

THE ARCHES OF NAZARETH:

AN ARGUMENT FOR THE INTENTIONAL POLYSEMY OF THE
NAZARENE PROPHECY IN LIGHT OF THE DRAMATIC
STRUCTURE OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

A Paper

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1. INTRODUCTION

“I’m not throwing away my shot” is the initial “punch line” of the Broadway blockbuster musical *Hamilton*¹. These words are repeated through the first act and set the thread of dramatic arches for the entire narrative. Throughout the show the expression is recaptured under new lights and the effect is the communication of a multitude of semantical arches that are developed as the story unfolds. However, this strategy is not exclusive to *Hamilton*, but it is a feature of discourse used for dramatic purposes. This dramatic use of key phrases in narratives do not merely present information but are speech-acts that carry out intentional polysemy communicating in a multi-layered way.²

If so, why not to consider a similar application upon the biblical text? This is the hypothesis in the background of this paper. Methodologically, this paper will approach the gospel of Matthew as a dramatic structure and consider the Nazarene prophecy of Matthew 2:23 in light of such structure. The exegesis of Matt 2:23 will consider its linguistic aspects and address the main interpretative solutions proposed for this puzzling prophecy. The thesis is that the prophecy of the Nazarene is a key intentionally polysemic hinge (“punch line”) in the dramatic structure of the Gospel of Matthew that summarizes, in retrospection, the complete fulfillment of the messianic promises of the Old Testament and, in anticipation, the arches of Matthean Christology.

2. DRAMATIC STRUCTURE OF THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

The macrostructure of the gospel of Matthew has been object of intense study and the most traditional proposal is the one presented by B.W Bacon. According to him, this gospel is a collection of 5 books, as an analogy to the Pentateuch, with a preamble (Matt 1-2) and an epilogue (Matt 26-28).³ A second proposal for the structure of Matthew was developed by E. Krentz and

¹ *Hamilton* is a musical written by Lin-Manuel Miranda. Composed over a seven-year period from 2008 to 2015, the musical tells the story of Founding Father Alexander Hamilton.

² John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 58-76; Barbara Johnstone, *Repetition in Discourse Interdisciplinary Perspectives. 1*, *Advances in Discourse Processes* 47 (Norwood, N.J: Ablex, 1994); Stanley E. Porter, *Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament: Studies in Tools, Methods, and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 83-93.

³ His two main arguments are: Jesus concludes five times with a stereotypical formula (Matt 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; and 26:1) and before each Jesus’ discourse there is a matching introductory narrative section tied to the discourse. See: B.W. Bacon, “The Five Books of Matthew Against the Jews”, *The Expositor* VIII, 85 (1918) 56-66. He is followed by: Christopher R Smith, “Literary Evidences of a Fivefold Structure in the Gospel of Matthew,” *New Testament Studies* 43.4 (1997): 540–51; Morton Scott Enslin, “‘The Five Books of Matthew’: Bacon on the Gospel of Matthew,” *Harvard Theological Review* 24.2 (1931): 67–97; Raymond E.

was subsequently propagated by J.D. Kingsbury and D.R. Bauer. It basically sets the story in three acts: Matt 1:1-4:16 presenting Jesus as a person; Matt 4:17-16:20 displays Jesus' teachings and proclamations; and Matt 16:21-28:20 narrates his passion, death, and resurrection.⁴

By framing the structure of the gospel of Matthew as a literary arrangement, both alternatives create, in some level, a distinction between the historical narrative and the heavy theological content of the apostolic teaching. However, this association is central to Matthew's argument. This unity is emphasized under the lenses of a dramatic structure. Comprehending the Gospel as a plot, as a web of dramatic events⁵ organized in a literary material⁶ following a temporal/sequential order ingrained in a topic/thematic motif with an apologetic intention to raise a response from the reader ends up revealing a book that unfolds religion centered redemptive-historically in Jesus.⁷ The dramatic structure, then, is not merely a "narrative flow", but a "narrative logic". It displays the events under an organizing principle (a hermeneutical theological grid) that logically connects them in meaningful ways.⁸

Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, First edition. (Yale University Press, 1997), 172; Wilhelmus Johannes Cornelis Weren, "The Macrostructure of Matthew's Gospel: A New Proposal," *Biblica* 87.2 (2006): 171–200; Philippe Rolland, "From the Genesis to the End of the World: The Plan of Matthew's Gospel," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 2.2 (1972): 155–76. This structure has been disputed particularly because of the lack of continuity among the book and low importance of the cross and resurrection as the climax of the gospel. A modified version of this structure is defended by C.H Lohr, viewing Matthew as a great chiasm. For further details, see: Charles H Lohr, "Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 23.4 (1961): 403–35.

⁴ This proposal focuses on the continuity of the narrative character of the gospel and argues that the stereotypical formula following Jesus' five discourses has a linking rather than a dividing function. Their understanding is that there is a parallelism between 4:17 and 16:21 in which both verses open with Ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς followed by an infinitive κηρύσσειν καὶ λέγειν in 4:17 and δεικνύειν in 16:21 and summary of Jesus' words. These verses would have a macro syntactic function and serve as the captions of two long sections, the first about Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom and the second about his journey to Jerusalem and his passion, death, and resurrection. These two sections are, then, preceded by a prologue about Jesus' identity. See: Weren, "The Macrostructure of Matthew's Gospel: A New Proposal."; Edgar Krentz, "Extent of Matthew's Prologue: Toward the Structure of the First Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83.4 (1964): 409–14; David Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1989). This structure has been object of criticism because of a non-consistent and arbitrary division. See: Frans Neirynck, "La Rédaction Matthéenne et La Structure Du Premier Évangile," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 43.1 (1967): 41–73; Frans Neirynck, "Apo Tote Ērxato and the Structure of Matthew," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 64.1 (1988): 21–59.

⁵ An event may be defined without great rigor as something that happens, something that can be summed up by a verb or a name of action. See: Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, First Edition. (Oxford, 1966).

⁶ Paul Raymond McCuiston, Colin Warner, and Francois P Viljoen, "The Influence of Greek Drama on Matthew's Gospel," *HTS Theological Studies* 70.1 (2014): 1–9.

⁷ Matthew's rhetoric writing style is a literary strategy of characterization as he intentionally portrays dramatic persons as they interact with others, especially with Jesus, since He is the main character. Jesus is the supreme eschatological agent of God in Matthew's story. Francois P Viljoen, "Reading Matthew as a Historical Narrative," *In Die Skriflig* 52.1 (2018): 1–10; Janice Anderson, "Matthews Narrative: Web over and over and over Again", First Edition. (Sheffield, England: UNKNO, 1994).

⁸ Such organization invites us to describe plot as correlative rather than as simply episodic: events are related to one another in terms of cause and effect, and it is through discernment of these causal links that the logic of the narrative is revealed. See: Frank

This dramatic structure also highlights Matthew's gospel as intensely rhetorical as he narrates events presenting a message that demands a response.⁹ There is a continuous intensification of conflict between Jesus and other characters of the plot and this strategy urges for a response from the reader.¹⁰ If the plot is understood under this light, there is a necessary conclusion to this gospel which depends on the reader's response: those who respond in faith to the risen Jesus Christ the Nazarene are commissioned, by his authority, to take the Gospel to the nations. Thus, the dramatic structure is connected to the mission to Gentiles and the *ecclesia* motif in Matthew.¹¹

Structurally, the dramatic structure of Matthew's Gospel could be described briefly as: (i) the appearance of Jesus the Messiah (prologue heralding the arrival of the King Messiah: Matt 1:1-2:23); (ii) God fulfilling providentially His promises to Israel (Matt 3:1 – 11:19); (iii) Israel refusing to accept Jesus as the Messiah or to listen to His teachings (Matt 11:20 – 16:20); and (iv) the Gospel passes to the nations for the gathering of the true Israel revealed throughout the Old Testament "OT" (Matt 16:21 – 28:20). Thus, the plot of Matthew's Gospel revolves around the

J Matera, "The Plot of Matthew's Gospel," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49.2 (1987): 233–53; and Powell, "The Plot and Subplots of Matthew's Gospel." However, it does not mean considering the text in a pure redactional criticism form of grasping the author's *Sitz im Leben* and its redactions towards the motifs behind it, but approaching the biblical text in its historical setting, with the theological emphasis pressed by the biblical author and investigating both in and as the story is narrated by the author. See: David L Barr, "The Drama of Matthew's Gospel: A Reconsideration of Its Structure and Purpose". *Theological Digest* 24 (1976): 349-59.

⁹ In this sense, Matthew's gospel employs a technique of direct engagement with the reader through speech-acts (language communications that expect response). This form of communication is common, particularly in spoken language. This literary usage is more common in dramatic construction, as if mirroring spoken language in dialogue. Then, in a dramatic structure, it is expected that Matthew would use it. This is also used in Scripture in other places that are not necessarily dramatic, but seek to engage the reader with the intention, for example, to teach (Rom 15:4); to remind (Rom 15:15); to direct (1 Cor 5:9); to encourage (1 Pet 5:12); to stimulate (2 Pet 3:1); to bless (Rev 1:3). See: Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The Rhetoric of Comprehension in the Gospel of Matthew," *New Testament Studies* 41.3 (1995): 358–77; Brevard Springs Childs, "Speech-Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58.4 (2005): art. 4, 375–92; Vern S Poythress, "Canon and Speech Act: Limitations in Speech-Act Theory, with Implications for a Putative Theory of Canonical Speech Acts," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 70.2 (2008): art. 2, 337–54; John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, New Ed edition. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Barry Smith, "Materials towards a History of Speech Act Theory," *Vh.2.12smi* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, April 2022); Jeannine K Brown, "Direct Engagement of the Reader in Matthew's Discourses: Rhetorical Techniques and Scholarly Consensus," *New Testament Studies* 51.1 (2005): 19–35

¹⁰ According to Kingsbury, Matthew's plot derives largely from conflict analysis. His structure is drawn from Jesus conflicting with Satan, with demons, with nature, with disease, with various civil authorities, with the leaders of Israel, with his own disciples, and even with himself. These conflicts, however, do not all contribute equally to the story. The conflict with the human heart is different from all others in which the divine authority and judgment is immediately enforced. Because of the redemptive plan of God, there is patience and the announcement of the Kingdom of God being at hand. Matthew continues to develop this specific conflict throughout the narrative in ways that are essential to Matthew's plot. As Kingsbury sees it, "the conflict on which the plot of Matthew's story turns is that between Jesus and Israel". Additionally, I would suggest that taking this perspective in a dramatic sense, the last remaining conflict is with the reader, when Matthew presents the person of Jesus and calls the interpreter towards a response to the question: "who is this man?" See: Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story: Second Edition*, 2nd edition. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 3-10.

