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HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES EVIDENCED IN  
THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

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A Research Paper Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for elective  
E-200

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by

Benjamin G. Lorenz

March 1977

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## Introduction

When Jesus spoke with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, He "interpreted to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."<sup>1</sup> The word which the Evangelist used of Jesus' presentation of the Scriptures was ἑρμηνεύω, a compound of the simple, ἔρμηνεύω, which has the same meaning, namely, to interpret, explain, or translate. Although the term has various contextual applications,<sup>2</sup> the verb basically refers to the process or action of making something clear and intelligible which was previously veiled, unintelligible, or misunderstood. The root also evidences the connotation of revelation. We note that Hermes (Ἑρμῆς) is the proper name of the Greek god, also known as Mercury, who served as herald and messenger of the gods. As such, he was the patron of all communication, presiding over roads, commerce, invention, eloquence, cunning, and theft, and conducting the dead to Hades.<sup>3</sup> The word, therefore, presupposes that one's "hermeneutics" represent objective communication or revelation. Ideally, the interpreter will not obscure, distort,

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1. Luke 24:27, writer's translation.

2. For example, "to explain," cf. Lk. 24:27, 1 Cor. 14:13; "to translate," cf. Jn. 1:38, 41, 42, Acts 9:36.

3. Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, rev. ed. (1971), s.v., "Hermes."

or bend that which he relates.

Various terms have been used by New Testament and Old Testament scholars alike to depict the manner in which the New Testament uses and interprets the Old Testament. Three categories defined by von Rohr Sauer<sup>4</sup> call attention to the problems of Messianic Interpretation, and bear direct relevance to a discussion of the hermeneutics of the New Testament. We thus note the categories of rectilinear, typological and applied prophecies.<sup>4</sup> New Testament authors have been said to use the Old Testament according to its literal sense, typical sense, consequent sense, as well as by accomodation. Where scholars would observe a difference in meaning which some passages have in their original Old Testament context and in their use by New Testament authors, we might observe citations used in perhaps a typical way, by accommodation, or by drawing the consequence.<sup>5</sup>

At issue is the legitimacy of the New Testament's interpretation of the Old Testament text. Shires writes, "The N.T. contains some examples of doubtful, unnatural, and forced interpretation of the Old Testament."<sup>6</sup> Yet Shires

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4. Alfred von Rohr Sauer, "Problems of Messianic Interpretation," Concordia Theological Monthly XXV (October, 1964): pp. 566-74.

5. J. J. O'Rourke, "The Fulfillment Texts in Matthew," Catholic Biblical Quarterly XXIV (1962): p. 394.

6. Henry M. Shires, Finding the Old Testament in the New (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), p. 37.

maintains that the instances of strained interpretation are the exception rather than the rule. However, others would not take that position. One writer has said, "As a matter of fact, it is only by exception that the New Testament adheres to the strictly historical sense in its citations of the Old Testament."<sup>7</sup> Our concern in the following study insues from such critical analyses of New Testament hermeneutical phenomona.

The scope of the following study is the Gospel of St. Matthew. The main portion of the paper shall consist of an exegetical study of select Old Testament citations in the Gospel according to Matthew. The study is entitled, "Hermeneutical Principles Evidenced in the Gospel According to Matthew."

It is generally recognized that Matthew's Gospel evidences the richest and most constant use of the Old Testament as any of the Gospels. Martin Franzmann has commented that the Gospel is fittingly placed at the beginning of the New Testament since it "constitutes the New Testament's most powerful link with the Old."<sup>8</sup>

Our objective in examining Matthew's use of Scripture is to determine the nature of the interpretation involved.

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7. B. Vawter, The Conscience of Israel, p. 292, n. 5, quoted in O'Rourke, op. cit., p. 394.

8. Martin H. Franzmann, The Word of the Lord Grows (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), p. 180.



We deliberately choose the word, "evidenced," in the title in order to allow for the double concern of the present study. The concern is not only with respect to the evangelist's manner of interpretation; nor only with "principles" which may have guided the evangelist in his selection, use and interpretation of Scripture; but also with any guidance which the Gospel may suggest for our use and interpretation of Scripture. Our objective, then, is ultimately a practical one. Not only do we pursue that which is descriptive of the Gospel's hermeneutics, but that which is normative as well.

The method by which we shall pursue the the exegetical study will be inductive. That is, we will examine particular passages which involve an interpretation of the Old Testament. The selection of those passages included in this paper followed a primary examination of approximately thirty direct quotations as well as allusions in Matthew's Gospel. The basis of the primary study was the text of The Greek New Testament published by the United Bible Societies,<sup>9</sup> where Old Testament citations are highlighted in darker print. Subsequently, the present writer selected a sampling of those passages which appeared to be representative of the different kinds of quotations in Matthew's Gospel, as well as challenging.

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9. The Greek New Testament, 2nd ed., edited by Kurt Aland, et. al. (New York: American Bible Society, 1968).

We might add that the study includes both that which appears to be editorial comment by the evangelist, as well as that which is attributed to Jesus and others in the narrative.

Following the exegetical study we would hope to make some general observations and conclusions regarding any hermeneutical principles which might be evident in Matthew's Gospel. We would further hope to make reference to the observations and conclusions of other writers regarding Matthew's use of the Old Testament, both in the conclusion, as well as throughout the course of the exegetical study.

Although the study focuses specifically on select and direct quotations in Matthew, we recognize that the Old Testament "constitutes the ever-present background and the all-pervasive atmosphere of the Gospel."<sup>10</sup> We would hope to keep in mind such matters as the structure of Matthew's Gospel, which would perhaps intend to identify Jesus as the New Moses. We would keep in mind the explicit connection with the Old Testament which Mt. 1:1-17 provides, and which depicts Jesus as the direct literal descendant of Abraham. Likewise, we are mindful of the indirect allusions to Old Testament passages. Nevertheless, let it suffice that we study a representative sampling of passages which involve explicit reference to the Old Testament.

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10. Franzmann, loc. cit.

Finally, in the examination of the various passages, we would take as much cognizance as possible of the meaning of the particular passage in its original context. Nevertheless, the emphasis of the study proper shall be on the first Gospel's treatment and understanding of the text. The exegetical study is limited to Matthew's Gospel.

