Matthew 1-2 Quotations from the Hebrew Bible

2021-09-19

1. Matthew 1:22-23: All this took place to fulfil 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).
2. Isaiah 7: 14: Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Imman'u-el.
3. The context: In the midst of political and diplomatic intrigue, the LORD speaks to King Ahaz.
4. The passage about the child concludes with Isaiah 7: 16: For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.
5. The translation of virgin/young woman is controversial.
6. The Hebrew word used in Isaiah 7: 14 is “alma” (עַלְמָה ).
7. The Septuagint translated “alma” to “Parthenos” (παρθένος ), which means virgin.
8. The King James Version (and probably Matthew) follow the Septuagint. The Revised Standard Version and New Revised Standard Version translate “alma” as young woman.
9. The word “alma” occurs only seven times in the Hebrew scriptures. It isn’t clear in any of these instances whether it means virgin or young woman.
10. For example, Proverbs 30: 18-19: There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a young woman.
11. Hebrew has a more common word for virgin, betula (בְּתוּלָה) where the meaning is less ambiguous.
12. For example, Ezekiel 44: 22: They shall not marry a widow, or a divorced woman, but only a virgin of the stock of the house of Israel, or a widow who is the widow of a priest.
13. Matthew 2: 5-6: 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.'"
14. Micah 5: 1: But you, O Bethlehem Eph'rathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.
15. Micah 4 is a vision of the peaceful latter days, when “nation shall not lift sword against nation.”
16. King David came from Bethlehem, so Micah 5: 1 can be read as a prophecy that the Messiah will be descended from David.
17. 2 Samuel 5: 1-2: Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Behold, we are your bone and flesh. Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you that led out and brought in Israel; and the LORD said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.'"
18. Matthew 2: 15: …This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt have I called my son."
19. Hosea 11: 1: When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.
20. The context is God’s tender, fatherly love for Israel despite Israel’s disobedience. For example,
21. 11: 3: Yet it was I who taught E'phraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them.
22. 11: 8: How can I give you up, O E'phraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! How can I make you like Admah! How can I treat you like Zeboi'im! My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender.
23. Coming from Egypt is mentioned again in Hosea 11: 10-11: They shall go after the LORD, he will roar like a lion; yea, he will roar, and his sons shall come trembling from the west; they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria; and I will return them to their homes, says the LORD.
24. Matthew 2: 17-18: 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."
25. Jeremiah 31: 15: Thus says the LORD: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not."
26. Ramah is along the route the exiles took from Jerusalem to Babylon.
27. Most of Jeremiah 31 is joyful anticipation of the deliverance and return from Babylon; verse 31: 15 is uncharacteristic.
28. The last phrase “they are not” (אֵינֶֽנּוּ ) is used to describe Rachel’s son Joseph – for example, Genesis 42: 13: And they said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more."
29. Matthew 2: 23: 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."
30. The Hebrew Bible does not contain the sentence, “He shall be called a Nazarene.”
31. It may be a wordplay on Nazirite (נָזִיר). Nazirites were men or women who took a special vow, were separate for the LORD, didn’t cut their hair, and drank no wine or grape juice. Nazirites are described in Numbers 6. Samson was a Nazirite from birth.
32. With Nazirites in mind, consider Isaiah 4: 3: And **HE** who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem **WILL BE CALLED HOLY,** every one who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, (emphasis added)
33. Another possibility is wordplay on Is 11: 1: There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch (nay-tser, נֵצֶר ) shall grow out of his roots.

Sources:

* Barbara E. Reid, O.P., The Gospel According to Matthew, 2005
* Robert Alter, The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary, 2019
* www.blueletterbible.org

Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version (RSV)