¹¹ Brendan Byrne, "The Messiah in Whose Name 'the Gentiles Will Hope' (Matt 12:21): Gentile Inclusion as an Essential Element of Matthew's Christology," *Australian Biblical Review* 50 (2002): 55–73.

dramatic events of Israel's rejection of Jesus¹², his teaching, works, messiahship and salvation in his death and resurrection – all providentially guided by God.¹³ Approaching this gospel under the light of a dramatic structure presses for a specific form of receiving the story, as a progressive revelation of historical narrative under a theological grid. There is an element of suspense, of the unknown in the dramatic encounters and arches that are being developed. Matthew's plot would then be structured as narrative blocks, being the Nazarene prophecy the first turning point setting arches for a complex theological narrative that uses syntactical, semantical, and literary devices to communicate the fullness of the fulfilment in Christ.¹⁴

A dramatic structure entails dramatic literary devices and techniques, which Matthew uses abundantly. Two very common in his plot are the use of anticipation and retrospection movements and *inclusios*. This anticipation/retrospection is present, for instance, in quotations from the OT. This use emphasizes God's providential work in history and is marked with the repetition of a characteristic formula quotation – that may not be referring only to temporal fulfilment of prophetic anticipations, but also typological elements being presented now in full light.¹⁵ The

¹² This depiction of Israel's rejection has given occasion for accusations of Matthew being antisemitic. This is not the scope of this paper, but for further details about this topic, see: Raymond Edward Brown, "Are the Gospels Anti-Semitic?," *Catholic Digest* 68.5 (2004): 60–69; John Nolland, "The Gospel of Matthew and Anti-Semitism," in *Built upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge, 2008), 154–69; Francois P Viljoen, "Matthew, the Church and Anti-Semitism," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 28.2 (2007): 698–718; Ulrich Luz, "Le Problème Historique et Théologique de l'antijudaïsme Dans l'évangile de Matthieu," in *Le Déchirement: Juifs et Chrétiens Au Premier Siècle* (Geneva, 1996), 127–50.

¹³ Matera distinguishes major and minor events (kernels and satellites) in the Matthean plot. He identifies as "kernels" the following events: the birth of Jesus, the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the question of John the Baptist, Jesus' conversation at Caesarea Philippi, the cleansing of the temple, and the great commission. See: Matera, "The Plot of Matthew's Gospel."

¹⁴ Matthew right from the opening words: "The book of the genesis of Jesus Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham" advances semantical and theological categories that the chapters 1 and 2 will develop as formative materials necessary for the interpretation of who Jesus is, the meaning of the events that will unfold and the response of the reader that is presented to such truths. See: Richard Paul Carlson, "Reading and Interpreting Matthew from the Beginning," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 34.6 (2007): 434–43.

¹⁵ Mogens Müller, "The Theological Interpretation of the Figure of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew: Some Principal Features in Matthean Christology," *New Testament Studies* 45.2 (1999): 157–73; and Brown, "Direct Engagement of the Reader in Matthew's Discourses: Rhetorical Techniques and Scholarly Consensus." Another interesting characteristic of the typological fulfilment in anticipation/retrospection in Matthew is his semiotic approach. The Nazarene prophecy presents an interesting case of semiotic transposition where Matthew seeks to translate the content an icon as a non-verbal text into a verbal text, creating a verbal imagery. When transposition takes place, the icon gives rise to a different kind of text quite independent of the aims of transposition. In this case the imagery of Nazarene is based on a combination of texts from the OT that correspond to the identity of Jesus depicted visually. The icon, the semiotic symbol of the Nazarene, serves as an intermediary between two texts in a descriptive, narrative way. See: Valerii Lepakhin, "Basic Types of Correlation between Text and Icon, between Verbal and Visual Icons," *Literature and Theology* 20.1 (2006): 20–30.

anticipation/retrospection is also employed inside his gospel setting interpretative hooks that are connected by the repetition of key phrases – producing *inclusios*.¹⁶

Another feature of Matthew's dramatic structure is the occurrence of summary passages that crystallizes the essence of theological points derived from the events narrated. These summary passages press the reader into conclusions/responses. The anticipation/retrospection associated with verbal repetition and summary passages threads a tapestry of dramatic masterpiece that involves the reader by creating, linguistically and thematically, multiple meaningful connections. Summary passages form thematical *inclusios*, while verbal repetition form linguistic *inclusios* and anticipation/retrospection form theological *inclusios*.¹⁷ In different registers, Matthew is pressing his fulfilment theme, encircling the perfection of the person and work of Jesus.

In this tapestry, linguistic and thematic tones are intertwined creating semantic richness. Through *inclusios* and summary passages, Matthew uses polysemy intentionally as a rhetorical device. Polysemy enables the coexistence of different possible meanings to the same expression, and this is not done to confuse, but to enrich possibilities. The ambiguity used by Matthew creates multiples arches of connections or applications within the plot inviting the reader to hear and engage in curiosity.¹⁸ Ambiguity presses the reader to interpret carefully, to dig deeper in the layers of meaning and to be confronted with the applications. Polysemy, in Matthew, is not done in obscurity, but in profoundness – it is done to clarify and embellish portraying the multiform wisdom of God in the person of Christ.

Finally, it is important to delineate the typological approach of Matthaean theology of fulfillment for the purpose of use of the OT passages in a dramatic structure. Succinctly, Matthew's narrative is very direct, without much detail and rooted in the Jewish messianic expectation and promises of the OT. However, he registers speeches and teachings of Christ in detail, as close as

¹⁶ Anderson, *Matthews Narrative*, 190-191; McCuiston, Warner, and Viljoen, "The Influence of Greek Drama on Matthew's Gospel"; Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, New edition. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 47; R. S. Crane, "The Concept of Plot", *Approaches to the Novel: Materials for a Poetics*, ed. R. Scholes (San Francisco: Chandler, 1961), 159-69.

¹⁷ Matthew Black, "The Theological Appropriation of the Old Testament by the New Testament," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39.1 (1986): 1-17.

¹⁸ Brown, "Direct Engagement of the Reader in Matthew's Discourses: Rhetorical Techniques and Scholarly Consensus."

possible to the words of the Nazarene.¹⁹ Jesus' identity, words and deeds are crucial for Matthew's plot. Jesus is the ultimate redemptive-historical character of history, the definitive and complete fulfillment of the entire OT. Jesus is a typology both in the analogical and in the prophetic sense, meaning that Jesus is Himself the personal correspondence among revealed truths about persons, events, institutions, and other things within the historical framework of God's special revelation, which, anticipated in the OT, are now viewed in retrospective from the New Testament ("NT").²⁰

3. EXEGESIS OF MATTHEW 2:23

Matt 2:23 is the conclusion of the first portion of the Gospel of Matthew. Matt 1 addresses questions related to the identity of Jesus²¹ in the fulfillment of the eschatological kingly expectations (son of David) as well as his Jewish origins and priestly role (son of Abraham).²² Matt

¹⁹ This is suggesting evidence for Markan priority since it would be a comprehensible move if Matthew was elaborating on things not developed in the gospel of Mark. Also, this aspect of his style of writing might also point to Matthew's Jewish origins as he intends to mirror Jesus' teachings and the Law, a Jesus being the supreme revelation of God, a prophet better than Moses or Elijah, and a new covenant being made in a new epoch of the story of redemption and revelation. Other possibility is that this is suggestive of a dramatic structure carrying an artistic element that resembles the details of the dialogues present in the Greek tragedies. Even though Greek tragedy intended dialogue to be set to music and Matthew set them to be read, they both function in the same way, as *stasimas*, meaning the ode that is placed in the narrative as a reflection of the episodes or the identity/character of the characters. There is a distinction, however, between story (what is told) and discourse (how it is told), since Matthew dialogues reveal Matthew as a hermeneutical narrator responding to Jesus' actions or words. See: McCuiston, Warner, and Viljoen, "The Influence of Greek Drama on Matthew's Gospel."

²⁰ The idea of typology is central for the concept of fulfillment in Matthew. His theological understanding of fulfillment is quite original in the sense that this fulfillment is not a result of merely a prediction of future events, but Jesus fulfills the OT by being consummation of history in absolute, the hermeneutical hinge of existence, the incarnation of the living Word of God, the absolute redemption promised in Scriptures and now perfected in the person and works of Jesus. This fulfillment involves the reversal of the negative aspects of Israel's history and presents Jesus as the central typological character of the Matthean drama as the incarnation, in recapitulation and τέλος (end, goal, purpose), of Israel's history. See: Paul Raymond McCuiston, "Fulfilled through the Prophets," *In Die Skriflig* 50.4 (2016): 1–8; Brandon D Crowe, "Fulfillment in Matthew as Eschatological Reversal," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 75.1 (2013): 111–27; D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd edition. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2005); Mogens Müller, "The Theological Interpretation of the Figure of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew: Some Principal Features in Matthean Christology," *New Testament Studies* 45.2 (1999): 157–73; Crowe, "Fulfillment in Matthew as Eschatological Reversal."; G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 37-38.

²¹ Matthew starts his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus points to the historical connection with the people of Israel as it presents the history of the OT in groups of 14 generations. Matthew's use of βιβλος γενέσεως (book of the beginnings/generations) in 1:1 and 18 echoes the OT "toledot" markers of Gen. 2:4 and 5:1. The LXX utilizes Matthew's Greek expression in these two passages. This introduction also connects with the ending of the Ketuvim (2 Chronicles) as the historical fulfillment of the Jewish messianic expectations. See: Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2005), 158-187; Peter J. Leithart, *The Gospel of Matthew Through New Eyes Volume One: Jesus as Israel* (Athanasius Press, 2018); Dale C. Jr Allison, *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present*, Reprint edition. (Baker Academic, 2012), 157-72.