1. THE VIRGIN BIRTH: "GOD WITH US"

The Gospel here gives a citation of Isaiah 7:14 which is peculiar to Matthew's Gospel. Because the quote follows an introductory formula, commentators generally categorize it as a "formula quotation."<sup>11</sup>

Matthew 1:22-23 (Isaiah 7:14)

And the whole of this has happened in order that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Behold, a virgin will conceive and bear a son, and they will call His name Emmanuel."<sup>12</sup>

The Translation

The Greek of Matthew's text follows the Septuagint almost completely. In the idiom, ἐν γαστρὶ ἕξει ("she will have in the womb"), Matthew agrees with ἕξει of LXX<sup>A</sup> against LXX<sup>B</sup> which reads ἀγγιψέτω. The third person plural of καλέσουσιν ("they will call") varies from the LXX tradition. Gundry argues the possibility that Matthew's text follows a Greek Old Testament text unknown to us on the basis

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11. The German equivalent category is Reflexionszitate in contrast to the Contextszitate integrated into the Gospel narrative. "Formula Quotation" is presumably an abbreviation of the more correct "Fulfillment-Formula Quotation." See George M. Soares Prabhu, "A Key to the Origin of the Formula Quotations of Matthew," Indian Journal of Theology XX (1971): 71.

12. Writers translation.

of a Qumran manuscript of Isaiah. IQIs<sup>a</sup> reads קָרָא which can be pointed קָרָא (pual perfect--"It [his name] shall be called") or קָרָא (kal perfect--"one shall call" = LXX<sup>N</sup>), "both of which are equivalent to Mt's impersonal plural."<sup>13</sup>

Matthew's citation, of course, relates the understanding that the prophecy concerns a virgin (παρθενα), thus excluding the possibility of conception by normal human intercourse. The following impersonal plural, "they will call;" together with the transliteration, Ἐμμανουήλ, indicates the deity of the son conceived; thus necessitating the virgin conception. The narrative of the surrounding context supports these interpretive emphases in Matthew's Greek translation of Isaiah.

### The Context

The context, of course, is the narrative witness to the birth of Jesus. Matthew 1:1-17 relates the genealogy of Jesus. Then verse eighteen begins, "And the birth of Jesus Christ happened in this way." Verse 18b expressly relates that Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit before Joseph knew her. While Joseph planned to "divorce" Mary, the angel appeared in a dream, and explained to Joseph what had happened.

It is difficult to determine whether we should regard the Old Testament reference as a sort of editorial comment or regard it as a part of the angel's explanation. On the one

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13. Robert Horton Gundry, The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel, (Supplements to Novum Testamentum, vol. XVIII (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), p. 90.

hand, the introductory formula has the same characteristics as the other "formula quotations" which, as a class, occur as a narrative observation.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the introduction, "The whole of this happened," seems to be a significant change in the flow of the angel's promise, "He will save His people from their sins." On the other hand, it seems odd that the narrator would insert a "comment" in the context of the dream. It is interesting that of all the so called formula quotations, Matthew 1:23 alone is Septuagintal, while the others exhibit more independence in text form.<sup>15</sup>

The apparent running-together of witnesses within the narrative is hermeneutically significant. Matthew does not intend to distinguish between God's witness to Jesus Christ, which the angel represents, and his own witness in the narrative. The ambiguity suggests that the Gospel of Matthew, per se, wants to be understood as identical with God's witness. This is to imply that Matthew's hermeneutic is guided by God's witness to the Christ rather than Matthew's faith, or creative imagination.

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14. Prabhu, op. cit., pp. 70-71, says: "The fulfillment formulas of Matt., all of which are variants of the same Grundform *ὅσα πάντα τὰ ἄρα διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντες* are quite unlike anything found elsewhere in the New Testament or in contemporary Jewish literature. . . Except for Mark 1:2 and its parallels, they are the only quotations in the Synoptic Gospels which are not part of the direct speech of Jesus or of the other characters in the Gospel story, but are comments of the Evangelist on the 'scripturalness' of one or other event he narrates."

15. cf. Prabhu, op. cit., p. 71.

### Introductory formula

The Gospel according to Matthew contains eight such introductory formulas. We distinguish the purpose clauses with ἵνα and the aorist subjunctive, πληρωθῆ, from other "formula quotations" characterized by the same "mixed, non-Septuagintal type."

According to the text of Matthew, "what was spoken" (τὸ ῥηθῆναι) necessitated (ἵνα πληρωθῆ) all which has occurred (τὸ βῆναι δὲ ὅλον γεγονός).

"The whole of this has happened." The witness specified that which prophecy necessitated. If one understands the angel to be the speaker, then the reference may be simply the conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. If, on the other hand, the witness is distinct from the angel's message, then we must include even the angel's appearance as necessary for the prophecy's fulfillment. The words, "this all," seem to emphasize the inclusiveness of that which preceded.

"In order that (ἵνα)." Machen's New Testament Greek For Beginners clearly states, "Purpose is expressed by ἵνα with the subjunctive."<sup>16</sup> We also cite the authority of Arndt and Gingrich:

In many cases purpose and result cannot be clearly differentiated, and hence ἵνα is used for the result which follows according to the purpose of the subj. or of God. As in Jewish thought, purpose and

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16. J. Gresham Machen, New Testament Greek for Beginners (The Macmillan Company, 1951), p. 132; 286.

result are identical in declarations of the divine will. . . . The Formula "ὡς ἵνα πληρωθῆ" is so to be understood, since the fulfillment is according to God's plan of salvation. . . .

Furthermore, the future mood of the subjunctive, πληρωθῆ, calls for one to so understand ὡς ἵνα as indicating purpose. The subjunctive is future in relation to "this all" which "has happened." "All of this has happened for the purpose that it might be fulfilled. . . ," cannot bear the meaning of result: "All of this has happened with the result that it was fulfilled."<sup>18</sup>

The purpose clause is thus hermeneutically significant since the witness thereby emphasizes the importance of Scripture's role in the life of Jesus. Particular facets of Jesus' life occurred in accordance with, and because of the scriptures. By the purpose clause, the witness explains why the particular event or events occurred. They occurred because of the written prophecy. The implication is that if the events had not occurred the prophecy would not be fulfilled. Hence, the witness is actually interpreting Jesus' life by the use of Scripture. We might note that in such use of Scripture, the witness points us to the words of Scripture as though they were clear enough to be understood without additional commentary.

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17. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 4th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), s.v. ὡς ἵνα.

