

“Can anyone here tell me three types of fishing gear discussed by the prophet Habakkuk that demonstrate how we can be better fishers of men?”

(an aside) Matthew and I played the original Trivia game, Bible Trivia game. He would toss out the question. I waited as the fishermen in the room struggled to remember what was in the book of that minor prophet, then finally chimed in,

“Hooks and two kinds of nets. They demonstrate that we should use the best applicable methods to make disciples, not use just one technique.”

Matthew and I *loved* that kind of stuff. Geeks...I believe would be your appropriate term. Bible Geeks.

We’d met several years after the death of Jesus.¹ Most modern scholars believe he wrote his book more than three decades after that. So, I knew him for those three decades leading up to his writing the *Gospel of Matthew*.

Matthew and I were close friends for two reasons that are apparent to anybody who has read our books. First, we were passionate about bringing the Jews to belief in Jesus. I am known as the Apostle to the Gentiles, but I was intent on always going to my Jewish brothers first in order to make them disciples of Jesus. That leads to the second reason Matthew and I were close.

Matthew and I were experts in the Old Testament, and we continually used Old Testament passages in our writings to convince the Jewish people that Jesus was the savior that the Old Testament prophets often prophesied about. Over the decades we knew each other, we constantly got special insights from Holy Spirit about those passages. Matthew and I delighted in sharing those insights with one another. (he gives a “you know” look) Bible Geeks!

About 80% of Matthew’s book can be found in *Luke* and *Mark*. Rather than repeat stories from episodes about those two books, I will tell you about a few passages in Matthew’s gospel that have to do with the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture. I just love this stuff. (he keeps this vibe from the opening)

¹ Acts 9:27

From the start, Matthew reveals that the prophet Isaiah foretold the birth of Jesus. Mathew quotes Isaiah, "A virgin will get pregnant, and will give birth to a son, and will name him Immanuel."² He goes on to describe how Mary conceived through the Holy Spirit, not through a man.

I teased Matthew a little bit for using such an obvious scripture from the prophets, but he made it clear the next prophecy was as obvious to even the chief priests and teachers of the law. When Herod asked where the Christ was to be born, they quoted the prophet Micah, and told him the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem.³

Matthew did show his obvious inspiration from the Holy Spirit with his next two obscure quotes. He told the story that after Jesus was born, the wise men refused to return to Herod and give him information about the birth of Jesus. That made Herod so mad that he killed all the babies in Bethlehem and its vicinity. Prior to that, an angel had warned Joseph to take Jesus and go to Egypt, from where he returned after Herod died. Matthew quoted an obscure passage in *Jeremiah* that foretold the killing of the innocent babies,⁴ and another passage in *Hosea* saying that Jesus would return from Egypt.⁵

From the start of his gospel, Matthew would have impressed any Jew with his knowledge of the Old Testament and how it pointed to the coming of Jesus. They might not have been convinced, but they would have been impressed. What Matthew did next was a stroke of genius.

John the Baptist was still highly revered by the Jews even though he had been dead for several decades. Mathew reminded everyone about John the Baptist and how he was prophesied by Isaiah,⁶ and that his authorized mission from God was to prepare the way for the coming King. He reminded people that John had authority over the Jewish leaders, and that he baptized Jesus. He reminded people that disciples of John transferred their devotion to Jesus because John said Jesus was the chosen one of God.

Matthew waits for a few passages, then through the words of Jesus, Matthew reminds everyone that the prophet Malachi had said a messenger was to be sent ahead of the Messiah, and Elijah must come back before the day of the Lord.⁷ Then the hammer drop; John is the messenger and the figurative Elijah, and so the conditions are fulfilled for the Messiah to arrive...and that Messiah is Jesus!

² Isaiah 7:14

³ Micah 5:2

⁴ Jeremiah 31:15

⁵ Hosea 1:1

⁶ Isaiah 40:3

⁷ Malachi 3:1, 4:5

If Matthew had stopped writing there, his gospel would have been invaluable. But increasing the value all the more, he continued to tell the story of Jesus. Some of his Scriptures references are humorous to those of us in the know. For instance, he used the prophet Isaiah to show that Jesus was prophesied to live in Capernaum.⁸ I think he pressed that point because Capernaum was also Matthew's home and place of employment.

I have to admire him for not pulling any punches when he described his call to follow Jesus. He openly admitted that he was a hated tax collector who spent time with other tax collectors and sinners. I grinned when I noticed that he found a way to use a passage from *Hosea* to prophesy about his calling to follow Jesus.⁹

Luke and Matthew wrote about many of the same things, but Matthew was insistent about continually showing how Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures the Jews so revered.