²² Huizenga argues that the juxtaposition Son of David and Son of Abraham encompasses the complete work of atonement carried by the Messiah in its kingly and sacrificial role. The "son of Abraham" introduces a significant sacrificial Christological category centered on the figure of Isaac which complements the Messianic aspects of Jesus Christ's ministry associated with the title "son of David." "Son of David" and "son of Abraham" therefore stand in parallel at the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew as two titular designations specifying two Christological categories of the greatest import for the Gospel: King ("son of David") and Priest ("son of Abraham"). Thus, it is solved the difficulty of a crucified Messiah. See: James M Gibbs, "Purpose and Pattern in Matthew's Use of the Title 'Son of David,'" *New Testament Studies* 10.4 (1964): 446–64; Leroy Andrew Huizenga, "Matt 1:1: 'Son of Abraham' as a Christological Category," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 30.2 (2008): 103–13.

2 clarifies the historical details about the location of his birth and circumstances of Jesus' early years. Matt 1-2 is wrapped in the OT background: a mechanism used by Matthew to summarize the core of his theology rooted in the fulfillment of Scriptures and suggesting that both chapters should be considered as a unit.²³

With the lenses of a dramatical structure, Matthew's plot is presented in discourse.²⁴ The syntactical structures from 1:18 to 2:23 presents semantical markers of storytelling.²⁵ Each section is introduced by a genitive absolute aorist participle²⁶ followed by an ἰδοὺ, which resembles the Hebraism הִנֵּה displaying the rhythm of a narrative account and marking the pace of temporal frame and geographical movement. Another element of the narrative/dramatic account is the use of historical present to describe vividly a past event with anticipation for the outcome²⁷. Matthew's discourse is also remarkably Jewish in style. He builds his first act with evident parallelism presenting (a) an account of revelation; (b) an imperative angelic message; and (c) Joseph's obedient response. Thus, proposals of Matthean infancy narratives as essentially mythological or an example of archetype of origin story is against the characteristics of the discourse that is marked by factual narrative.²⁸

Thus, verses 19-23 are the conclusion of events recorded by Matthew in connection to the

²³ Vincent A Pizzuto, "The Structural Elegance of Matthew 1-2: A Chiastic Proposal," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 74.4 (2012): 712-37; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Academic, 2010), 98-99; R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (NY: Doubleday, 1997), 176.

²⁴ For further details about the use of discourse analysis, see: J P Louw, "Discourse Analysis and the Greek New Testament," *The Bible Translator (Ja, JI Technical Papers)* 24.1 (1973): 101-18; Jeffrey T Reed, "Discourse Analysis as New Testament Hermeneutic: A Retrospective and Prospective Appraisal," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39.2 (1996): 223-40; Porter, *Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament*; Stanley E Porter and Andrew W Pitts, "New Testament Greek Languages and Linguistics in Recent Research," *Currents in Biblical Research* 6.2 (2008): 214-55.

²⁵ It contains a total of 50 participles in 31 verses: 8 functioning adjectivally and 42 functioning adverbially. See: Wolfram Wilss, "EUGENE A. NIDA: COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS OF MEANING--AN INTRODUCTION TO SEMANTIC STRUCTURES," *The Bible Translator (Ja, JI Technical Papers)* 27.3 (1976): 350-54.

²⁶ ἐνθυμήθεις ("while he was thinking") in 1:20; γεννηθεις ("when he was born") in 2:1; ἀναχωρησάντων ("when they departed") in 2:13; and τελευτήσαντος ("when he died") in 2:19. See: William Varner, "A Discourse Analysis of Matthew's Nativity Narrative," *Tyndale Bulletin* 58.2 (2007): 209-28.

²⁷ Ernest DeWitt Burton, *Syntax of the Mood and Tenses in NT Greek* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1976): 9; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 526; Stanley Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 134-36.

²⁸ There is a common element of opposition, enmity against the "king of the Jews" (Matt 2:2), "the son of David, son of Abraham" (Matt 1:1), "son of God" (Matt 2:15) that is introduced. The king of the Jews and the promised child (promised seed) that would be conceived by the Holy Spirit bearing the name of Jesus, the one set apart to take away the sins of his people (Matt 1:21) is presented as rejected and despised, so much so that has to flight to Egypt. Immanuel, God with us (Matt 1:23), the ruler and shepherd of Israel (Matt 2:6), the only one who should be worshiped (Matt 2:11) is despised in humiliation and hidden from Israel amidst darkness, wept, refusal, murder, and exile – as the Scriptures foretold (Matt 2:15 and 2:18). See: Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 33a, Matthew 1-13 (Hagner)*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1993), 33; Benedict Viviano, "The Genres of Matthew 1-2: Light from 1 Timothy 1:4," *Revue Biblique* 97.1 (1990): 31-53.

fulfilment of the OT.²⁹ The Nazarene prophecy occurs in this context of presentation, of announcement of the arrival of Jesus and his identity is intertwined with God's direct activity.³⁰ Considering this theological interpretation of the narrative in light of the OT, Matthew's literary genre has been object of debate. One of the proposals consider it as a *midrashic Haggadah*, meaning a narrative that is being interpreted with deep theological significance, but also in dependance and reflecting the story of the Exodus and Moses. Normally this approach tends to consider Matthew not historically accurate given the allegoric application of rabbinic *midrashic* hermeneutics in first century Judaism³¹. However, the influence of a Jewish *midrashic* hermeneutics or even rabbinic language in the way of writing does not entail an inaccurate historical account *per se* and would also corroborate with Papias' testimony of Matthew writing in a Hebrew way or format.³² In this sense, Matthew's type of writing in a Hebrew way could encompass not only his style, but also his hermeneutics of retelling the story of Israel in miniature. In his prologue, this involves the city of David, the land of exodus, the mourning of exile and the return to the promised land - all in temporal, geographical and theological retelling centered in the person of Jesus (typological fulfilling).³³

This summation of providence centered in the person of Jesus also clarifies the obedience

²⁹ After Herod died, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream once again and told him to go back to Israel. The choice of verbs by Matthew clearly distinguishes the way to Egypt as in a hurry (Matt 2:13 – *φεύγω*) and the way back as a common journey (*πορεύομαι*), another marker of dramatic storytelling. Simultaneously, the words of the angel match with precision the words of Exodus 4:19 in the LXX also overlap the historical narrative with the theological frame of Matthean fulfillment – particularly with the Mosaic typology as Jesus being a superior Moses delivering and rescuing the eschatological people of Israel. Matthew dramatically sets Moses as a symbol for someone greater, a promise awaiting fulfillment, and his Gospel presents a new historical deliverance (exodus) anticipating an eschatological one. See: Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew*, ed. Dr Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, EGGNT (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2017); and Dale Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology*, Reprint edition. (Wipf and Stock, 2013), 273.

³⁰ Mt 1 primary aim is to establish the royal identity of the newborn child Jesus. However, Matthew expresses more than the fact that Jesus is the long awaited Davidic messianic figure. When he breaks the genealogy between Jesus and Joseph to make it clear Jesus' adoption, Matthew deeply roots Jesus' origin from God. God is directly acting implying the divine sonship of Jesus. See: Lidija Novakovic, "Jesus as the Davidic Messiah in Matthew," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 19.2 (1997): 148–91.

³¹ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd edition. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2003), 497-98. For more details concerning Matthew's *midrashic Haggadah* style and parallels among the opening chapters of the Gospel of Matthew with the book of Exodus, see: Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 33a, Matthew 1-13 (Hagner)*, 34.

³² In his famous testimony Papias of Hierapolis asserts that Matthew "put together the sayings of Jesus in Hebrew dialect" (*μὲν οὖν ἑβραϊδὶ διάλεκτῳ τὰ λόγια συνετάξατο*) quoted in Eusebius, *Ecccl. Hist.* 3:39 and 6:25; Iraneus, *Against Heresies* 3:1; and Jerome, *De viris illustribus*, 3:3. This quote has been interpreted as if Matthew had written his gospel originally in Hebrew language because of the Greek expression for dialect. However, the emphasis of the quote from Papias is the arrangement of the sayings and not the gloss in which they were recorded. In this way, Kurzinger argues that Matthew arranged the sayings in a Jewish manner. This would also match with his hermeneutics, usage of Septuagint ("LXX") and theology of fulfillment applied to the narrative of a complete Messiah in Jesus. See: Josef Kürzinger, *Papias von Hierapolis und die Evangelien des Neuen Testaments: Gesammelte Aufsätze, Neuausgabe, und Übersetzung der Fragmente, kommentierte ... Philosophie und Theologie* (Regensburg: F. Pustet, 1983); James E. Crouch and Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, ed. Helmut Koester, Revised ed. edition. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007); W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 1-7: Volume 1*, ICC (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 16-17.

³³ Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, (New Haven, Conn. London: Yale University Press, 1999), 217.

of Joseph pointing to a parallelism of the movements in Matt 1:24 and 2:14. Joseph obeyed the angel but was concerned for his family. He heard that Archelaus³⁴ was governing the territory of Judea and he chose to settle in Galilee. Matthew highlights God's providence working through Joseph's decision making process of protecting his family against a cruel ruler with the dramatic "punch-line" that all this took place in fulfillment of Scripture.³⁵ Coming to live in Nazareth³⁶ was temporally, geographically, and theologically providential fulfillment of Scriptures, which should be immediately puzzling to the reader because the place that became their home needs introduction since it is nowhere mentioned in the OT³⁷.

This series of historical providential events are tied up by Matthew with a puzzling prophecy: ὅπως πληρωθῇ τὸ ρηθὲν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν ὅτι Ναζωραῖος κληθήσεται. The puzzling aspect of the prophecy is not only its obscure referent or content, but the form in which the prophecy is stated. The previous quotations of Matthean prologue are structured in a set formula. They are introduced by standard form of conjunction and subjunctive which appear quite often in the NT³⁸. However, in Matt 2:23, the author changes his formula in a unique way. He uses the conjunction (ὅπως)³⁹ as a marker expressing purpose for an event or state and it associated

³⁴ Archelaus was son of Herod the Great and was ethnarch of Judea, Idumaea and Samaria from 4 B.C when his father died until he was deposed in AD 6 by Augustus and exiled to Gaul. The present tense βασιλεύει after the discourse marker ὅτι emphasizes that the ongoing activity of Archelaus was the center motif for Joseph's decision. Archelaus was notorious for his cruelty to such an extent that the Jews sent a delegation to Rome complaining that Archelaus had massacred there thousand shortly before near the temple. See: Osborne, *Matthew*, 101; Josephus, *Ant.* 17:200-18.