18. A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research. (Nashville: Broad-



"It might be fulfilled." Yet interpretation was certainly involved in the use of the Old Testament passage. The purpose clause implies that the words spoken (~~το~~ <sup>το</sup> ~~ρῆμα~~ <sup>ρῆμα</sup>) warranted fulfillment. The aorist passive subjunctive, πληρωθῆ, is future in relation to the subject of the verb, ἔειπεν because of the subjunctive mood. The aorist tense makes the action punctual, and consequently describes complete action. Hence, the passage is capable of only a single fulfillment. The fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 could not occur unless the events recorded in Matthew 1:18ff. took place. The introductory formula, however, need not imply that the events described constitute the corresponding fulfillment of the cited prophecy. We might note that in the present instance the prophecy contains two facets: 1.) the virgin birth and 2.) the ascription of the name Emmanuel. The second facet may involve an on-going fulfillment, namely, that Jesus is God throughout His life, that is, forever. Hence, the corresponding fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 is not so much with respect time, that is, the moment of Jesus' birth. Rather, the corresponding fulfillment is in connection with the life of Jesus. The introductory formula, furthermore, indicates that the Scripture is not limited by the corresponding fulfillment. Instead, the fulfillment is "limited" by

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man Press, 1952), p. 848, regarding the aorist subjunctive, "There is only relative time (future), and that is not due to the tense at all. The subjunctive is future in relation to the speaker. . . ."

the norm of God's promise in Scripture.

We might add that πληροῦν means "to fill," "to make full," "to complete," "to bring to an end," "to accomplish," "to consummate," etc. The New Testament usage of the term always refers to ultimacy. Both by definition and by New Testament usage, there is never partial "fulfillment." Fulfillment may be continuous with respect to time, but is always ultimate with respect to content.<sup>19</sup> It should go without saying, that the nature of the fulfillment depends on the context in which the concept is used. Where Scripture is the object of fulfillment, one must understand the nature of the fulfillment in view of the context. Again, the nature of the fulfillment depends on the Scriptural antecedent.<sup>20</sup>

"What was spoken." At the risk of repetition, we again note that the witness simply points us to the clear words of Scripture without further commentary. The referral is so vivid that the reader is compelled to understand the Old Testament passage on its own terms, that is, contextually. There is no indication that the witness intends a literalistic, automatic use of the words in such a way that the context would be violated. That is, the simple reference to Scripture presupposes that "what was spoken" had a simple, single meaning. The witness would direct us to the native sense of the text.

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19. cf. D. Dr. Alfred Schmaller, Handkonkordanz Zum griechischen Neuen Testament (Stuttgart: Privilegierte Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1949), s.v. πληροῦν.

20. For example, where statements of law are involved, the corresponding deeds and attitudes constitute fulfillment

"By the Lord." We should briefly note that, hermeneutically, the witness asserts without qualification that "what was spoken" was the very word of God. The assertion accords with the context of Isaiah 7:14, where we read, "Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz. . . ." <sup>21</sup> Yet the witness further asserts that Isaiah the prophet was the mediator of the message. Again, the assertion accords with the context. <sup>22</sup> One could hardly dispute that the prophecy intends to represent God's word.

However, as the context of Isaiah 7 evidences a lack of distinction between the prophet's words and God's words, so is there a lack of distinction between the spoken and written message. In directing us to "what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet," it would seem that the witness directs us to the text of Isaiah, where the historical narrative and prophetic oracle blend into a distinctly prophetic literary form, and are hardly distinguishable. This is not to deny the historical witness of Isaiah. Matthew would certainly not do that. We simply suggest that Matthew identifies the written text of Isaiah with the word of God. Such an identification is contextually sound in view of the lack of distinction between the prophet's words and God's words in the written text.

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and may be continuous. cf. Matt. 5:17, Rom. 13:8, 10. Where statements of judgment are involved, ultimate pertinence may constitute fulfillment. cf. Matt. 13:14-15, 15:7-9. As we shall see, all statements of Scripture regarding law, judgment, grace and salvation have their fulfillment in connection with Christ.

21. Is. 7:10.

22. Is. 7:3.

That is, the context of Isaiah, per se, warrants such an identification. Admittedly, the preceding argument relies more on the context of Isaiah 7 than on Matthew's assertions. Yet the reasoning is valid since Matthew simply refers us to "what was spoken."<sup>23</sup>

### Interpretation

Although the witness does not provide explicit commentary or explanation regarding the cited passage, certainly an interpretation is involved. We would summarize the interpretation with at least four points.

The literal sense. Matthew intends to refer us to the literal sense of Isaiah 7:14. That the literal understanding is intended is evident both by the simple reference without explanation and by the implications as to the prophecy's fulfillment in the virgin conception of Jesus.

Liabile to fulfillment. Matthew understands the passage as warranting fulfillment. As already discussed above, the fulfillment could not have occurred without the events described in Matthew 1:18ff.

The word of God. Matthew understands the passage to be the word of God.

Refers to the Messiah. In view of the assertion regarding the fulfillment, it is evident that Matthew understands

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23. That the word of the Lord spoken "through the prophet" refers to the written text of Isaiah may be further evidenced by Jesus' reference to Isaiah 56:7 and 60:7, where He says (Matt. 13:14-15), "It is written. . . ."

the content of Isaiah 7:14 to refer to the Messiah.

At this point we shall not discuss that which guided Matthew in his interpretation of Scripture. (For example, what principles did he use, if any? What were his guiding presuppositions, if any?) We might point out again<sup>24</sup> in this connection, however, that Matthew wants his witness to be understood as indistinguishable from God's witness.

Finally, one more point is worthy of mention regarding the context of Isaiah 7:14. The setting of verse fourteen is one of prophecy. The Lord told Ahaz to ask for a sign. When Ahaz refused, the Lord promised the sign in verse fourteen. The prophecy, of course, points to a day in the future. One should be cognizant of the possibility that prophecy may be oracular, and hence, obscure, initially, regarding its fulfillment.

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24. See p. 9 above.

## 2. THE PLACE OF BIRTH

Matthew 2:5-6 (Micah 5:1, II Sam. 5:2  
I Chron. 11:2)

For thus it has been written through the prophet,  
"And you, Bethlehem of the land of Judah, are not  
at all (by no means) least among the leaders of  
Judah, for from you will proceed a ruling one, who  
will shepherd my people Israel."

