

Bible Study 3

Jesus' Usage of Jewish Scripture

Aim: To examine how Jesus uses the Jewish Scriptures in the Gospels and how Christians may hear those texts today as a call to faithful and holy living.

Opening Prayer: Gracious God, open our hearts and minds as we study your Word. Help us to hear the Scriptures as Jesus heard them, to recognize your liberating work among us, and to respond with faith, humility, and holy living. Guide our conversation, deepen our understanding, and form us into a community that bears witness to your justice, mercy, and peace. Amen.

Learning Guide Questions

- What might Jewish Scripture have meant within its own historical and theological context?
- What should we understand about the imagination and hope of the First Testament?
- How does Jesus interpret Scripture in relation to his mission and message?
- How can Christians today hear Jesus' call to holy living?

Primary Texts

Readings: Matthew 11:2–6 with Isaiah 35:5–6 and Isaiah 61:1; Matthew 11:7–10 with Malachi 3:1.

Matthew 11:2–6 — John's Question and Jesus' Response

Now when John heard in prison about the things the Christ was doing, he sent word by his disciples to Jesus, asking, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"

Jesus responded, "Go, report to John what you hear and see. Those who were blind are able to see. Those who were crippled are walking. People with skin

diseases are cleansed. Those who were deaf now hear. Those who were dead are raised up. The poor have good news proclaimed to them. Happy are those who don't stumble and fall because of me."

Isaiah 35:5–6 — Signs of Restoration

"Then the eyes of the blind will be opened,
and the ears of the deaf will be cleared.
Then the lame will leap like the deer,
and the tongue of the speechless will sing.
Waters will spring up in the desert,
and streams in the wilderness."

Isaiah 61:1 — Good News for the Poor

"The LORD God's spirit is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me.
He has sent me
to bring good news to the poor,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim release for captives,
and liberation for prisoners,"

Reflection: Jesus and the Prophetic Hope

The text in Matthew raises a searching question from John's disciples: "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" John had called Israel to social and religious righteousness, and his question invites the community to discern Jesus' identity in light of Scripture. Matthew presents Jesus as the one whose ministry fulfills the prophetic hope of Israel.

Jesus does not answer with a simple claim about himself. Instead, he invites John's followers to report what they have heard and seen: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those with skin diseases are cleansed, the deaf hear,

the dead are raised, and the poor receive good news. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' identity is recognized through the works of God's mercy and restoration.

The prophetic texts from Isaiah present a vision of God's liberating reign. These passages describe healing, release, restoration, and renewed life for vulnerable people and wounded communities (Isaiah 26:19; 29:18–19; 35:5–6; 42:6–7; 61:1–2).

Isaiah 26:19 — Hope After Devastation

This chapter is a poem celebrating Judah's victory after apocalyptic destruction. It offers a vision of resurrection and renewed community after disaster threatens the nation.

“Your dead will live, their corpses will rise, and those who dwell in the dust will shout for joy. Your shadow is a shadow of light, but you will bring down the ghosts into the underworld.”

Isaiah 29:18–19 — Renewal for the Vulnerable

Jerusalem had faced siege and judgment, yet the prophet announces renewal. The weak, poor, and needy are especially named as those who will rejoice in God's saving work.

“On that day: The deaf will hear the words of a scroll and, freed from dimness and darkness, the eyes of the blind will see.

The poor will again find joy in the LORD,
and the neediest of people will rejoice in the holy one of Israel.”

Isaiah 35:5–6 — The Return of the Redeemed

Isaiah 35 imagines the redeemed returning to Judah. The community is strengthened and healed, and the wilderness is transformed into a place of life. Barrenness gives way to streams of water and a safe road home.

“Then the eyes of the blind will be opened,
and the ears of the deaf will be cleared.

Then the lame will leap like the deer,
and the tongue of the speechless will sing.
Waters will spring up in the desert,
and streams in the wilderness.”

Isaiah 42:6–7 — A Light to the Nations

In the servant songs, God’s servant is called to be a covenant for the people and a light to the nations. The servant’s mission includes opening blind eyes and bringing prisoners out of darkness.

“I, the LORD, have called you for a good reason.
I will grasp your hand and guard you,
and give you as a covenant to the people,
as a light to the nations,
to open blind eyes, to lead the prisoners from prison,
and those who sit in darkness from the dungeon.”

Isaiah 61:1–2 — The Spirit-Anointed Mission

The prophet announces an anointed mission of good news, healing, release, liberation, and comfort. Later Christian interpretation hears this passage in relation to Jesus’ Spirit-filled ministry and God’s work of justice and restoration.

“The LORD God’s spirit is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me.
He has sent me
to bring good news to the poor,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim release for captives,
and liberation for prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor
and a day of vindication for our God,
to comfort all who mourn,”

Discussion Questions

1. What words, phrases, or images stand out to you in these passages?

2. What do these statements reveal about God's intention for people and communities?
3. How do these texts shape the way you hear Jesus' mission?

Jesus' Ministry as Evidence of God's Reign

Jesus' ministry drew the attention of many people. When asked about his identity and authority, Jesus pointed to lived experience and to the direction of God's promises in Isaiah. His answer connects his ministry to God's work of healing, freedom, and mercy.

Jesus is identified with a mission of mercy among people who are "harassed and helpless." Matthew describes this mission through visible signs of transformation:

- a) The blind receive sight.
- b) The lame walk.
- c) Those suffering from disease are cleansed.
- d) The deaf hear.
- e) The dead are raised.
- f) The poor receive good news.

These miracles of transformation are evidence that good news is near. Jesus' words and works announce that God is on the move.

Jesus then announces a blessing for those who welcome him and recognize his identity without stumbling over his mission.

Discussion Question: Can the miracles of Jesus be recognized today through the church's witness in our communities, or should miracles be understood only as events from biblical times? Explain your response.

Matthew 11:7–15 — John the Prophet

1. What might the symbols of the reed, soft robes, and the prophet represent?
2. What expectations did people have of a prophet then, and what expectations do we have of prophetic voices today? How might a prophet be recognized? (Matthew 11:7–9)
3. Read Malachi 3:1 as a text of anticipation. What themes emerge from this passage—justice, purification, judgment, or preparation?
4. John is more than a prophet. He challenges Herod and points people toward the kingdom of heaven. Matthew presents John as the promised Elijah who prepares the way for Jesus (Matthew 11:11–15).

To “have ears to hear” is to discern the significance of John and Jesus in relation to God’s reign and God’s saving presence among the people.

Closing Reflection

Closing Prayer: Lord, teach us to recognize the signs of your love, justice, and truth among us. Raise up within us the prophetic courage of John and the faithful witness of Jesus, so that our community may be transformed by peace, healing, and hope. Amen.