³⁵ Crowe, "Fulfillment in Matthew as Eschatological Reversal."

³⁶ The verb used for "lived" is κατοικέω meaning "to dwell, live in, reside". Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 679. The Hebrew equivalent most commonly used in the LXX is נָשָׁא. For the distinct use of the preposition in Matthew, see BDF §205.

³⁷ The insignificance and lack of reference to this city was object of intense study and conjectures of the fictitious creation/inexistence of such city. Nazareth is not mentioned either Talmud, Midrash or Josephus, for instance. See: BDAG 664. However, later studies points to evidence of the existence of Nazareth even before the first century and the correspondence of the Nazareth of the NT with the modern location of the town of en-Nasira. See: James F Strange, "Diversity in Early Palestinian Christianity, Some Archaeological Evidences," *Anglican Theological Review* 65.1 (1983): 14–24; René Salm, *The Myth of Nazareth: The Invented Town of Jesus* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Pr, 2008); Ken R Dark, "Nazareth Village Farm: A Reply to Salm," *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 26 (2008): 109–11; James F Strange, "Nazareth", *ABD*, 4:1050-51. Interestingly, Luke's account clarifies that Nazareth was the city that Mary and Joseph previously lived, which provides an explanation for the choice of an insignificant and small city in Israel.

³⁸ Matt 1:22 and 2:15 contain ἵνα πληρωθῇ ("that it may be fulfilled") while 2:23 is introduced by ὅπως πληρωθῇ ("that it may be fulfilled"). In 2:17 the quotation is introduced by the indicative of τελερῶ preceded by τότε. The quotation in 2:5 is introduced by the entirely different οὕτως γὰρ γέγραπται ("for thus it is written"). See: Varner, "A Discourse Analysis of Matthew's Nativity Narrative."

³⁹ It is worth noticing the change of ἵνα for ὅπως since Matthew uses the exact same construction ὅπως πληρωθῇ in Matt. 8:17 and 13:35 positioned at the end of large and theologically dense sections. In a similar fashion, Matt 2:23 comes at the end of the theological presentation of the person, birth, coming of Jesus, as a type of Matthean prologue heralding the coming of the King in his journey temporally and geographically from Bethlehem to Nazareth.

with the irregular aorist passive of λέγω demonstrating God's purpose as revealed in Scripture⁴⁰.

The modifications to the formula quotations continues as it is said to be fulfilling what was said by the prophets (plural - δια των προφητών) and not the previous singular prophet (του προφήτου). Therefore, Matthew does not have only one prophet in mind as the referent of a particular singular passage, but he is alluding to more than one prophecy pointing syntactically to a polysemic solution. The polysemic referent is even furthered considering the dramatic structure of the Gospel of Matthew because this very same modified introductory formula produces an *inclusio* that brackets almost the entire book. This unique construction referring to the fulfilment of the OT (των προφητών) only reappears in the words of Jesus in Matt 26:56 in the moment of His betrayal and arrest. This huge *inclusio* bracketing the entire plot is an example of Matthew's use of his hermeneutical hooks that provide a polysemic arrangement developing meanings in the narrative. This *inclusio* amplifies the range of meaning because in the moment that precedes the passion of Christ, the reader is retrospectively thrown back to the Nazarene theme of the beginning of the book. This implies that His rejection and mission was already latent and anticipated in some form inside the prologue. Elements already included in his prologue are setting the trajectory of the dramatic structure of Matthew but are only seen completely in hindsight. This puzzling arch is recovered in the end of the drama to conclude the story pointing to the necessity and anticipation of Christ's rejection and humiliation. This polysemic dramatic effect must be acknowledged when providing an interpretation for the prophecy in Matt 2:23.

Therefore, the introductory formula quotation of Matt 2:23 is intentionally singular among the prophecies of Matt 2. There is a conclusive motif – inside the prologue and for the whole book. The modified formula introduces a summarizing idea condensing various thematic connections – as a magnifying glass narrowing the rays of the sun in a particular spot. It is a dramatic feature that synthesize the main thought of a portion marking key characteristics of Jesus and unifying the web of events related to Him. The Nazarene prophecy then, *prima facie*, is already a historical and theological hinge in a dramatic hermeneutical narrative leading up to a conclusion of the first act of the Gospel of Matthew.⁴¹

Bearing this in mind, it is important to analyze the main interpretative solutions already

⁴⁰ The regular form of the passive aorist is ἐπρέθεν, which is the form used by Matthew in Matt 5:21 when referring to something that was heard. However, interestingly, the irregular form abovementioned ῥηθέν is used by Matt 1:22-23 and Matt 22:31-32, both referring to written texts "said" by God. One in reference to LXX Isa 7:14 and the second to LXX Exod 3:6. See: BDAG 718

⁴¹ George M Soares-Prabhu, *The Formula Quotations in the Infancy Narrative of Matthew* (Rome: Biblical Inst Pr, 1976), 52.

proposed for this puzzling prophecy with the lenses of a dramatic structure.

a. Ναζωραῖος

The main interpretations solutions focus on the location of the referent for the word Ναζωραῖος, searching for an OT passage that would corresponds to it. However, this has proven to be a difficult task considering that the OT does not mention the city of Nazareth or the word Ναζωραῖος. Also, the immediate meaning drawn from the context of Matt 1-2, from outside sources and from early church fathers seems to be a reference of an adjective of origin, a designation for someone who is native of Nazareth.⁴²

Thus, various solutions agree that Matthew means more than just the plain statement about the place of origin of Jesus. These are the solutions proposed⁴³: (a) a word play with the word נצר (“branch”) of Jesse from Isaiah 11:1 in an allusion of the descendants of David and a reference to the theme of the Son of David present in Matt 1-2⁴⁴; (b) a word play with the verb נצר (“guarder, preserver”) referring to Isa 42:6, 49:6 or Jer 31:6⁴⁵; (c) a derivation of the word נָזִיר (nazir) in reference to Judges 13:5-7 and the story of Samson’s birth⁴⁶; (d) a philological derivation of the name Nazareth⁴⁷; (e) a way to portray Jesus’ humble origins since Nazareth was an insignificant village (in relation to John 1:46)⁴⁸; (f) a way of designating a Christian in the region Syria, a probable place of the composition of the gospel of Matthew and connected to its *Sitz im Leben*⁴⁹;

⁴² Moisés Silva, “Ναζωραῖος” *NIDNTTE* 3:368-70; J Lionel North, “Reactions in Early Christianity to Some References to the Hebrew Prophets in Matthew’s Gospel,” *New Testament Studies* 54.2 (2008): 254–74.

⁴³ Sébastien Doane, “LES CITATIONS DE MATTHIEU 1-2: Charnières Théologiques Entre l’ancien et Le Nouveau,” *Theoforum* 47.1 (2016): 133–48.

⁴⁴ Michael D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew*, (London, SPCK, 1974), 241; A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Pub Group, 1982), 21; Robert Gundry, *Matthew, a Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, 1st Printing edition. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans Pub Co, 1982), 40.

⁴⁵ David Hill, “Son and Servant: An Essay on Matthean Christology,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 6 (1980): 2-16; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 129.

⁴⁶ Martinus Menken, “The Sources of the Old Testament Quotation in Matthew 2:23,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120.3 (2001): 451–68; Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 33a, Matthew 1-13*, 41; Craig Blomberg, “Matthew” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. D. A. Carson and G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids, Mich: Nottingham, England: Baker Academic, 2007), 11.

⁴⁷ William Foxwell Albright, “The Names ‘Nazareth’ and ‘Nazoraean,’” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 65.4 (1946): 397–401; Hans Peter Rüger, “Nazareth / Nazara Nazarēnos / Nazōraios,” *Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der Älteren Kirche* 72.3–4 (1981): 257–63; Henry M Shires, “The Meaning of the Term ‘Nazarene,’” *Anglican Theological Review* 29.1 (1947): 19–27.

⁴⁸ Richard Thomas France, “The Formula-Quotations of Matthew 2 and the Problem of Communication,” *New Testament Studies* 27.2 (1981): 233–51; Jared August, “‘HE SHALL BE CALLED A NAZARENE’: THE NON-CITATION OF MATTHEW 2:23,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 69.1 (2018): 63–74; Crowe, “Fulfillment in Matthew as Eschatological Reversal.”

⁴⁹ George F. Moore, “Nazarene and Nazareth”, in *The Beginnings of Christianity*, ed. Frederick J. Foakes-Jackson, Kirsopp Lake (London, Macmillan, 1920), 426-432; Crouch and Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 122-23; Albright, “The Names ‘Nazareth’ and ‘Nazoraean’”; Hans Heinrich Schaefer, “Nazarenos, Nazoraioi,” in *Der Mandaismus* (Darmstadt, Germany, 1982), 161–65.

(g) an invented prophecy to complete a numeric scheme used by Matthew⁵⁰; (h) a synthesis of the preceding OT formula-quotations of Matt 2⁵¹; (i) an anticipation of the formula-quotations in Matt 4:15-16; 8:17; 12:18-21⁵²; (j) a formula-quotation of a lost source⁵³; (k) a quotation from a source that Matthew was not sure or did not know precisely⁵⁴; and (l) a mnemonic to link several qualifiers of Jesus⁵⁵.

Considering the polysemic hypothesis in a dramatic structure, here follows an analysis of possible relations of some solutions with the Matthean Christology developed in his gospel⁵⁶:

i. The Nazirite (נָזִיר) hypothesis – Jesus as the Holy One

This solution is defended by Maarten Menken⁵⁷ as a word play made by Matthew with the Hebrew word corresponding to Nazirite (נָזִיר)⁵⁸ and fulfilling typologically the story of Samson in

⁵⁰ Marcus J. Borg, John D. Crossan, *The First Christmas. What the Gospels Really Teach about Jesus' Birth*, (New York, HarperOne, 2007), 209.

⁵¹ Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 33a, Matthew 1-13*, 40-42; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1989), 46-47; John J O'Rourke, "Fulfillment Texts in Matthew," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 24.4 (1962): 394-403; John Roskoski, "'HE SHALL BE CALLED A NAZARENE': THE OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND OF MATTHEW 2:23," *Journal of Biblical Theology* 1.3 (2018): 80-92.