### Translation

"The land of Judah." Neither the Hebrew Massoretic  
Text or the Septuagent are represented in Matthew according  
to the ipsissima verba. Most worthy of acceptance is the  
view that "the land of Judah" is a contemporization of the  
antique "Ephratah" (פְּרָתָה).<sup>25</sup>

"By no means least." The Hebrew as well as the Sep-  
tuagent read, "little to be among the thousands of Judah."  
Certainly the effect of the emphatic negative in Matthew,  
οὐδανῶς ἑλαχίστη ἐστίν, is to express that which is implied  
in the original. Although Bethlehem was too little to have  
a place when the thousands, or clans were numbered,<sup>26</sup> and thus  
had no clan-head or ruler of thousands; she would, nevertheless

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25. Gundry, op. cit., p. 91, says, "'Bethlehem-Judah' was the common OT designation (Ruth 1:1; I Sam 17:12; etc.), and the insertion of γῆ is similar to the LXX of I (III) Kings 19:3. . . ." cf. n. 1, "As often in poetry, Mic used the old name." sic, R. C. H. Lenski; The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1943), p. 64.

26. Bethlehem is not mentioned among the clans of

be the greatest since the ruler of all Israel would come from her. Gundry gives three possible explanations for the negative in Matthew which we summarize as follows:<sup>27</sup>

1. It is a targumic interpretation based upon the implications inherent in the text.
2. It is the interpreter's answer to what was understood as a rhetorical question.<sup>28</sup>
3. Matthew's text actually had the negative.

"Among the leaders of Judah." That רִבְּזֵי may be translated "leaders" (רִבְּזֵי) rather than "thousands" (MT: רִבְּזֵי) is consistent with the subject matter of Micah 5:1, namely, that a ruler will proceed from Bethlehem.

"Who will shepherd my people Israel." The addition of the final phrase, reveals that the translation is interpretative. Noting that it accords with II Samuel 5:2 and I Chronicles 11:2, the phrase is rich with interpretative significance. The idea expressed in Micah 5:1, that from Bethlehem would proceed one to be ruler "in Israel," (יִשְׂרָאֵל) is here amplified with an allusion to the Lord's promise to David. The implication is twofold. Foremost is the understanding that Micah's prophecy is Messianic. With that interpretation, there is the understanding that the Messiah would fulfill the promise given to David.

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Judah in the MT of Josh. 15:59.

27. Gundry, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

28. Ibid., p. 92. See n. 2. The argument for this view seems most convincing.

### The Context

The previous section told of the virgin conception of Jesus. Matthew mentions the actual birth of Jesus only briefly in 1:25. Yet even there the statement still deals with Mary's virginity and Jesus' name. Chapter two begins, "Now Jesus having been born in Bethlehem of Judaea. . . behold, Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem." In Jerusalem, the Magi inquired where they might find "He that was born king of the Jews." Herod, being troubled at this, consequently assembled "all the chief priests and scribes," and asked them where "the Christ (*ὁ Χριστός*) is born." They answered, "In Bethlehem of Judaea."

The ambiguity as to the source of the citation resembles that of Matthew 1:22-23. The passages' position in the narrative would indicate that the priests and scribes thus quote Micah 5:1 to Herod. However, we cannot assert absolutely whether the witness intends to relate the priests' and scribes' presentation of Micah 5:1, or whether he turns directly to Micah himself. The important question is whether Matthew intends the translation, as we have it, to accurately reflect the sense of God's word. Matthew certainly asserts that the prophecy of Micah is the basis of the priests' and scribes' answer, as is evidenced by the introduction, "for thus it has been written. . ." The same formula, "it has been written," allows for the witness to render his own translation."



Of course, the point of the citation is to show that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem. Significant for our purposes, is that Herod, the priests and the scribes, as well as the Magi, were concerned about the birthplace of the Christ. Matthew bears witness to the fact that their conclusion corresponded with the reality of the matter. The basis of their conclusion was Scripture. The fact that Matthew provides the specific reference indicates acceptance; and the lack of distinction between sources indicates his concurrence in the "hermeneutics" depicted in the text of Matthew 2:1-6.

#### Interpretation

The translation which Matthew gives intends to represent, in understandable language, the literal sense of the Old Testament passage. It is upon the literal sense of the Scriptures that the priests' and scribes draw their conclusion that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. The expression, "out from you will proceed," is taken quite literally, as opposed to figuratively.<sup>29</sup>

The content of the passage is understood to refer to the Christ. The Messianic interpretation is consistent with the context of Micah, which depicts the contrasting themes of judgment and salvation. It is significant that, when a question concerning the Christ arose, the authorities answered on the basis of Scripture. Scripture was the authority.

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29. cf. Alan Hugh M'Neile, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, The Greek Text with introduction, Notes,

Finally, we should note that the formula, "through the prophet" (διὰ τοῦ προφήτου), indicates the understanding that the citation is the word of God. In the present case, it is that which "has been written" which was "through the prophet," and hence, from the Lord. It is not allowed that the prophet somehow colored the truth which he recorded.

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and Indices. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 16, says that Micah 5:1 does not refer to the birthplace of the Messiah, but merely that the Savior will come from the stock of David.

### 3. FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

Matthew 2:15 (Hosea 11:1)

And he was there until the death of Herod, in order that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "From Egypt I called my Son."

#### Translation

The translation appears to be a direct rendering of the Hebrew and differs from the Septuagent, which reads "From Egypt have I called (μετεκάλεσα) his [Israel's] children (τὰ τέκνα).<sup>30</sup>

#### Context

The narrative. The narrative of which this citation from Hosea is a part witnesses to the flight into Egypt. Following the visit of the Magi, an angel directs Joseph to go to Egypt with Mary and Jesus. The reason for the move is to save the life of the child, Jesus: "for Herod is about to seek to destroy Him." The witness then reports that Joseph took the child and Mary to Egypt where they remained "until the death of Herod. . ." Subsequently, the narrative returns to Herod's slaughter of the children in Bethlehem. Then the narrative again returns to Egypt, where, after Herod's death, an angel called the family back to Israel.

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30. The Hebrew MT reads: וַיִּגְדַּל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ;  
sic Matthew: ἐξ Αἰγυπτου ἐκάλεσα τὸν υἱόν μου.

Introductory formula. The introductory statement indicates purpose, and is identical to that of Matthew 1:22 except for the qualifying words, "all of this has happened." Consequently, the subject of the purpose clause is not so obvious. It is difficult to say whether the subject of the purpose is Jesus' deliverance from death at the hands of Herod, as the immediate context would suggest, or whether it is the angel's directive that Joseph return with his family from Egypt to Israel, as the larger context allows. The positioning of the statement in the context which concerns Jesus' delivery inclines the present writer to understand the subject of the purpose to be Jesus' deliverance from Herod. The immediately preceding words, "until the death of Herod," well accord with the point of the immediate context.