He used a passage from *Isaiah* to show that Jesus would heal people of their diseases.¹⁰ He used a passage from *Hosea* to show that God really wants people to be merciful more than he wants their sacrifices.¹¹ He used the words of Isaiah to show that Jesus was the servant of God empowered by the Holy Spirit.¹² Over and over, Matthew used the Scriptures to show how they pointed to Jesus being the Messiah.

You would think Jesus' life and teachings would have been enough to convince the Jews, but Matthew rightly understood a big stumbling block for the Jews was their misunderstanding of Scriptures. They knew the Scriptures, but often applied them incorrectly or were more intent on following man-made rules and interpretations. Unless Matthew could show correct interpretations adequately, the Jews would remain hard-hearted and not willing to come to Jesus.

Imitating what he learned from Jesus, Matthew used the Jewish leaders as the perfect way to accomplish his aim. The Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, teachers of the law, and priests were the authorities when it came to Scripture interpretation. Scripture geeks, if you will. Somehow this was true even though they often disagreed among themselves. Jesus and Matthew knew that if they could show the authorities to be wrong, the rest of the people might gain true understanding. I'm not sure he really thought the authorities would ever change their minds, because authorities of any kind don't like to be wrong. Some things just don't change, I'm sure you agree.

⁸ Isaiah 9:1-2

⁹ Hosea 6:6

¹⁰ Isaiah 53:4

¹¹ Hosea 6:6

¹² Isaiah 42:1-4

The first public rejection of Jesus by the authorities was when Jesus healed a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute. It is important to note that he was blind and mute because of demon-possession, not for a physical reason. When Jesus healed him, the Pharisees mocked Jesus and said he only drove out demons by the power of Satan. Jesus used parables and logic to defeat the accusation of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees and teachers switched gears, they asked to see a miracle of Jesus. The implication in their question was that if he did a miracle to prove he was the Messiah, perhaps they would believe. Jesus knew they were only being argumentative, so he accused them of being wicked and evil for wanting a miracle that they would not believe. He contrasted them to the people of Ninevah and the Queen of Sheba who truly repented and wanted to learn when they were faced with the truth. From then on, Jesus was an enemy of the Jewish authorities.

In comparison, Jesus had compassion for the common people because they were so helpless. They could not understand the esoteric arguments and teachings of their leaders, and they could not follow all of their man-made rules. So, Jesus talked to the people in parables, telling stories that made sense to them. They were quite intelligent enough to understand the lessons Jesus was teaching once it was phrased correctly. The people were always amazed at his understanding and his authority.

Matthew used a passage from *Isaiah* and from *Psalms* to show why Jesus taught the way he did.¹³ Isaiah indicated that people with hard hearts could never understand. That pointed to the fact that many of the Jewish leaders had hard hearts. In contrast, the common people who were humble, could hear and understand the truth. Since Matthew knew the parables were so important, he recorded many that neither Mark nor Luke wrote about.

Matthew records in detail one very important event in his life and in the life of the apostles. Mark and Luke only briefly mention the event. In the tenth chapter of Matthew, he gives a very detailed description of Jesus sending out the Twelve with authority to drive out evils spirits and heal every kind of disease and sickness. The success of the event doubtless was a turning point in the training of the apostles, and was indelibly inscribed on Matthew's heart and consciousness. My friend could not resist quoting the prophet Micah while he talked about this event.¹⁴

Before finishing, I want to point out one more thing. Matthew was very diligent in writing about Jesus, his teachings, and his prophecies given near the end of Jesus' life. It is only through Matthew that we learn the Parable of the Landowner and Evil Tenants,¹⁵ the many scriptural

¹³ Isaiah 6:9-10, Psalm 78:2

¹⁴ Micah 7:6

¹⁵ Matthew 20:1-16

fulfillments of Jesus' Triumphal Entry¹⁶, and some of Jesus' final comments against the Jewish authorities and his lament over Jerusalem.¹⁷ Only Matthew records the Parable of the Wicked Servant, the Parable of the Wise Virgins, and the Parable of the Talents.¹⁸ Only Matthew records Jesus' words about the judgement at the coming of the Son of Man, with its famous lines about the sheep and goats.¹⁹

Yes, we would be much poorer if it weren't for the writing of my friend, Matthew. He is the sole source for many of Jesus' teachings, and he was a master at using the Old Testament to prove the applicability of many prophecies to Jesus. And, a fellow Bible Geek.

I have a new question for him the next time we meet. Who was the most effective preacher of the Old Testament?²⁰

[starts to walk away, then comes back and sits down. Makes a motion like he is sharing a secret with the audience.] Jonah. He preached a sermon of less than a dozen words and got 120,000 people to repent!

¹⁶ Matthew 21:10-17

¹⁷ Matthew 23:8-40

¹⁸ Matthew 24:43-25:28

¹⁹ Matthew 25:31-46

²⁰ Jonah. Jonah 3:4, 4:11