⁵² Walter Grundmann, "Das Evangelium nach Matthäus" in *Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 1 (Berlin, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1968), 88-89

⁵³ Alfred Resch, *Agrapha: Aussercanonische Schriftfragmente*, (Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974), 382-383

⁵⁴ This interpretation assumes that the author of the Gospel of Matthew was using such prophecy in an apologetic way to justify Jesus' origins in Nazareth, a problem solved by a vague and *ad hoc* tailored prophecy. See: Geza Vermes, *The Nativity: History and Legend* (New York: Doubleday Religion, 2007), 133.

⁵⁵ André-Marie Dubarle, "La conception virginale et la citation d'Is. VII, 14 dans l'Évangile de Matthieu", in *Revue Biblique*, 85 (1978), 379

⁵⁶ This paper presupposes a self-authenticating model of formation of the Canon of the New Testament, which implies providential exposure, apostolicity, divine qualities, and corporate reception as functional, ontological, and exclusive attributes of the books inspired by the Holy Spirit as Word of God. Furthermore, this paper assumes Matthew as the author of the Gospel of Matthew, as well as the divine inspiration through concursive operation of the Gospel and the inerrancy/infallibility of Scripture. Therefore, solutions such as an intentional *ad hoc* prophecy, a mistaken or invented quotation by the author or a lost OT canonic source are not the scope of this paper. See: Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books*, 1st edition. (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2012); Richard Gaffin, "The New Testament as Canon," in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, a Challenge, a Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1988), 165-83.

⁵⁷ Menken, "The Sources of the Old Testament Quotation in Matthew 2:23." The peculiar traits of the introductory formula in Matt 2:23 are explained by the assumption that "the prophets" indicates the corpus of the former prophets - a reference to the portion of the Jewish OT (Tanak) called Nevi'im, which the book of Judges is part of. The Nevi'im is the second great division of the Hebrew Canon that was formally declared by the council of Rabbis in Jamnia c. 100 AD. Matthew apparently exhibits close affinities to their rabbinic argument. See: J.L. McKenzie, "The Gospel According to Matthew". *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* 2 vols (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968) 2:64. Also, another modification of the formula is the replacement of εἶναι by κληθήσεται. This suited the context and was legitimated by Isa 7:14, a passage analogous with the verses from Judges.

⁵⁸ נָזִיר means devoted, consecrated, devotee. The Nazirite was a vow of someone devoted to God and bound by an oath to allow hair to grow freely and to abstain from wine. The word would also mean prince. It could also have the use applied to someone who would withdraw from common practices, that would behave differently. As a verb in the Niphal, it may also mean an act of self-denial, as a consecration or dedication. The Greek equivalents used in the LXX: εὐχομαι, ἁγιάζω, ἅγιος. See: Longman, Tremper, III, and David E. Garland, eds. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Numbers-Ruth* (Revised Edition). Vol. 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012; Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament Vol. 2*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson, Revised ed. edition. (Leiden; New York: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 719.

Judg 13:15.⁵⁹

This hypothesis affirms that the word Ναζωραίος, as written by Matthew, is primarily a gentilic one meaning an inhabitant of Nazareth⁶⁰ and Matthew would be building upon this gloss, since the main motif of Matt 2 is geographical movement and settlement in Nazareth. However, the word play would also be connected to the Septuagint (“LXX”) since the difference between the Nazirite (ναζιραῖος) and Ναζωραίος is no more than one vowel. This would be a word association of Nazareth and Nazirite under the theme of holiness applied to Jesus (the theme of holiness is the direct meaning of Mark’s prologue - Mark 1:24). Additionally, the passages from Judges relate to Isa 4:3, where it is said that whoever is left over in Jerusalem “will be called holy” (in the Hebrew text: וְהָיָה שְׁמוֹ קָדוֹשׁ יְיָ and in the LXX: ἅγιοι κληθήσονται). This connection could also clarify the use of κληθήσεται in Matthew’s quotation.

The idea of holiness is prominent in Judg 16:17 LXX, wherein Samson refers to himself as “holy one of God” (ἅγιος Θεοῦ), being the only instance of application of such title in the LXX.⁶¹ There is linguistic correspondence between Judg 13:5-7 and 16:17. First, Samson is referred as a “Nazirite to God” (נָזִיר אֱלֹהִים) and the LXX translates the Hebrew as Ναζῖρ Θεοῦ in 13:5, but later it changes the translation of the same expression to “holy to God” (Θεοῦ ἅγιον) in 13:7 and 16:17. Thus, there is an interchangeability in the LXX between holy (ἅγιος) and Nazirite (Ναζῖρ or נָזִיר).

Therefore, “holy” is one of the direct possible glosses for ναζῖρ, given its uses in the LXX, a theme that is very possible to have been applied in Matt 2:23 highlighting Jesus as the Holy one of God, the One set apart for the Lord.⁶² This interpretation was common among early Christianity that would define Ναζωραίος as “holy” or “pure”.⁶³ Matthew’s writing style and the way he used

⁵⁹ The primary difficulty with this view is that Jesus did not meet the requirements for the Nazirite vow. For example, Jesus drank wine (Luke 7:33-34; John 2:10-11) and approached a dead body (Matt. 9:24-25; John 11:38-44); both of these actions would have disqualified him from the prescribed Nazirite vow of Numbers 6:1-21. See: D. A. Carson, Frank E. Gaebelin, and J. D. Douglas, *Matthew, Vol.1 (Ch. 1-12), The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1995), 97.

⁶⁰ Menken argues that it is a normal gentilic, a Grecizing of an Aramaic נַצְרַי, derived from the Hebrew name – probably a vulgar Aramaic form. Nāsrāyā (cf. Syriac) would have become *Nesōrāyā → *Nezōrāyā → (Christian Palestinian) Nāzōrāyā → Ναζωραίος. A transliteration of צ into ζ is argued as possible; a gentilic could be formed out of a placename with the omission of the feminine ending of the latter; and the ω could be explained either as due to metathesis, or as the *scriptio plena* of a *shewa*, or as coming from a form נַצְרִי.

⁶¹ David was referred to as “your holy one” in Psalm 16:10, but in a different linguistic construction. See: W. D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *Matthew 1-7: Volume 1*, ICC (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004).

⁶² This view is often also connected to the specific Nazirite vow described in Numbers 6:1-21 (especially 6:2, 13, 18). See: August, “‘HE SHALL BE CALLED A NAZARENE’: THE NON-CITATION OF MATTHEW 2:23.”

⁶³ This was the understanding present in Jerome *Lib. Interpr. Hebr. Nom.*, 147; Jerome, *Comm. in Matt.* 1.2.23; Origen *Orat.* 3.4; Eusebius *Dem. Ev.* 7.2.46-51. After Jerome this etymology is found in *Opus imperf. in Matt. Hom.*, 2.23. Origen interpreted נִזְרִיָּה

the LXX into his theological grid of fulfilment of the OT may have led him to enrich the word play with the theme of holiness and uniqueness of Jesus as the Holy one of God also in connection with Matt 1:22-23. This suggests a semantical arch between Nazirite/Nazarene meaning that Jesus is “the consecrated holy one who will save his people”. A similar expectation is present in the birth account of Samson: a birth also revealed by an angel stating the mission of the son, with a vow of holiness empowered and sustained by the Holy Spirit.⁶⁴

This solution provides interesting insights for the polysemic possibility of the prophecy, particularly in the whole context of Matthean Christology. Matthew presents Jesus as the divine Son of Man (Matt 12:32), in a clear reference to Daniel 7, the one who is the completely other, distinct from all creation. Meanwhile, He is also the complete and perfect Messiah whose holiness is a central aspect of His teachings and of the purpose of His works. Jesus being the Ναζωραῖος, the Holy One of God consecrated to be pure and righteous, is typologically the fulfillment of a better Samson and connects with the overall arches of the Matthean narrative of Jesus being the coming one (Matt 3:13-17), the perfect shepherd leader (Matt 12:11-12; 26-31), the perfect sacrifice (Matt 12:18-21)⁶⁵. Jesus is the Holy presence of God Himself, the perfect fulfilment of the Immanuel promise to Israel (Matt 1:22-23). Jesus is the singular one: the promised seed of Abraham that would redeem and rescue; the second Adam that would be victorious over the serpent: blameless and without sin, the victorious prince (נָזִיר) Son of God.⁶⁶

ii. The Branch (נֶזֶר) hypothesis – Jesus as the Son of David

The standard solution relates Matt 2:23 to Isa 4:3 and 11:1. By using the word Ναζωραῖος, Matthew would echo a Davidic theme through a word play with the term *netser*, meaning “branch, blossom, sprout, offshoot”. This fulfilment presents Jesus as the king-messiah son of David (2 Sam 7:16, Ps 89:20-38). This is the standard solution because of the linguistic relation and correspondence with Isa 4:3, where in the Hebrew text it reads “he shall be called holy” (קָדוֹשׁ יִנָּמֵר) and in the LXX reads ἅγιοι κληθήσονται, and with Isa 11:1, where the “branch” is growing

at Lam 4.7 similarly {frag. 102 in Lam. 4.7, and this plural form was applied to Christians by Tertullian *Adv. Marc.* 4.8. See: North, “Reactions in Early Christianity to Some References to the Hebrew Prophets in Matthew’s Gospel.”

⁶⁴ In each instance of the comparison, the parallels are based on the holiness, providence, deliverance, and salvation: Samson from the Philistines who were blocking full possession of the Promised Land and Jesus from the power of sin which was blocking entry into the Kingdom of God. See: J. Meier, “Matthew, Gospel of”, *Anchor Bible Dictionary 6 vols* (NY: Doubleday, 1992) 4:630; Roskoski, “‘HE SHALL BE CALLED A NAZARENE’: THE OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND OF MATTHEW 2:23.”

⁶⁵ Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 90-97; M Eugene Boring, “Matthew’s Narrative Christology: Three Stories,” *Interpretation* 64.4 (2010): 356–67.