#### Interpretation

Certainly the introductory formula indicates that Jesus was taken into Egypt for the purpose that God's word might be fulfilled. Yet the issue raised in the preceding paragraph is further complicated by the use of Hosea 11:1. Was Jesus taken into Egypt in order that He might return from Egypt? Or was He taken in order that He might escape death? The answer somewhat depends on the interpretation of the Old Testament which Matthew cites. Much to one's frustration, Matthew does not explain the intended reference of Hosea 11:1.

As in Matthew 1:22, the witness simply points us to "what was spoken." The fact is that "what was spoken" necessitated

Jesus' sojourn in Egypt. Secondly, Matthew's use of the words, "from Egypt I called my Son," indicates that those words warranted fulfillment, and that the fulfillment could not have occurred without Jesus' sojourn. Thirdly, both the tense of the subjunctive, namely aorist, and the definition of fulfillment indicate that the fulfillment of the Hosea passage must be singular. Furthermore, the purpose clause does not necessitate that we regard Jesus' sojourn as the corresponding fulfillment of the Old Testament passage cited. Again, according to Matthew's use of the passage within the purpose clause, Matthew does not limit the fulfillment to a particular event in history. That is, he does not explain the Hosea passage in a so called "Peshar" fashion and thus indicate a "this is that" relationship between Jesus' sojourn and Hosea 11:1.<sup>31</sup> Rather, Matthew's purpose is simply to show that Jesus' sojourn was necessary for Scripture's fulfillment; and this is to underscore the fact that the fulfillment is necessarily in connection with Jesus. Therefore, the context of the purpose clause, with the simple reference to "what was written," suggests that we must understand the nature of the fulfillment on the basis of "what was written."

The preceding discussion is motivated by the problem of the meaning of Hosea 11:1 in its original context. Even writers of a more conservative bent regard the historical reference as to "God's deliverance of Israel from their national bondage in

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31. Richard Longenecker, Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), p. 145.

Egypt."<sup>32</sup> Should Hosea's statement in verse one actually refer to Israel's exodus out of Egypt, and should one understand Matthew 2:15 to intend that Hosea's statement refers to Jesus, then Matthew's hermeneutic would seem problematical. Under such conditions, Matthew would then evidence basically two possible types of interpretation, 1.) a literalistic type or 2) a typological type. As we define these terms, one will note that we do not describe guiding principles, but merely modes of interpretation.

Literalistic. A literalistic interpretation understands the words literally without regard for the sense which the context might dictate. We would simply distinguish such a manner of interpretation from 1.) allegory which rests on philosophical dualism, and from 2.) literal interpretation which takes into account the context, the mode of speech and the literary form. A literalistic interpretation, as would be evidenced in Matthew, certainly involves the presupposition that the words are inspired. In fact, such a presupposition is the main basis for the authority of the hermeneutic. Though such a manner of interpretation presumes verbal inspiration of Scripture, it by definition allows for the violation of the context. Hence, it in effect may contradict the actual native sense of the text. If Hosea in fact refers to Israel's exodus, then it would appear that Matthew in effect misrepresents the true sense of the words.

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32. Homer A. Kent, Jr., "Matthew's Use of the Old Testament," Bibliotheca Sacra CXXI (1964), p. 37.

Consequently, the student of the Scriptures would face quite a dilemma if he were to recognize Matthew's hermeneutic as literalistic.

Typological. Writers such as Kent would classify Matthew 2:15 as a typological interpretation.<sup>33</sup> A typological interpretation, quite simply stated, understands a particular event, person or thing to be a model, figure or image of something or someone else. As a hermeneutical method, typology involves very definite presuppositions. Gundry says: "Typology rests on a telic, eschatological view of history."<sup>34</sup> Although Longenecker classifies Matthew 2:15 as a Peshier form of interpretation, his description of Matthew's process is that of typology:

Matthew seems to be thinking along the lines of corporate solidarity and rereading his Old Testament from an eschatologically realized and messianic perspective. . . . he is making the point that that which was vital in Israel's corporate and redemptive experience finds its ultimate and intended focus in the person of Jesus the Messiah.<sup>35</sup>

Hence, when one ascribes to Matthew a typological interpretation, it is understood that in Hosea chapter one, God, through the prophet (διὰ τοῦ προφήτου) spoke about (τὸ ἄρθρον) the exodus of Israel from Egypt. Furthermore, since Matthew interpreted typically, he intended that the type, that God called

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33. Ibid.

34. Gundry, op. cit., p. 209, n. 3.

35. Longenecker, op. cit., p. 145.

Israel out of Egypt, and hence delivered "His Son," is fulfilled in the anti-type, namely, that God the Father delivered His Son, Jesus, by sending Him into Egypt and subsequently called Him out again.

One must concede that typology appears to be a tenable explanation of Matthew's hermeneutic. First, the alleged type has the rough features which could constitute the pre-figure of the anti-type: the element of deliverance, the sojourn in Egypt, the role of God's love and the directive of God to call out of Egypt. Secondly, it is possible to speak of the type as warranting a singular fulfillment, namely, the anti-type. Hence, for the type, there is only one fulfillment allowed. Third, the eschatological purposefulness of Israel frequents the Old Testament in the Messianic and remnant themes. Fourth, it is possible that God's use of the words, "My Son," indicates God's intention for Israel's exodus to serve as a type; and that Matthew's usage of Hosea in 2:15, "aided by the instruction of Jesus both before and after the resurrection, along with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit," affirms this intention.<sup>36</sup>

We would suggest, however, that typology, if not inappropriate, is not necessary to ascribe to Matthew 2:15 as the hermeneutic involved. First, we would suggest that God's statement in Hosea 11:1 refers to Jesus, not typically, but theologically. Stated briefly, Israel's whole purpose for existence was that God would rise up a Savior, namely, Jesus. In a very real

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36. Kent, op. cit., p. 37.



sense, God's promises concerning the elevation and deliverance of Israel directly concern the Christ.<sup>37</sup> One should observe that this theological identification differs from typological similarity. Theologically, "what was spoken," ultimately refers to the Christ directly and really. Typologically, "what was spoken," does not by definition refer to Christ, but merely to an image of Christ.<sup>38</sup>

Second, the introductory formula of Matthew 2:15 does not state the nature of the fulfillment. Rather, he asserts only that Jesus' sojourn into Egypt was necessary for the fulfillment of Hosea 11:1. Hence, the fulfillment was necessarily in connection with Jesus' sojourn. However, since Matthew merely points us to the passage, we must look for the nature of the fulfillment within the passage itself. Now, if Hosea refers to Christ theologically, then it is evident that God delivered Israel from Egypt so that He might accomplish, that is, fulfill, His plan of Salvation through Christ. When God called Israel out of Egypt He had His Son clearly in view. Likewise, it was necessary for God the Father to send Jesus into Egypt and call Him back again so that God's purpose in Christ might be fulfilled. Consequently, the fulfillment consists in God's Salvation in Christ. Therefore, one may explain Matthew's hermeneutic as

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37. cf. Gal. 3:16 (RSV): "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many; but, referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' which is Christ."

