

J. Richard Middleton

**Herod as Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar: A ‘Political’ Reading of the Prophets
in Matthew’s Infancy Narrative**

The infancy narratives in Matthew are popularly read as a set of “feel-good” stories for the Christmas season. However, careful attention to the Old Testament quotations in Matthew 1–2 (which are primarily from the Prophetic Books, with one fragment from 2 Samuel 5) shows that they function as a critique of Jerusalem leadership at the time of Jesus’s birth. This paper will explore how Matthew’s nuanced use of the Old Testament in chapters 1–2 contributes to our understanding of the thrust of his message, whereby the gospel of Jesus the Davidic Messiah brings a subversive critique of Israel’s leadership and a challenge to the church today. Not only is Matthew an astute reader of the texts he quotes, but his approach these texts has the potential to provide a lens for Christian reading of the Old Testament Prophets, in terms of their own (original) “political” critique of earlier Israelite leadership.