⁶⁶ Benjamin Wisner Bacon, “Jesus the Son of God,” *Harvard Theological Review* 2.3 (1909): 277–309; David Hill, “Son and Servant: An Essay on Matthean Christology,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 2.6 (1979): 2–16.

from the “roots of Jesse” in reference to the Davidic kingly imagery and connected to the genealogy of Matt 1. Thus, Matt 2:23 unifies both passages (Ναζωραῖος κληθήσεται).

This solution proposes that Matthew alludes to Isa 4:3 and 11:1 substituting the Hebrew *netzer* (נֶצֶר) from 11:1 in place of holy (שָׁדֵךְ or ἅγιοι) in 4:3. However, the movement of replacement is not necessary when considering the polysemic approach because Matthew could be referring to both simultaneously. The first part of the word (Ναζωρ) could be a transliteration of (נֶצֶר) into Greek and the second part (αῖος) could be a spelling of the word holy (ἅγιοι), especially because in the reconstructed pronunciation of koine Greek the γ sounds as “ῑ”. This morphological option could even develop the word play phonetically since both fit in the Ναζωραῖος spelling.⁶⁷

These multilayered semantical possibilities connected with Matt 2:23 are all present in Isaiah and could be intentionally drawn in polysemy⁶⁸. Thus, it is not incompatible to consider together the branch hypothesis with the possibility of word play with the verb נָצַר (“guarder, preserver”) referring to Isa 42:6, 49:6 or Jer 31:6 since both would be possible without the Masoretic marks and commonly referring to Jesus in its kingly role of protector and rescuer of Israel.⁶⁹

Comprehending Matt 2:23 in light of Isa 4:3 provides a connection with the Matthean Messianic content of Jesus being the Son of David. The theme also connects with Isa 7:14 and Matt 1:23 as the messianic figure of Isa 11:1 is the same Immanuel of 7:14, already fulfilled in Matt 1:23. Additionally, the same figure is referenced in Isa 9:1 as the promised Messiah comes from Galilee⁷⁰. Phonetically, *Nasrat* (Nazareth) and *netzer* (branch) would have the same middle

⁶⁷ Interestingly, the same word *netzer*, when a verb, may also mean “to see” or “to look at or after”, “to take care of” or “to perceive with the eyes”. In the Qal stem, it means “to keep watch, watch over, protect, preserve, observe or comply with”. In Isa 48, it is applied in the sense of something that was set apart – again an indirect polysemic possibility of the Holy One. See: Koehler and Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament Vol. 2*, 716-17.

⁶⁸ This verb is similar in sense to שָׁמַר (*šamar*, “to keep”), but it is much less common. It often refers to a superior “guarding” or “protecting” someone or something: to husband (*nāšar*; Isa 27:2-3) a vineyard; to tend (*nāšar*; Prov 27:18) a fig tree; to guard (*nāšar*; Prov 13:3) the mouth; or to be a watchman (*nāšar*; Jer 31:6) for a city. God keeps (*nāšar*; Exod 34:7) his loyal love and preserves (*nāšar*; Ps 40:11) people from danger. When the subject is a subordinate, *nāšar* indicates being faithful or obedient. The righteous keep (*nāšar*) God’s covenant (Deut 33:9; Ps 25:10), law (Prov 28:7), and commandments (Ps 78:7; 119:2, 22, 33-34, etc.). They also obey (*nāšar*) parents’ commandments (Prov 3:1; 6:20) and wisdom (Prov 3:21; 4:13; 5:2). The word *nāša* can also mean “to guard,” in the sense of “to keep secret” (e.g., “hidden things” in Isa 48:6) or “to besiege” (Isa 1:8). The verb occurs most often in the Wisdom literature of the OT, often in synonymous parallelism with *šamar* (Ps 12:7) and never within a narrative. See: Timothy A. Gabrielson, “נָצַר,” *Lexham Theological Wordbook* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

⁶⁹ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 129.

⁷⁰ This very same branch of David is referenced by other prophets in Jer 23:5 and Zech 3:6 and 6:12. Jesus’ hometown reveals him as the promised Davidic king growing from the dead stump of Jesse, an image of redemption, hope and renewal, also paralleling the necessity of redemption inferred by the “genealogy of misfits” in Matt 1. See: Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 33a, Matthew 1-13*, 41; Leithart, *The Gospel of Matthew Through New Eyes Volume One* (Kindle), 1043.

consonant and similar sound referring to Jesus as the branch of David, the holy one of God that would restore Israel after exile and Matthew would point to the location of Nazareth as the fulfilment of Isaiah.⁷¹ The location of Nazareth may also be connected with the reference of Isa 11:1 to the stump coming out of Jesse concerning the unexpected origins of the King of Israel. David was the last one among his brothers, the smallest one in the house of Jesse, one that was without majesty to be attracted by human standards. The narrative of the anointment of David may also be in the background of Isa 11:1 and may be recaptured by Matthew in the Nazarene prophecy.

Thomas R. Schreiner⁷² reinforces the polysemic possibility when he argues that Matthew desired his readers to recall both Isa 11:1 and Judg 13:5. Jesus should be viewed typologically as a fulfillment of a better Samson, dedicated to God from his birth, the one who will save his people (Matt 1:21), and also a better David as well: an unlikely candidate for king over Israel (1 Sam. 16:6-13). The Branch solution adds meaning to Jesus as the perfect Davidic King⁷³ and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah⁷⁴. Matthew would be uniting under the Ναζωραῖος image the complete conception of the Messiah: divine and human, humble king, a powerful servant, a noble rejected. Matthew affirms Jesus' relationship to David and Abraham, also being God is among us, as promised in the Scriptures. Jesus' identity and mission as the complete and perfect Messiah is more than the expectations of the characters that surrounded Him in the first century and beyond the expectations of Matthew's reader in Jerusalem and in the ends of the world.⁷⁵

iii. The OT theme hypothesis from R.T FRANCE – Jesus as the Rejected One

R.T France proposes a different solution by not trying to find one specific passage of reference, but, considering the uniqueness of the formula-quotation, understands the possibility of an allusion to a broad OT theme. The solutions from Judg 13:5 and Isa 4:3; 11:1, according to

⁷¹ Isaiah is the favorite references for Matthew fulfilment quotations with four of the seven passages coming from this prophet (Matt 1:23>Isa 7:14; Matt 4:14–16>Isa 9:1; Matt 12:17–21>Isa 42:1–4; Matt 8:17> Isa 53:4). See: Gibbs, "Purpose and Pattern in Matthew's Use of the Title 'Son of David.'"

⁷² Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2008).

⁷³ Novakovic, "Jesus as the Davidic Messiah in Matthew"; Brian M Nolan, "Rooting the Davidic Son of God of Matthew 1–2 in the Experience of the Evangelist's Audience," *Estudios Bíblicos* 50.1–4 (1992): 149–56; Gibbs, "Purpose and Pattern in Matthew's Use of the Title 'Son of David.'"

⁷⁴ Hill, "Son and Servant: An Essay on Matthean Christology"; Leroy Andrew Huizenga, "The Incarnation of the Servant: The 'suffering Servant' and Matthean Christology," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 27.1 (2005): 25–58; Rikki E Watts, "Messianic Servant or the End of Israel's Exilic Curses?: Isaiah 53.4 in Matthew 8.17," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38.1 (2015): 81–95.

⁷⁵ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*; Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*.

France, are subject to an essential problem of communication because there would be no way for a Greek-speaking reader of Matthew to catch the references.⁷⁶

The direct correlation of one-to-one passages seems to be against the plural formula-quotation (τὸ ρηθὲν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν). France shows that a similar construction is used in four generally anticipatory passages (Matt 2:23; 5:17; 26:54 and 56) referring to the thematic development of a specific messianic expectation and not to a direct citation of any passage. In ten formula citations (Matt 1:22; 2:15, 2:17; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 13:35; 21:4; 27:9) Matthew uses (1) the verb πληρόω, (2) a singular noun, (3) the participle λέγοντος, and (4) cites an OT verse. However, in four formula-citations (Matt 2:23; 5:17; 26:54, 26:56) Matthew uses (1) the verb πληρόω, (2) a plural noun, (3) no participle, and (4) does not cite an OT verse. Since Matt 2:23 perfectly fits in the second category, it should be assumed that Matthew did not intend to allude to or cite any specific OT passage.⁷⁷

France argues that Matthew intended to refer to a general OT theme and “the most promising approach paradoxically takes its cue from the very nonexistence of Nazareth in the OT as a scriptural nonentity”.⁷⁸ The same possibility is addressed by Robert Mounce⁷⁹: “The best approach is that since Matthew speaks of prophets (plural) he is providing a summary in indirect speech rather than quoting a specific utterance”. Craig Blomberg, although suggesting that it could be alluding to Isa 11:1, concludes that “it may be indicating that he is not quoting one specific text but summarizing a broader scriptural theme”.⁸⁰ Thus, the phrase “He shall be called a Nazarene” is a summary statement concerning the numerous OT prophecies of a Messiah being from humble origins⁸¹, suffering servant who would not be recognized nor be taken seriously by his people (Isa

⁷⁶ France affirms that neither previous solutions offer any proper explanation for the use of κληθήσεται. The Isaiah hypothesis offers no solution for the verb and the Nazirite possibility would leave the pun in a single word of the OT that is not being written in the same form but modified. Then, it would be very unlikely that a Greek-speaking Christian would have been able to identify the connection without proper knowledge of the original Hebrew text. See: France, “The Formula-Quotations of Matthew 2 and the Problem of Communication.”

⁷⁷ August, “‘HE SHALL BE CALLED A NAZARENE’: THE NON-CITATION OF MATTHEW 2:23.”

⁷⁸ France, “The Formula-Quotations of Matthew 2 and the Problem of Communication.”

⁷⁹ Robert Mounce, *Matthew* (NIBC; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991)

⁸⁰ Craig Blomberg, “Matthew” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. D. A. Carson and G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids, Mich: Nottingham, England: Baker Academic, 2007), 11

⁸¹ For instance, such messianic imagery also appears in Ps 22, 69 and specially in Zech. 9-14 with a royal figure who is unexpectedly humble, the shepherd whose authority is not accepted by his sheep (11:4-14) and of one who is pierced by the people of Jerusalem (12:10) and struck down by the sword of God (13:7). See: R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 94.

