

Four Ways the New Testament Quotes the Old Testament

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The NT authors quote the OT in four different ways. Matt. 2 illustrates all four methods.

The first is *literal prophecy plus literal fulfillment*. In this manner Matthew 2:5–6 quotes Micah 5:2. Micah’s prophecy that the Messiah’s birthplace would be in Bethlehem of Judah is literal in meaning. The term for a fulfillment of a literal prophecy in the New Testament is *a literal fulfillment*. Isaiah 7:14; 52:13–53:12; Zechariah 9:9; and others belong to this category.

The second is *literal plus typical*. Matthew 2:15’s quotation of Hosea 11:1 illustrates. The original context is not prophetic, but refers to God bringing Israel (His national son) out of Egypt (the Exodus). Hosea referred to literal Israel, because the following verses speak of Israel quickly slipping into idolatry. The *literal* meaning in Hosea 11:1’s context refers to the Exodus. Israel (God’s national son) coming out of Egypt *typifies* the individual messianic Son of God leaving Egypt. The fulfillment was typical (not prophetic), since Hosea 11:1 was not prophetic. Matthew does not deny, change, or reinterpret the original literal meaning. The literal Old Testament event typifies a New Testament event. This is literal plus typical. Often, the Book of Hebrews cites Exodus and Leviticus similarly.

The third is *literal plus application*. Matthew 2:17–18 quotes Jeremiah 31:15 in this manner. Jewish young men going into the Babylonian captivity passed the town of Ramah. Rachel (the symbol of Jewish motherhood) was buried near the town. As the young men went, Ramah’s Jewish mothers wept for sons they would never see again. Jeremiah’s *literal* meaning pictures the scene as Rachel weeping for her children. The New Testament cannot change or reinterpret the contextual meaning. Rather, a New Testament event having one similarity to an Old Testament event *applies* it. The point of similarity is that once again Jewish mothers weep for sons they will never see again, applying an Old Testament

passage to a New Testament event. Everything else is different. Jeremiah's event happens in Ramah (north of Jerusalem), but Matthew 2:17–18 occurs in Bethlehem (south of Jerusalem). In Matthew, they die, but in Jeremiah living sons go into captivity. This is literal plus application. The original text may be history (as with Jeremiah 31:15) or prophecy. A prophetic example is Acts 2:16–21's citation of Joel 2:28–32. Joel did not mention (speaking in tongues). Dreams, visions, the sun darkened, the moon turned into blood did not happen in Acts 2. Joel spoke of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the whole nation in the last days, while Acts 2 speaks of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on people in the Upper Room. This is not Joel's *all flesh*, but one similarity, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, had unusual manifestations. Acts 2 does not change or reinterpret Joel 2, nor does it deny that it will have a literal fulfillment when the Holy Spirit will be poured out on the nation. It applies one point of similarity to a New Testament event.

The fourth is ***summation***. Matthew 2:23 illustrates: *... that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets, that he should be called a Nazarene.* No such statement occurs in the Old Testament. The plural *prophets* points to at least two, yet not even one uses these words. Unlike the first three categories, *summation* gives a summary of teaching by the prophets. The plural *prophets* is a clue. First century Jews despised *Nazarenes*, a reference to reproach and shame (John 1:46). The term *Nazarene* summarizes the prophets' teaching that people would despise and reject the Messiah (e.g., Isaiah 53:3). Another example is Luke 18:31–33. Using the plural for prophet again, Jesus states that the time for climactic fulfillment has come: the Messiah will go to Jerusalem, be turned over to the Gentiles who will mock Him, treat Him shamefully, spit on Him, scourge Him, and kill Him, but He will rise again the third day. No single prophet ever said all this, but the prophets together did.