**Prophecies: spoken and written**

1. **The prophecy that Jesus will be called a Nazarene**

In Matthew 2:23 we read:

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"And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets. "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Many are troubled with this verse since the SPOKEN prophecy that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene can nowhere be found written in the Old Testament. To solve this "difficulty", a connection is sometimes assumed\(^1\) between the term "Nazarene" and the Hebrew word "netser" that means "branch". Apart from the fact that this connection is no more than a mere supposition, the inconsistency of this view is also shown in that while Matthew 2:23 says that the prophecy was uttered by "the prophets" i.e. by a plural number of people, the word "netser" was used for Christ only by Isaiah (Isaiah 11:1\(^2\)).

However, we believe that this is not a real problem of the Word of God but a problem CREATED by the fact that we don't pay attention to what we read. Really, while the Scripture says that the prophecy that Jesus “shall be called a Nazarene”

\(^2\) This word occurs four times altogether. Apart from Isaiah 11:1, the other three occurrences are: Isaiah 14:19, 60:21 and Daniel 11:7. A check of these occurrences can confirm that none of them refers to Christ.
was SPOKEN [Greek: "to rethen" meaning "that which was spoken"] by the prophets, what we understand is that the prophecy was WRITTEN [Greek: "o gegraptaí" meaning "that which is written"] by the prophets. However, when the text says SPOKEN means SPOKEN. Some prophecies were spoken and not written. Some others were not spoken but only written, while some others were both spoken and written. When we read a quotation that says "as it is written", we will find it 100% in the Scripture, since it is guaranteed that it is WRITTEN. However, when what is quoted is said that it was simply SPOKEN, then we may find it written but we may also not find it written. The Word does not guarantee that it was written. What it guarantees is that it was SPOKEN.

There are fifteen quotations in the Bible for which we are told that they were SPOKEN. To see whether they were both spoken and written, or whether they were only spoken, we have to search the Scripture to see if we can find them. A search like this shows that all the prophecies that were spoken were also written, APART from two of the, one of which is the prophecy that Jesus would be called a Nazarene. The fulfillment of this prophecy is given in Matthew 2:23. This prophecy was only SPOKEN by the prophets and it was later written down by Matthew. This is also a form of the figure of speech "hysteresis" or "subsequent narration". By this figure "the Holy Spirit, in later and subsequent Scriptures, adds supplementary details which were not given in the history itself; and sometimes even historical facts, of which no mention had before been made". One of these facts of which no mention was made before is the prophecy that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene. This prophecy was SPOKEN by a plural number of

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4 See E. W. Bullinger: "Figures of Speech used in the Bible", Baker Book House, originally published 1898. This printing 1995, pp. 709-713.
prophets. It was not written by them but by Matthew who made it known together with its fulfillment.

2. The prophecy about the thirty pieces of silver

Apart from Matthew 2:23, another passage that for similar reasons is a stumbling block for many, is Matthew 27:9-10. There we read:

"Then was fulfilled what was SPOKEN BY JEREMIAH the prophet, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me"

The problem that many have with this passage is that this quotation cannot be found anywhere in the book of Jeremiah\(^5\). To "solve" this difficulty, it has been suggested that Matthew 27:9-10 is actually a quotation from Zachariah 11:12-13 on the base that both passages speak about "thirty pieces of silver". Apart from the great differences between these two passages, the inconsistencies of this view are made clear by the fact that God in Matthew 27:9-10 says that the prophecy was SPOKEN BY JEREMIAH. If these verses were a quotation from Zachariah, God instead of Jeremiah, would have mentioned Zachariah. In other words, instead of telling us "Then was fulfilled what was SPOKEN by JEREMIAH"

\(^5\) The presence of this "difficulty" is also evident in the marginal notes of the various English versions. So the margin of the KJV direct us to search to Zachariah 11:13. The NKJV directs us to Jeremiah 32:6-9. The NIV directs to 3 places of twenty verses altogether: Zachariah 11:12, 13, Jeremiah 19:1-13 and 32:6-9. The reader is encouraged to go and check for himself these passages. If he will do that, he will see that he will nowhere find what is quoted in Matthew 27:9-10.
He would have told us "Then was fulfilled what was WRITTEN by ZACHARIACH". We believe that when God says Jeremiah He means Jeremiah and therefore no one has the right to say that He actually means Zachariah.

However, again the problem is only a CREATED problem. And it is created because we don't pay attention to what we read. The text does not say that the prophecy was WRITTEN but that it was SPOKEN. Some prophecies were only written and not spoken. Some others were both written and spoken while some others were only spoken and not written. The prophecy quoted in Matthew 27:9-10 was SPOKEN but it was NOT WRITTEN. Matthew by the figure of speech "hysteresis" or "subsequent narration" informs us about this prophecy long after it was SPOKEN.

**Conclusion**

Concluding the above we can separate the passages / prophecies quoted from the Old Testament into two categories: in those that we are told that were WRITTEN and in those that we are told that were SPOKEN. The greatest majority of the quotations given in the New Testament belong to the first category i.e. to those that we are told that were WRITTEN. Since we are told explicitly that these passages / prophecies were WRITTEN, it is guaranteed that we will find them in the Old Testament. A check can prove that there is no passage that the Word says that it is WRITTEN that cannot be found in the Old Testament.

On the other hand, for the passages for which we are told that were SPOKEN there is NO guarantee that we will also find them written in the Old Testament. These passages would be found in the Old Testament only if apart from spoken were also written. But no one can say from the outset, that all the prophecies that were spoken were also written. From the fifteen passages for which we are
told that they were SPOKEN, the thirteen can be found in the Old Testament which means that they were both spoken and written. The two that cannot be found are Matthew 2:23 and Matthew 27:9-10. These prophecies were ONLY SPOKEN. Matthew, through the figure of speech hysteresis, informs us of their existence long after they were spoken.

Therefore, is there any real difficulty with Matthew 2:23 and 27:9-10? No, except if we CREATE one.

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References