53:2-3).⁸² So, the interpreter should not approach Matt 2:23 as an OT quote, but as a summary statement of the fulfilment of the expectation of the prophets in general.⁸³

Considering the polysemic possibility, this solution adds arches into Matthean Christology, specially connecting higher Christological meanings with the direct geographical context of Matt 1-2 (religion and historicity). Ναζωπαῖος shall, then, be understood as a sense of inferiority, in contrast with the expected royal dignity of the Messiah. France argues that, by the time of Matthew's writing, the term already had acquired bad connotation (John 1:46) and the remoteness of Nazareth would further its derogatory use. Galilee itself was not admired by the Judeans and the application of the Ναζωπαῖος term to Jesus (hence κληθήσεται) suggested the fulfilment of prophecies of a humble and unrecognized Messiah. The Immanuel coming under a veil of humbleness taking place and being fulfilled in Nazareth.⁸⁴ Matthew is not subscribing to the messianic glorious Jewish political expectations but is presenting a theological glorious Messiah within a category of meekness Christology. This is connected both to Matthew referring to Jesus as gentle (Matt 11:29), but also to Jesus as a rejected prophet, much like Jeremiah (Matt 16:14): the rejected one for our sake. Jesus' power is connected to his authority (ἐξουσία) which is only recognized by those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. He is the one "had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (Isa 53:2).⁸⁵

b. Ναζαρηνός vs Ναζωπαῖος

The polysemic possibility may be drawn from thematic connections, but also from linguistic choices done by Matthew. Thence, it is important to also consider the immediate meaning of the Nazarene prophecy in light of the Matthean context and his *sui generis* spelling.

i. Markan priority and intertextuality

The spelling of Ναζωπαῖος is curious. Although it cannot be separated from a philological

⁸² The imagery of a suffering servant was acknowledged in first century Judaism. This is evidenced by the fact that some would even divide the eschatological messianic king Son of David from the suffering servant of Isa 53, as it is exemplified in the texts findings of the Qumran community who had different eschatological expectations for the fulfilment of the messianic promises. See: Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 524-525.

⁸³ France, "The Formula-Quotations of Matthew 2 and the Problem of Communication."

⁸⁴ Jesus, though born in Bethlehem in conjunction with the recognized prophecy of Mic 5:1, was reared in Nazareth, and not in or near the religious center of Jerusalem. This notion would have not been what Israel was expecting, leading him to be treated with disdain. In this sense, Jesus is reversing expectations. See: August, "'HE SHALL BE CALLED A NAZARENE': THE NON-CITATION OF MATTHEW 2:23."

⁸⁵ Müller, "The Theological Interpretation of the Figure of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew: Some Principal Features in Matthean Christology."

derivation of the name Nazareth; it is different from what would be expected. The spelling is even more puzzling considering Mark's spelling of the term. Assuming the Farrer hypothesis of Markan priority over the Synoptics and Mark being a source first for Matthew and then both Matthew and Mark being sources of Luke⁸⁶, it is worth noticing that Jesus is called Ναζαρηνός in Mark 1:24; 10:47; Luke 4:34 and Ναζωπαῖος in Matt 2:23; 26:69; Luke. 18:37, John 18:5, 19:19 and Acts 2:22; 3:6; 22:8; 24:5. The Matthean way of writing became the standard, being a curious element of intertextuality.⁸⁷ There is not an easy or clear way to explain etymologically or phonetically Matthew's change⁸⁸, but it is a notorious case of Matthean redaction.⁸⁹ If it was a mere different in use referring to one who was born in Nazareth, it would be expected that different authors would bear different forms, but all seem to align with Matthew after Matt 2:23 showing that this prophecy bears a substantial meaning by marking a turning point (exception of Luke 4:34).⁹⁰

From a different perspective, Matthew intends to write reflecting two cultures: Hebrew and Greek. Matthew did not write only for one, but both, the Jew first (Matt 10:5–6; 15:24), then to the gentile (Matt 4:15; 15:21–28; 22:1–10; 28:16–20).⁹¹ The purpose of his writing is not to hinder one from proper understanding the meaning, but to address and grow both in deeper understanding of the layers of meaning that the prophecy would carry. A polysemic approach would seem fit for

⁸⁶ Arguing for the Markan priority is beyond the scope of this paper, for further details see: Eric Eve, *Solving the Synoptic Puzzle: Introducing the Case for the Farrer Hypothesis* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021); Mark S Goodacre, *The Case against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2001); Austin Marsden Farrer, "On Dispensing with Q," in *The Two-Source Hypothesis: A Critical Appraisal* (Macon, Ga, 1985), 321–56; *Markan Priority without Q: Explorations in the Farrer Hypothesis*, Library of New Testament Studies 455 (London: Bloomsbury; T&T Clark, 2015).

⁸⁷ "Intertextuality is a comprehensive model of textuality, and it is possible to accentuate certain of its features so that the theory may be applied in very different ways. Intertextuality can be formulated as a synchronic principle describing the structure of texts: "Other texts" are present in a given text; they are assembled within it and form part of its structure. Intertextuality can also be formulated with a stress on the diachronic dimension of textual analysis: Intertexts are memories preserved by a text—for example, sources, reminiscences, models, or patterns. Intertexts can be specific or general: It is possible to narrow the definition of "intertexts" to specific texts that can be identified, and it is possible to widen the definition, so that all texts of a specific culture or a specific time are present in a text, regardless of whether an author or reader is conscious of their presence (...) the concept of intertextuality can also be used as a tool for the reconstruction of the sense of a text, for the recovery of the author's context with the goal of differentiating between the author's own voice and the voices of his sources and reminiscences. Intertexts may be the product of the text or of the reader." See: Ulrich Luz, "Intertexts in the Gospel of Matthew," *Harvard Theological Review* 97.2 (2004): 119–37.

⁸⁸ The shift from A type vowel to the ω cannot be understood based on the Hebrew, nor based on the Syriac *nasrat*. Also, the transcription of the ז as a σ is unusual. So, the A type vowel to ω is basically assumed in this case. See: Albright, "The Names 'Nazareth' and 'Nazoraean.'"

⁸⁹ Luz, "Intertexts in the Gospel of Matthew."

⁹⁰ Ναζωπαῖος is a gentile meaning "an inhabitant of Nazareth." and synonym of the Mark parallel Ναζαρηνός (Mark 14:67) and it is fundamental to reinforce this "Christological geography" of Matthew. This is also emphasized by the other occurrence in Mt 26:71 when one of the servant girls of the high priest says about Peter to the bystanders: οὗτος ἦν μετὰ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωπαίου. William R G Loader, "What Light Does Matthew's Use of Mark in Matthew 1–4 Throw on Matthew's Theological Location?," *HTS Theological Studies* 72.4 (2016): 1–11; Krister Stendahl, *The School of St Matthew*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Pr, 1968); M Eugene Boring, "Matthew's Narrative Christology: Three Stories," *Interpretation* 64.4 (2010): 356–67.

⁹¹ Ivor Powell, *Matthew's Majestic Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Kregel Pubns, 1987), 44–45.

a comprehension that would be done in diversity and plurality, with both Greek and Hebrew being addressed together and thinking together in the church.⁹²

Eduard Schweizer, seeing the parallelism of Matt 2:23 and Mark 1:24, suggests that the different spelling is a redaction from Matthew highlighting Judg 13:7 and 16:17, especially the designation ὁ ἅγιος Θεοῦ explicitly stated in Mark and implicit in Matthew. Even though Schweizer focus on the Nazirite hypothesis, the morphological redaction of Matthew summarizes the Davidic kingly motif, the Immanuel prophecy, the suffering servant, and the humanity of the Messiah, all under the umbrella of the Holy One of God. An interesting suggestion is that the spelling Ναζωραῖος would be a compound of the Hebrew word נָצַח (branch) spelled with the vowels of the Hebrew word קֹדֶשׁ (holy)⁹³ followed by the Greek word ἅγιος (holy). This would create a final Greek word using a compound Hebrew word play resembling the Greek version for the Hebrew word for Nazirite (ναζιραῖος)⁹⁴. In this suggestion, Jesus is referenced as three times holy, which is a Hebrew reference to His divinity. Then, a prophecy about His rejection and humble origins would simultaneously bear the marks of His divinity, holiness, kingship, and glory as the Holy Prince, the consecrated coming one of God, the Immanuel that would save His people from their sins.

This conflation could be a morphological mnemonic: a polysemic and summarizing link of several qualifiers of Jesus simultaneously synthesizing the preceding OT formula-quotations of

⁹² This perspective may clarify the usage of the LXX in the Nazarene prophecy. The LXX translation sought to match word for word the Hebrew text, including the parataxis of simple coordination conjunction to keep the pace of Hebraic narrative. However, there is a linguistic mismatch among Greek and Hebrew, not only related to grammatical features of syntax, but also phonetically and morphologically. Sometimes the morphological conventions of one language makes it impossible to utter in the same way in another language. For instance, while Hebrew presents many letters to different sounds (שׁ, שׂ, ס, צ), Greek has only one letter (σ). This entails that translation, particularly of Hebraisms, imply linguistics choices that are defined by cultural expectations (register) or individual aesthetics preferences (style) which may lead to lexical variation. See: Greg Lanier and William A. Ross, *The Septuagint: What It Is and Why It Matters* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2021), 62-79; Christopher Fresch, "The Septuagint and Discourse Grammar" in *T&T Clark Handbook of Septuagint Research*, ed. William A. Ross and W. Edward Glenny, (New York: T&T Clark, 2021), 79-92.

⁹³ James A. Sanders, "Nazōraios in Matt 2:23," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84.2 (1965): 23; Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 33a, Matthew 1-13*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1993).

⁹⁴ Matthew's spelling legitimizes the reading of the parallels between ναζιραῖος as Ναζωραῖος based on an exegetical rabbinic procedure in which it was permitted to change either the vocalization of the consonantal Hebrew text or its consonants themselves in order to arrive at another reading of the Hebrew text. See: W. Bacher, *Die exegetische Terminologie der jüdischen Traditionsliteratur 1: Die bibelexegetische Terminologie der Tannaiten* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1899; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1990), 175-77.