38. New Testament references to typology which are explicit infer an essential distinction between type and anti-type. cf. Rom. 5:14, Heb. 9:9, 24, 10:1.

being literal and historical. Matthew thus points us to the native sense of the text, and does not at all violate the context by his usage of the passage.

Finally, Matthew's usage of Hosea certainly allows for the understanding that Hosea 11:1 may be prophetic (ἰσὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ) in intent. It is possible that Hosea exhibits a distinctly prophetic literary form in which promises for the future are couched in historic statements. Such a view is consistent with Hosea's contrasting themes of judgment and promise. In such a case, then Matthew evidences a literal form of interpretation.<sup>39</sup>

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39. The present writer is sympathetic toward this latter view, but has not studied the possibility so as to develop the theses.

#### 4. MOURNING IN BETHLEHEM

##### Matthew 2:17-18 (Jeremiah 31:15)

Then was fulfilled what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "A voice in Rama was heard, weeping and much mourning; Rachel weeping for her children and she would not be comforted, because they were not."

##### Translation

Matthew's Greek appears to be an independent translation of the Hebrew. Matthew transliterates  $\text{בֵּית לֵחְם}$ , agreeing with LXX<sup>B</sup> against LXX<sup>A</sup>, and thus understands the term as a place-name. Matthew also renders  $\text{בְּנֵיהֶן}$  with  $\text{τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς}$  ("her children"), whereas LXX<sup>A</sup> has  $\text{ἐπὶ τῶν νέων αὐτῆς}$ . Matthew does not render a second  $\text{בְּנֵיהֶן}$   $\text{לָהֶן}$  which we read in the Massoretic Text. Finally, Matthew reads "they are not," agreeing with the LXX and other versions against the Massoretic Text's  $\text{וְיִשְׂרָאֵל}$  ("he is not.")<sup>40</sup> Perhaps the translators understood the third person singular in an impersonal sense in view of the context, or else they worked from a Hebrew text reading  $\text{וְיִשְׂרָאֵל}$ . At any rate, Matthew's translation evidences no hermeneutical difficulties.

##### Context

The narrative. Following Jesus' escape to Egypt, the narrative immediately switches back to Herod, who, enraged by

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40. Gundry, op. cit., p. 96.

the Magi's "trickery," ordered to have killed "all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under. . ."<sup>41</sup> Herod's intent was, of course, to destroy the new-born "King of the Jews."

The introductory formula. The formula differs from the previous fulfillment formulas in two respects. First, the witness points to the specific content of the fulfillment. The word, "then," (τότε), indicates that the citation pertains to the time consonant with the murder of the children--that is, the time indicated by the aorist, ἀνεῖλεν ("he killed"). The aorist of the passive, ἐπληρώθη ("was fulfilled"), further indicates the pointedness of the fulfillment.

Second, as the aorist indicative of ἐπληρώθη also indicates, the witness does not express purpose. The lack of purpose would suggest that the Scripture did not warrant the event which Matthew 2:16ff describes. Consequently, the event which Matthew describes was not necessary, nor directed by Scripture. Plummer thus commented on the absence of a purpose statement:

Perhaps Mt. was unwilling to attribute the massacre at Bethlehem to God as designed by Him in order that His own word might be fulfilled.<sup>42</sup>

The question arises, however, whether Matthew intends to represent the children's massacre as in any way predicted by the prophet. One may presume to distinguish between prophetic foresight

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41. Matthew 2:16 (RSV).

42. Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew (London: Robert Scott, 1911), p. 18.

and divine predestination, which, in either case, the prophet's words would be understood as predictive. The definite reference to the fulfillment which we pointed out in the preceding paragraph would seem to indicate that the event described in Matthew 2:16ff is that to which Jeremiah 31:15 predictively refers. Matthew would then say in effect, "this is that," and thus handle the Scripture in the Peshar fashion of Qumran.<sup>43</sup>

There are, in fact, instances in the Book of Matthew in which the formula, "this is that," in effect occurs.<sup>44</sup> However, the use of the word, πληρῶν ("fulfill"), adds a significant dimension to Matthew's assertion in verse seventeen.<sup>45</sup> Because, as in other fulfillment formulas, Matthew simply refers us to Scripture without commentary; since there is no purpose expressed; and since the nature of the fulfillment depends on the Scriptural antecedent,<sup>46</sup> perhaps we should, therefore, look to "what was spoken" for the nature of the fulfillment. Matthew's hermeneutic must then be determined on the basis of both "what was spoken" as well as what he says about the passage.

One should therefore keep in mind Matthew's assertions regarding the Old Testament passage. 1.) The passage was fulfilled. Fulfillment is by definition singular. 2.) The witness

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43. Longenecker, op. cit., p. 145.

44. cf. Matthew 3:3; Is. 40:3; Matthew 11:9-10, Mal. 3:1.

45. O'Rourke, op. cit., n. 7, p. 395, says, "The fulfillment text has yet to be found in the Qumran writings. . ."

46. See p. 13 above.

implies that "what was spoken" was by the Lord, since it was spoken through (ſcā) Jeremiah.

