

Matthew's continuity



The Book of Matthew, the first of the Gospels in the New Testament, appears to be directed towards the Hebrews to compel them to accept Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah. As a result, the Book of Matthew is in many ways seemingly continuous of the Hebrew Scriptures. When reading the Book of Matthew, one immediately notices the lengthy recount of genealogy of “ Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” (Matthew 1: 1) starting from Abraham: “ Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob...” (Matthew 1: 2) and ending with Jesus Christ: “...and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah” (Matthew 1: 16) It is quite interesting how the Gospel according to Matthew approaches the issue of Christ with the retracing of birth and paternity of forty-two generations: “ So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations” (Matthew 1: 17). Jesus Christ is not related by blood to Joseph, and hence is not related by blood to David or Abraham. However, he is nevertheless referred to as “ the son of David, the son of Abraham” in because the Book of Matthew attempts to establish continuity with the Old Testament. First, this serves to convince the Hebrews that the Messiah is, like them, a descendant of Abraham, the progenitor of the Hebrews. It also shows that Jesus is a descendant of royalty, David, as prophesized in the Old Testament “...a child has been born for us, a son given to us...his authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom.” (Isaiah 9: 6-7) Matthew reminds us of this many times throughout the Book, for example: “...two blind men followed him, crying loudly, ‘ Have mercy on us, Son of David'” (9:

27), and “ all the crowds were amazed and said, ‘ Can this be the Son of David?’” (12: 23) Other fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies are common in the Book of Matthew. One such is the conception and subsequent naming of Christ: “ Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel” (Matthew 1: 23) prophesized by Isaiah “...the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7: 14) And in Hosea, a part of the history of the Jews, “ When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son” (Hosea 11. 1), which refers to Exodus “ thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn son” (Exodus 4: 22), is recapitulated when Joseph, following the instructions of an angel of God, brought Jesus and Mary out of Egypt. Jesus taught the crowds with parables, and fulfilled the prophecy “ I will open my mouth in a parable” (Psalms 78: 2). Jesus Christ told the crowds that John the Baptist was prophesized to be the return of the prophet Elijah: “ For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.” (Matthew 11: 13-14) Isaiah also prophesized a Messiah who “ borne our infirmities and carried our diseases” (Isaiah 53: 4). Jesus Christ was known for healing the sick. Chapters Eight and Nine of the Book of Matthew detail his many miracles. This brings up another major topic in both Matthew and the Old Testament Scriptures: miracles. In Exodus, God commanded Moses repeatedly to bring down harm against the Pharaoh and the Egyptians. For example, God said to Moses “...present yourself before Pharaoh...and say to him, ‘ Thus says the Lord: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. For if you will not let my people go, I will send swarms of flies on you, your officials, and your people...” (Exodus 8: 20-21) God, here seems to have Moses perform these miracles to prove his power: “ You shall

speaking all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his land. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and I will multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. When Pharaoh does not listen to you, I will lay my hand upon Egypt and bring my people the Israelites, company by company, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord..." (Exodus 7: 2-5) In Matthew, God again performs great miracles, this time through Jesus the Messiah in his ability to heal: "...a leper...knelt before him, saying, ' Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.' He stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, " I do choose. Be made clean." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed" (Matthew 8: 2-3). God's miracles in the New Testament, while they still serve to prove his greatness, are no longer vengeful, but compassionate (healing the sick, feeding the hungry, exorcising demons). God's ways have undoubtedly changed in the Book of Matthew. This is not to say that Jesus wished for his followers to reject the ways of the past: " Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill." (Matthew 5: 17) He goes on to elaborate upon the old laws of the Hebrews: " You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times...But I say to you..." He refers back repeatedly to the Ten Commandments given to Moses (in Exodus Chapter 20) to establish connections with the past. God continued to test faith in the Book of Matthew as he did in the Hebrew Scriptures. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac: " Take your son, your only son Isaac...and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you." (Genesis 22: 2) When God was sure that Abraham is a true follower, God stops Abraham from killing his son: " for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only

son, from me." (Genesis 22: 12) In Job, Satan (meaning "the accuser"), because he cannot battle with God directly, can tamper with God's creation, namely man, and in this case, the righteous and faultless Job. Satan attempts to alienate God from man by accusing Job of being the worst of sinners because he worships God for self-serving reasons. God allows Satan to test Job by removing every indication that Job has God's favor. Job does not curse God, but he is hurt because he feels that God has abandoned him. God eventually restores all that belonged to Job, and the Tempter Satan is silenced. Satan similarly tests Jesus in the desert: "If you are the Son of God..." (Matthew 4: 3) but Jesus, like Job, remained steadfast: "Away with you Satan! For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil left him" (Matthew 4: 10-11). Jesus, also like Job, at one point on the crucifix felt that God has abandoned him: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27: 46) Many aspects of the Book of Matthew suggest that Jesus is presented as the new and greater Moses. Moses was very important to the Hebrews. He was deliverer of his people, lawgiver, and attributed to writing the first five books of the Old Testament. Jesus was teacher, lawgiver and judge, but most importantly the faithful Son of God, while Moses was only the faithful servant of God. Both Moses and Jesus dealt with the subject of redemption. God instructed Moses to say to the Israelites: "I am the Lord, and will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment" (Exodus 6: 6) Redemption is mentioned again: "In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode." (Exodus 15: 13) But seemingly crucial to this idea of redemption is <https://assignbuster.com/matthews-continuity/>

the adherence to God's laws that were delivered to the people. God expected the laws to be obeyed and himself to be feared. Jesus, too, gives laws (in Matthew Chapters 5 and 6) but the purpose of his laws, and consequently, the idea of salvation, is different from that of the Hebrews. Jesus, because he is the Son of God, can forgive sins and acts as a direct agent of salvation. Obedience of his laws is a testament of faith in God "whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me" (Matthew 10: 40). If one loves Jesus, one will obey his laws, and Jesus will act on his behalf to attain salvation and reach "the kingdom of heaven." This idea is further supported when after the resurrection of Christ, he appears to his disciples and says: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28: 18-20) The last line of Matthew represents the compassion and timelessness crucial to the idea of Christ: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28: 20) The Book of Matthew has more references to the Old Testament Scriptures than any other book of the New Testament. The Book of Matthew seems very concerned with fulfilling prophecies from the Old Testament, which suggests that it was written towards a Jewish audience. The Old Testament again and again prophesied the advent of a Messiah who will save Israel and its people, and Jesus fulfills these prophecies in Matthew. The attempt of Matthew to establish itself in continuity with the Hebrew Scriptures (through the prophecies and recurring themes found in both the Old and New Testaments (tests of faith, salvation)) is in effect an attempt to convincingly introduce the idea of Jesus Christ to the Hebrews.