

Matthew's Use of Isa 42:1-4 in Matt 12:17-21

Lee Irons

Isa 42:1-4 MT	Isa 42:1-4 LXX	Matt 12:18-21
<p> הֵן עַבְדֵי אֲתִמְדָּבּוּ בַּחִירֵי רְצֹתָהּ נַפְשִׁי נִתְתִּי רוּחִי עָלָיו מְשַׁפֵּט לְגוֹיִם יוֹצִיא: </p>	<p> Ἰακωβ ὁ παῖς μου ἀντιλήμψομαι αὐτοῦ Ἰσραηλ ὁ ἐκλεκτός μου προσεδέξατο αὐτόν ἢ ψυχὴ μου ἔδωκα τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπ' αὐτόν κρίσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἐξοίσει </p>	<p> ἴδου ὁ παῖς μου ὃν ἠρέτισα, ὁ ἀγαπητός μου εἰς ὃν εὐδόκησεν ἢ ψυχὴ μου· θήσω τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπ' αὐτόν, καὶ κρίσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἀπαγγελεῖ. </p>
<p> לֹא יִצְעַק וְלֹא יִשְׁאָא וְלֹא-יִשְׁמִיעַ בַּחוּץ קוֹלוֹ: </p>	<p> ² οὐ κεκραξεται οὐδὲ ἀνήσει οὐδὲ ἀκουσθήσεται ἕξω ἢ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ </p>	<p> ¹⁹ οὐκ ἐρίσει οὐδὲ κραυγάσει, οὐδὲ ἀκούσει τις ἐν ταῖς πλατείαις τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ. </p>
<p> קָנָה רְצוּץ לֹא יִשְׁבֹּר וּפְשָׁתָהּ כְּהָהּ לֹא יִכְבְּנָה לְאַמַּת יוֹצִיא מְשַׁפֵּט: </p>	<p> ³ κάλαμον τεθλασμένον οὐ συντριψίει καὶ λίνον καπνιζόμενον οὐ σβέσει ἀλλὰ εἰς ἀλήθειαν ἐξοίσει κρίσιν </p>	<p> ²⁰ κάλαμον συντετριμμένον οὐ κατεάξει καὶ λίνον τυφόμενον οὐ σβέσει, </p>
<p> לֹא יִכְהֶה וְלֹא יָרוּץ עַד-יִשִּׁים בְּאַרְצוֹ מְשַׁפֵּט וּלְתוֹרָתוֹ אֵיִם יִנְחִילוּ: </p>	<p> ⁴ ἀναλάμψει καὶ οὐ θραυσθήσεται ἕως ἂν θῆ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς κρίσιν καὶ ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ ἔθνη ἐλπιούσιν </p>	<p> ἕως ἂν ἐκβάλῃ εἰς νῆκος τὴν κρίσιν. ²¹ καὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ ἔθνη ἐλπιούσιν. </p>

Although it is clear that Matt 12:17-21 involves a quotation taken from Isa 42:1-4, the textual basis of Matthew's quotation is difficult to determine. Matthew's wording has points of contact with both the MT and the LXX, but differs in a surprisingly large number of ways from both. The question, then, is how to explain the text-form of

Matthew's quotation. Scholars have proposed a number of theories, but most think that Matthew made his own independent translation/interpretation from the Hebrew, perhaps with some input from the LXX and/or an Aramaic targum.¹ Those who opt for this approach then argue that the changes reflect Matthew's broader narrative and theological concerns.²

However, I am attracted to the theory that, while a few of the changes reflect Matthew's editorial agenda, the bulk of the quotation comes from an early revision of the LXX.³ This approach has the advantage of isolating more clearly just what can be traced to Matthew's hand. My proposal is that, to the revised LXX before him, Matthew made two theologically significant changes: one in v. 18 (ὄν ἠρέτισα, ὁ ἀγαπητός μου), and one in v. 20 (ἐκβάλη εἰς νῆκος τὴν κρίσιν).⁴ Aside from these two changes, most of the differences between Matthew and the LXX are best explained as coming from a pre-existing revision of the LXX that was intended to bring it into greater conformity with the

¹ E.g., W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991); John Grindel, "Matthew 12,18-21," *CBQ* 29 (1967): 110-15; Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel with Special Reference to the Messianic Hope* (SuppNovT 18; Leiden: Brill, 1967); Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (WBC 33A; Dallas: Word, 1993). Krister Stendahl goes even further and attributes the quotation to "Matthew's school" which created it out of a patchwork of readings gleaned from various sources. Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew: And Its Use of the Old Testament* (ASNU 20; Lund: Gleerup, 1954).

² E.g., Richard Beaton, *Isaiah's Christ in Matthew's Gospel* (SNTSMS 123; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002).