Matt 2⁹⁵ and an anticipation of the formula-quotations in Matt 4:15-16; 8:17; 12:18-21⁹⁶, while the immediate direct meaning would be the humble origin of the suffering servant reared in an insignificant village of Galilee.

ii. κληθήσεται and the gentile motif

Because previous solutions focused upon the Ναζωραῖος word, the verb used in the prophecy has not been object of closer scrutiny. However, it is extremely relevant because the verb κληθήσεται points to not only a matter of origin, but a matter of identification.⁹⁷ This verb occurs in the LXX 23 times in this form⁹⁸ and two interesting ones are in the book of Isaiah. The first one is Isa 35:8 that prophesied about a time when the glory and majesty of the LORD would be seen, when God Himself would come to save (Immanuel promise) and the eyes would be opened and deaf ears unstopped. When this time would come, the lame would leap, the mute would sing because a “highway shall be there” and “it shall be called the Way of Holiness” (ὁδὸς ἁγία κληθήσεται). The second is Isa 54:5 which also uses the same exact verb when talking about the eternal covenant of peace done by the LORD with His people and identifying the covenantal name of God (LORD) as His name, the Holy One of Israel as Redeemer and “the God of the whole earth He is called” (αὐτὸς Θεὸς Ἰσραὴλ, πάση τῇ γῇ κληθήσεται). These two passages overlap with themes of Matthean Christology, especially the divinity of the Messiah and His holiness. The form of the verb stated in the prophecy of Matt 2:23, the intense Messianic content of the passages in Isaiah and Matthew’s constant use of LXX (particularly from Isaiah) may provide a fuller and richer background to the range of the semantical arches accessible to the immediate perception of the Greek and Hebrew reader of Matthew in the first century.

Furthermore, the identification theme of such verb connects with the ἐκκλησία motif that is developed in detail in Matt 16:18 and 18:17. There is an element of identification of Jesus as a Ναζωραῖος that is not contained in referring to his geographical origin, but refers to his

⁹⁵ Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 33a, Matthew 1-13*, 40-42; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1989), 46-47; John J O’Rourke, “Fulfillment Texts in Matthew,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 24.4 (1962): 394–403; Roskoski, “‘HE SHALL BE CALLED A NAZARENE’: THE OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND OF MATTHEW 2:23.”

⁹⁶ Walter Grundmann, “Das Evangelium nach Matthäus” in *Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 1 (Berlin, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1968), 88-89

⁹⁷ The verb is the future, passive, indicative of the verb καλέω, meaning “to bestow a name on someone or something” and translates the Hebrew קָרָא that bears a wide semantic range implying not only the naming of proper names, but also adjectivally in terms of asserting essence of something or someone. It could also mean “summon” as a called into something or a convocation towards an act or state. See: Moisés Silva, “καλέω” NIDNTTE 2:601-607

⁹⁸ Future, passive, indicative, 3 person singular.

identification both as a holy divine king and a rejected humble human.⁹⁹ The identification motif connects Jesus to his role of second Adam, the federal representative of the church, by He being called, summoned and recognized in His messianic identity.¹⁰⁰ The fulfilment concept in Matthew is historically realized in Jesus also as the continuing story of Israel tying the church with the Jewish heritage and stating that the history of redemption is one story.¹⁰¹ In this sense, the Nazarene prophecy may not only point back, but also forward to the identification of the church with her King-Messiah. The same adjectival type is used in Matt 26:69 and 26:71 in the big *inclusio* over the entire gospel of Matthew in which the κληθήσεται verb expresses an intense dramatic connotation and a new understanding to the initial prophecy because the pejorative element is applied to Jesus and the disciples. However, Matthew cleverly twists it in richness. The early church identification with the term Ναζωραῖος was so strong that one of the hypotheses of explanation of the prophecy was given by the way of designating a Christian in the region Syria, a probable provenance of the gospel of Matthew tied to its *Sitz im Leben*.¹⁰² Hence, κληθήσεται bears an dramatic element of retrospection towards the OT as Jesus is identified with His people Israel in His redeeming work, as it was promised by Scripture, but there is also an element of intense anticipation in which His church is going to be identified with Him and will be called after His name forever. This prospective element is deeply connected with the gentile motif of Matthew

⁹⁹Nolland also notes that it is a name given at first sight to Jesus' rejection and despised lowly origin, but it is a heaven-given name since it is given by Scripture, the Word of God, also an OT practice pointing to God's redemptive covenantal love in action (Gen 16:11; 17:5, 15, 19; Isa 8:3; Hos 1:4, 6, 9; cf. Isa 7:3, 14). See: Paul Raymond McCuiston, "Fulfilled through the Prophets," *In Die Skriflig* 50.4 (2016): 1–8; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 98.

¹⁰⁰ Luz affirms that understanding the dynamics of identification of Jesus in his Jewish context certainly clarifies the high Christological messianic statement of Matthew and connects with the previous prophecy in Matt 1:21 concerning the people (λαός) that will be redeemed by the Messianic fulfilment in Christ and the genealogy of Jesus and Israel's necessity of redemption. See: Crouch and Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 95.

¹⁰¹ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, (Nashville, Tenn: Holman Reference, 1992), 17-33.

¹⁰² Whether or not the use of Ναζωραῖος for Jesus and the first Palestinian Christians underlies the term adopted by Christians in Syria, Persia, Armenia, etc. is much debated, and attempts have been made to trace an earlier sect of the Nazarenes. The pre-Christian Jewish sect of Nazarenes is known only from Epiphanius (*Against Heresies* 18; 29.6), who carefully distinguishes them from the Jewish Christian Ναζωραῖοι. It is possible, however, that there never was any sect of this kind at all, but that Epiphanius is confused by a Jewish list that really has Christians in view. According to his depiction, they have little in common with John the Baptist, Jesus, or later Jewish Christianity. It is worth mentioning that Jesus was first designated as the Ναζωραῖος and the peculiar formation of the adjective to the church may be attributed to Paul as linked to the sect of the Ναζωραῖος in Acts 24:5. See: Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume*, TDNT (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 625; Crouch and Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 124.

being Jesus the hinge of the revelation of the true Israel of God being the people of all tribes, nations, and tongues.¹⁰³

4. CONCLUSION

In citing this prophecy and drawing attention to this obscure title Ναζωραῖος, Matthew has built a powerful climax to the birth account that provide hooks that point to different aspects of who Jesus is. The question that is repeated throughout the Gospel of Matthew is: “Who is this man?” (Matt 8:27; 16:13-16; 21:10)¹⁰⁴ and Matthew intentionally seeks to provide a puzzling image to provoke the heart of the reader towards an answer. Jesus is different than anyone else and the dramatic structure of his gospel delineates the multiform wisdom of God in the person of Jesus. Matthew redirects the perspective of the reader to be surprised by the person of Jesus Christ over and over.¹⁰⁵

Thus, the Ναζωραῖος prophecy has an important placement in the dramatic unfolding of the Gospel of Matthew as a summary statement of the heralding of the messianic identity of Jesus. The summary statement of fulfilment (πληρωθῆναι) is the conclusion of Matt 1-2¹⁰⁶ and refers not only to one, but to various OT themes concerning the Messiah¹⁰⁷. Matthew connects religiosity and history through fulfillment in Christ, as a herald announcing the entrance of the king of heaven and earth. Under the veil of the face of the Ναζωραῖος, Matthew is announcing Jesus’ royalty and incarnation. He is sounding the trumpets presenting all the necessary theological hooks preparing for the coming of the promised Messiah.¹⁰⁸ Matthew is emphatic on Jesus’ historicity interpreted

¹⁰³ The gentile motif also is noticeable in the dramatic structure as whole. Matthew intentionally structured the gospel with definite dramatic literary markers emphasizing the flow, the characters, and the surprising reversal (resurrection and a universal great commission), bearing a strong semblance to a Greek drama. This suggests Matthew’s purpose in structuring his gospel as a drama with the intent of having an understandable, attractive way to present Jesus to Jew and gentile alike, rooting his theological and hermeneutical style deeply in his Jewish origins, but also presenting in a format to reach the gentile and Jewish reader, particularly Hellenized Jews (*Sitz im Leben* indication?). See: McCuiston, Warner, and Viljoen, “The Influence of Greek Drama on Matthew’s Gospel.”

¹⁰⁴ Thiemann forwards the thesis that the Gospel of Matthew is organized around the question posed by Jesus to his disciples at Caesarea Phillip: “Who do you say that I am?”. Therefore, the central unifying theme of the Gospel of Matthew would be, then the quest of elucidating the identity of Jesus Christ and the most direct answer would be Peter’s reply “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”. See: Ronald F Thiemann, “Matthew’s Christology: A Resource for Systematic Theology,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 4.6 (1977): 350–62.

¹⁰⁵ Andrew E Nelson, “‘Who Is This?’: Narration of the Divine Identity of Jesus in Matthew 21:10-17,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 7.2 (2013): 199–211.

¹⁰⁶ Leithart, *The Gospel of Matthew Through New Eyes Volume One*.

¹⁰⁷ O’Rourke, “Fulfillment Texts in Matthew.”

¹⁰⁸ Samuel Lewis Johnson, “The Argument of Matthew,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 112.446 (1955): 143–53; Paul Raymond McCuiston, Colin Warner, and Francois P Viljoen, “Fulfillment of Righteousness: Historical and Ontological Perspective of Matthew 3:15,” *In Die Skriflig* 48.1 (2014): 1–8.

through a theological grid. Therefore, Matthew's summarizing thought of his prologue also points prophetically to Jesus' rejection and necessity of atoning sacrifice on behalf of His people.¹⁰⁹ This is the dramatic context that holds this Gospel in such tension because God has come to save his people – a historical, covenantal, Christological, eschatological, ecclesiological fulfilment: all arches of the Matthean gospel.

The Nazarene prophecy displays an intentional polysemy from Matthew as he connects overall dramatic arches of his Christology in the identity of Jesus, the son of David, son of Abraham, son of God. Matt 2:23 is a dramatic discourse feature intentionally polysemic summarizing retrospectively the complete fulfillment of the messianic promises of the OT and prospectively the arches of Matthean Christology that will be presented in his Gospel and further held firmly by the church. This prophecy is not only a quotation or collection of OT passages, but a polysemic doctrinal summary of the person of Jesus Christ that is designed to interact with the reader in a dramatic, apologetic, and responsive way.

¹⁰⁹ George M Soares-Prabhu, *The Formula Quotations in the Infancy Narrative of Matthew* (Rome: Biblical Inst Pr, 1976), 52.

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