes Himself as the "light of the world" in John 8:12, inviting followers to walk in the light and thus avoid darkness, aligning with the thematic elements of Isaiah's prophecy.

¹ "Isaiah 9 - The Complete Jewish Bible with Rashi Commentary." [Chabad.org](https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/15939/jewish/Chapter-9.htm/showrashi/true). Accessed February 22, 2024.
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Additionally, Isaiah 49:6 prophesies the Messiah to be “a light to the Gentiles.” Paul claims in Acts 26:23 that the Messiah “should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles,” and claims to be proclaiming Jesus to have fulfilled this very matter.

ISAIAH 50:4-7

The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. (Isaiah 50:4-7)

Isaiah 50:4-7 is part of what is commonly referred to as the "Servant Songs" of Isaiah. These songs describe the mission, trials, and victories of a mysterious figure referred to as "the Servant." In traditional Jewish interpretation, this Servant is often understood to be symbolic of the nation of Israel itself. However, in Christian interpretation, the identity of this Servant is often associated with the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Specifically, the phrase "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair" seems to clearly find its fulfillment in the suffering of Jesus, as detailed in the Gospel accounts.

For our purposes, since we are considering the ministry and teachings of Jesus we will focus on verse 4, “The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.” Jesus was recognized for His wisdom even as a child, astonishing the teachers in the Jerusalem temple with His understanding (Luke 2:46-47). His teachings were often noted as being very different from what the nation was used to, and looked upon with astonishment. For instance, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5), and "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). After the sermon, the crowds were amazed at his teachings, "because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Matthew 7:28-29).

Moreover, Jesus demonstrated deep compassion for the weary and burdened. He said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). His words brought comfort and hope to those in distress, showing His ability to "speak a word in season to him that is weary." So, we can see that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah 50:4.

In fact, all four gospels make mention of the Lord’s ability to speak in “the tongue of the learned” (Is. 50:4).

- "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." (Matthew 7:28-29, KJV)
- "And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes." (Mark 1:22)
- "And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power." (Luke 4:32)
- "The officers answered, Never man spake like this man." (John 7:46)

ISAIAH 42:2-3

He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.

In the broader context related to the millennium and second coming, the Messiah is referred to in gentle terms as one who would not break a bruised reed or extinguish a smoldering wick. This clearly pertains to the Messiah's earthly ministry, not to the second coming or the judgment of nations.

In Matthew 11:28-29, Jesus extends a compassionate invitation to those who are weary and burdened, saying, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This reveals His deep empathy and willingness to provide relief and comfort to those in distress.

In the following chapter, Matthew 12:1-16, we see this empathy in action when Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees. They were hoping to catch Him in an act of wrongdoing, specifically breaking the Sabbath law. A man with a withered hand approaches Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. Instead of shying away from the act due to the Pharisees' scrutiny, Jesus simply asks them a rhetorical question, "What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?" (Matthew 12:11). Of course, the Pharisees would not hesitate to rescue a sheep in such a scenario, despite it being the Sabbath.

Jesus then proceeds to heal the man, demonstrating His commitment to alleviating suffering over adhering to rigid interpretations of the law. In response, "the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him" (Matthew 12:14). Yet, Jesus, rather than engaging in a dispute, simply "withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all" (Matthew 12:15).

Matthew then quotes Isaiah 42:2-3, identifying it as a prophecy fulfilled through Jesus' gentle and compassionate ministry. Isaiah's prophecy depicts the Messiah as one who "shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth." This image of a tender-hearted Messiah, who quietly assists those in need rather than seeking public acclaim, perfectly aligns with Jesus' actions and teachings. He consistently focused on helping those who were hurting, without causing a commotion or seeking to draw attention to Himself.

CONCLUSION

The ministry and teachings of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the New Testament, align remarkably with the prophetic texts found in the Old Testament. From the mysterious "Servant" of Isaiah's songs, to the "great light" that shines on those living in darkness, to the gentle healer who does not break a bruised reed, the prophecies paint a vivid picture of the Messiah's mission. This mission is beautifully fulfilled in Jesus, whose teachings brought spiritual enlightenment, whose words comforted the weary, and whose actions demonstrated compassion and empathy for those in need. The examination of these prophecies not only strengthens our understanding of the Messiah's role as depicted in the scriptures, but also deepens our appreciation for the extraordinary life and ministry of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of these prophecies.