³ Maarten J. J. Menken argues this in depth in *Matthew's Bible: The Old Testament Text of the Evangelist* (BETL 173; Leuven: Peeters/Leuven University, 2004). Beaton acknowledges it as a justifiable option (pp. 119-20).

⁴ E.g., מְבָרַךְ means ἐκλεκτός (as the LXX rightly has it), not ἀγαπητός, so it is unlikely that a reviser of the LXX would have changed the former to the latter.

Hebrew as well as to make various stylistic improvements to the Greek.⁵ These revisions include, most notably, the deletion of the LXX's *Ἰακωβ* and *Ἰσραηλ*, interpretive insertions which probably had no textual basis in any Hebrew *Vorlage*.⁶ Most of the remaining revisions are merely alternative Greek translational equivalents made for stylistic reasons – *εὐδόκησεν*, *θήσω*, *ἀπαγγελεῖ*, *ἐρίσει*, *κραυγάσει*, *ἐν ταῖς πλατείαις*, *συντετριμμένον*, *κατεάζει*, *τυφόμενον*, etc.⁷ Aside from *ἐρίσει* (where the LXX has *κεκράζεται*), it is difficult to see what would have prompted Matthew to make these minor stylistic changes since they lack a clear redactional purpose. Thus these changes are best attributed to the reviser of the LXX who preceded Matthew. Even *ἐρίσει* (for *רָצַץ*) was probably already present in the revision of the LXX, since it is unlikely that a reviser would have been happy with *οὐκ κεκράζεται οὐδὲ κραυγάσει* due to the stylistic problem of using similar verbs in close proximity, thus forcing him to come up with another word for *κεκράζεται*. It is significant, I think, that the final clause, *καὶ ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ ἔθνη ἐλπιούσιν* (“and in his name shall the Gentiles hope”) is retained unchanged from the LXX, specifically retaining “his name” instead of changing it to conform more closely to the Hebrew, which has “his law” (*תּוֹרָתוֹ*). It is more likely that Matthew quoted from a

⁵ The discovery of the Greek scroll of the Minor Prophets at Nahal Hever in 1952 has led scholars to believe that the LXX underwent revision as early as the 1st century BC. Emanuel Tov, “The Septuagint,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. Martin Jan Mulder; Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum II/I; Assen: Van Gorcum; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 182-3.

⁶ Such additions are consistent with the translation technique of the Greek translator of LXX Isaiah.

⁷ Note that most of these are verbs. This suggests the presence of scribal revision activity, since it leaves the LXX's basic syntactical structure intact (for the most part).

revision of LXX Isaiah, than that Matthew made a fresh translation from the Hebrew that happens to agree with the LXX against the MT.

The two changes that I *do* assign to Matthew, by contrast, are part of his shaping of Isa 42:1-4 to tighten the links with his broader Christological and narrative framework. By means of the first change (replacing ἐκλεκτός with ἀγαπητός),⁸ he brings out the Christological point that Jesus is God's "beloved" Servant, thus referring back to Jesus' baptism (3:17) and preparing for the transfiguration (17:5), where the voice from heaven also quotes Isa 42:1. By means of the second change, he shows that though the Son/Servant is now retiring and meek, he will in the end "drive justice on to victory" (ἐκβάλλη εἰς νῆκος τὴν κρίσιν), thus hinting at the climax of the story (Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection). "The striking ἐκβάλλη in Mt is much more forceful than מַשִׁי or θῆ and is introduced in anticipation of the following εἰς νῆκος, which suggests a contest or struggle in which the opponents of the Servant are routed."⁹ Various theories have been proposed to explain εἰς νῆκος, but in my view, it is best regarded as Matthew's attempt, along with ἐκβάλλω, to heighten the forcefulness of the statement.

Note that if my theory is correct, Matthew's editorial handiwork is limited to the beginning and the end of the quotation, and leaves untouched the central correspondence between the behavior of Jesus and the Messianic expectation contained in Scripture, which for Matthew rests primarily on Isa 42:2 ("He will not quarrel or cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets"). Thus, Matthew's Jesus fulfills the role of the Isaianic *Ebed Yahweh* by withdrawing from the scene of conflict and by charging those

⁸ But Matthew retains the sense of מַשִׁי with οὐ ἠρέτισα. Beaton, 126-7.

⁹ Gundry, 114.

whom he healed not to make him known (vv. 15-16). The reason Matthew quotes Isa 42:1-4, rather than v. 2 alone, is that he wants to place this retiring quality of Jesus within his larger Christological and narrative framework. He sees it as a temporary limitation which is part of Jesus' divine calling and which will ultimately be reversed when he achieves victory over his opponents in the subsequent drama. And as v. 3 makes clear ("a crushed reed he will not break," etc.), Jesus' Servant role is on behalf of others – to bring God's justice to the downtrodden and the marginalized.