### Interpretation

Jeremiah 31:15 appears to describe, in poetic language, a figurative lamentation because of Israel's devastation and subsequent captivity. The passage depicts the captivity of Israel, which, as verse eighteen suggests, was due to her sin. Yet the theme of the entire chapter is one of comfort. It is the comforting proclamation of God's love for Israel and of God's ultimate restoration of Israel. The comfort ultimately lies in God's "new covenant."<sup>47</sup> It is evident that the theme of the chapter is prophetic in a predictive sense. Yet the promise of Jeremiah is in contrast with the historic malady of Israel's captivity. Matthew, then, applies<sup>48</sup> "what was spoken" through Jeremiah, regarding Israel's captivity, to the tragedy at Bethlehem. The passage "was fulfilled" in that "what was spoken" could have no greater pertinence than to the tragedy at Bethlehem.<sup>49</sup> We might further speculate that the reason for the ultimate relevance of Jeremiah 31:15 to Matthew 2:16ff<sup>50</sup> lies in the latter event's connection with the Christ, the fulfillment of God's promises in Jeremiah.

If the preceding paragraph accurately describes Matthew's usage of Jeremiah 31:15, then it is evident that Matthew uses

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47. Jer. 31:31.

48. The term, "applies," implies that Matthew did not understand Jer. 31:15 to be predictive.

49. We would not suggest that Matthew said more than he intended. sic, Plummer, op. cit., n. 1, p. 18.

the passage in the same manner as does Jeremiah, namely, as a figurative expression of lamentation. Consequently, Matthew's hermeneutic is literal in that he intends the words, per se, to mean the same as they do in their original context ("what was spoken"). The words have their ultimate application, however, in the context of Matthew 2:16ff.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, such usage on the part of the Gospel of Matthew would suggest to us that Matthew understands all of Scripture to be somehow fulfilled in connection with Christ.

On the other hand, one might ascribe to Jeremiah 31:15 predictive significance in view of its oracular nature, and because of the predictive theme of the whole chapter. Matthew's usage of the passage certainly allows for such a view, in which case the intended referent would be that described in Matthew 2:16ff. We would simply suggest that Matthew does not necessarily indicate such an understanding--we must find the nature of the fulfillment in the Scripture to which he directs us.

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50. There may be more than one "application," but only one "fulfillment." In the case of Matthew 2:16ff, the text is applicable because of the signification of a woman unconsolably mourning over children which "are not;" the text is "fulfilled" because its application is in connection with Christ.

## 5. CALLED A NAZARENE

### Matthew 2:23

And coming, he dwelt in a city called Nazareth, so that might be fulfilled what was spoken through the prophets, that (because) He would be called a Nazarene.

### The Context

The context of Matthew 2:23 explicitly relates the fact that Jesus settled in the place called Nazareth. ὅτι ὡς with the subjunctive is a more classical reading equivalent to ὡς with the subjunctive, and thus indicates purpose.<sup>51</sup> Hence, Matthew again asserts that a particular event in Jesus' life was no accident, but was necessary for the fulfillment of Scripture. In the present case, it is the fact that Jesus lived in Nazareth which Scripture necessitated.

### The reference

Since Matthew's apparent citation cannot be found in the Old Testament, the difficulty of Matthew's reference has prompted much discussion.<sup>52</sup> Sanders argues that Matthew here alludes to Judges 13:5, which reads,

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51. Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., s.v. ὅτι ὡς.

52. J. A. Sanders, "NAZORAIOS in Matt. 2.23," Journal of Biblical Literature LXXXIV (1965), p. 169.



for lo, you shall conceive and bear a son. . . .for the boy shall be a ~~N~~azirite to God from birth; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines.<sup>53</sup>

Sanders thus suggests that Matthew intends a play on the words Nazareth and Nazirite:

. . . . But by an excellent use of biblical Paronomasia, the first evangelist cryptically permits the word, by an indefinite reference to "the prophets," to convey a second equally important meaning. Matthew employs a word play on a village name, . . . to signal the double truth of Jesus' background: the historic home of his youth and the theological grounding of his mission.<sup>54</sup>

Should such an explanation be the case, then Matthew's hermeneutic may be either typical or literal. Typically, Matthew would understand God's promise regarding Samson as an image of which Christ was the ante-type. Literally, Matthew would understand God's promise as actually fulfilled in Christ: Samson only helped to further Israel's existence so that Christ might come. At any rate, Matthew would understand the Scripture from a Christological, eschatological perspective.<sup>55</sup>

Others have explained Matthew 2:23 as a pun on references in "the prophets" to the branch (7Y1). In such a case, Matthew's interpretation would be literal while his manner of usage would be allusive.(cf. Isaiah 11:1).

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53. Judges 13:5 (RSV). Judg. 13:5b in LXX<sup>A</sup> reads, ὅτι ἠγαθόν ἐστιν ναζαρεθίων ἔσται τῷ θεῷ τὸ παιδίον ἐκ τῆς γαστρὸς, καὶ αὐτὸς ἄρξεται σώζειν Ἰσραὴλ ἐκ χειρὸς ἀδελφῶν αὐ.

54. Sanders, op. cit., p. 172. cf. M'Neile, op. cit., p. 22, "προφητῶν might then be a reference to the second division of the Heb. canon, in which Judges is one of the 'Former Prophets.'"

55. cf. Longenecker, op. cit., p. 147.

However, one should question the above explanations in view of Matthew's actual assertion in 2:23. He asserts that the Scriptures ("the prophets") necessitated Christ's dwelling in Nazareth. The above explanations render Christ's dwelling in Nazareth as merely coincidental. Furthermore, Ναζωραῖος, is elsewhere in the New Testament used to indicate Jesus' home.<sup>56</sup> Both Longenecker and Sanders admit that Ναζωραῖος does mean "an inhabitant of Nazareth."<sup>57</sup> Finally, Jesus was no Nazarite in the strict Old Testament sense of the term.

Plummer suggests that the conjunction read as a causal subordinating conjunction, and thus, "because" or "for."<sup>58</sup> Thus, the following words, "He would be called. . .," would not allude to "what was spoken through the prophets," either as direct or indirect discourse. Matthew simply emphasizes that Jesus' title would be no accident. Plummer's suggestion seems to strain common Greek usage, however. Instances of causal subordination are generally easy to recognize.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, the pattern of Matthew's other fulfillment formula quotations should lead one to conclude that Matthew does point to "what was spoken" by the word, ὅτι. Even a consecutive ὅτι ("so that"), which would fit

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56. Mt. 21:11, 26:21, Mk. 16:6, Jn. 1:45, Acts 2:22, 10:38, 22:8.

57. Longenecker, op. cit., p. 146. Sanders, op. cit., p. 169. cf. W. F. Albright, "The Names 'Nazareth' and 'Nazoraeon'," Journal of Biblical Literature LXV (1946), pp. 397-401.

58. Plummer, op. cit., p. 19. Sic, Lenski, op. cit., p. 88.

59. cf. Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., s.v., ὅτι.

better than a causal, does not fit Matthew's pattern. Nevertheless, the use of the word, ὅτι, instead of λέγοντος is itself a conspicuous divergence from Matthew's own pattern, and must be regarded as significant. One will observe that λέγοντος consistently signals a quotation in Matthew. By the unusual ὅτι, Matthew must, therefore, intend something different. Since Matthew refers to the plural, "prophets," as necessitating Christ's habitation in Nazareth; and since the prophets "nowhere said even in substance 'that he shall be called Ναζαρηθίος';"<sup>60</sup> and since ὅτι is not Matthew's usual way of indicating direct discourse, a causal or consecutive reading is preferable.

Consequently, since Matthew does not refer to a specific Scripture citation, we can only theorize as to his specific hermeneutic. Lenski sees in Jesus' title the clue to Matthew's statement, and argues that the name, Nazareth, signaled the hate and contempt which the Jews felt toward Jesus. Accordingly, "what was spoken through the prophets," consisted of the prophecies that Jesus would be despised.<sup>61</sup> Matthew, then, understood the "prophets" as predicting this contempt.

Perhaps a better explanation is to regard ὅτι as a loose causal, meaning "for," whereby Matthew merely reminds us that Jesus will be called a Nazarene. Matthew's assertion

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60. Lenski, op. cit., p. 87.

61. Ibid., p. 88. cf. Ps. 22:6, Is. 49:7, 53:3, Dan. 9:26.

regarding fulfillment concerns the whole of "what was spoken" through the prophets," as though, for some reason, it would not be fulfilled if Jesus had not grown up in Nazareth. Consequently, Matthew would thus regard the whole of "the prophets" to deal with the Christ.

## 6. A VOICE IN THE DESERT

### Matthew 3:3 (Isaiah 40:3)

He is the one spoken of through Isaiah the prophet, saying, "A voice crying in the desert, 'prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths."

### Translation

The translation agrees with the Septuagint except for the words, τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν ("our God"), where Matthew reads αὐτοῦ ("His"). In relation to the Hebrew Massoretic Text, the Greek translation suggests two observations. 1.) Matthew would place בְּיַבְיָבָה ("in the desert") with וְקוֹל צֹעֵק ("A voice crying"), rather than with כִּי יִשְׁׁרְׁתָּ ("prepare").<sup>62</sup>

2.) The Septuagint translates the Hebrew verbatim in reading τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν ("our God"). Stendahl, Zahn, and others explain that Matthew's simple αὐτοῦ ("His") is a Christological adaptation designed to identify Jesus with Yahweh. Yet Gundry suggests that it may be an abbreviation.<sup>63</sup>

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62. The MT thus reads, "A voice crying, 'in the desert prepare. . .'" The LXX, Targum, OT Peshitta, Vulgate, and rabbinical expositors agree with Matthew. See Gundry, op. cit., p. 10.

63. Gundry, loc. cit.; cf. K. Stendahl, The School of St. Matthew and its Use of the Old Testament (Uppsala, 1954), p. 48; Th. Zahn, Einleitung in das Neue Testament, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1899), vol. II, p. 315. All three of the synoptic Gospels read αὐτοῦ. "Luke extends the quotation through Is. 40:5 in abbreviated form," in Gundry, op. cit., p. 9.

Context

Immediately following the account of Jesus' settlement, the witness leaps on to the ministry of John the Baptist. The citation of 3:3 serves to identify John. Following the citation, Matthew goes on to describe John (verse 4), his ministry (verse 5-6), his message (verse 7-10) and his witness to Jesus (verse 11-12). Subsequently, the witness concerns Jesus Himself for the duration of the book.

The Introductory Formula

The introductory formula pointedly identifies John the Baptist as the object of the Scripture cited. The aorist passive participle, ὁ λεγόμενος ("the one spoken of"), being nominative, singular, masculine, agrees with αὐτός, which in turn refers to John himself. There can be no question that "what was spoken through the prophet" referred, therefore, to John the Baptist.

In view of Matthew's normal pattern of introducing Scripture citations, one may note the conspicuous absence of any assertion regarding fulfillment. Furthermore, there is no purpose indicated. The introduction appears to be a mixture of the formula which Matthew uses in his own witness to various events, and the formula which Jesus used to identify John.<sup>64</sup> Matthew uses that part which is characteristic of Jesus' identification of John (αὐτός ἐστίν, "this is he"), whereas Matthew retains his own

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64. Matthew 11:10, "This is he concerning whom it has been written. . . ."

characteristic reference to the Scripture (ἐφ' ἰσαΐα . . . ,  
 "which was spoken through Isaiah. . .").

### The Interpretation

Most conspicuous regarding Matthew's hermeneutic in 3:3 is the certain "this is that" relationship between John the Baptist and the Scripture. Matthew thus understands Isaiah 40:3 to refer to the Baptist.

One should observe that the context of Matthew 3:1ff, in which John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus, accords with the context of Isaiah 40:3ff. Isaiah 40:3-4 speaks of the preparation, followed by the promise of verse five: "And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed. . ."<sup>65</sup> Isaiah 40:9ff subsequently witnesses to the coming presence of God: "'Behold your God! . . . He will feed his flock like a shepherd, He will gather the lambs in his arms. . . ."<sup>66</sup>

Because of the Septuagintal form of Matthew's translation, Longenecker says,

The Evangelist is evidently taking a widely employed text which was commonly considered to have messianic relevance, and, in Christian fashion, applying it to the ministry of John the Baptist.<sup>67</sup>

However, the nature of the introductory formula, in that it evidences an identification with Jesus' own teaching, suggests that Matthew's citation is more than a mere Christian application.

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65. Isaiah 40:5 (RSV).

66. Ibid., vv. 9-11.

67. Longenecker, op. cit., p. 147.

The introduction suggests that Matthew's understanding of John's identity follows Christ's own teaching. That is, Jesus, Himself, probably so identified John with Isaiah 40:3. At the present point in the narrative, however, it would be inappropriate for Jesus to identify the Baptist.

Finally, it is evident that Matthew intends to use Isaiah 40:3 according to its literal, native sense. That is, "the one spoken of" through the prophet refers literally to "A voice" (singular) which exhorts to "prepare the way of the LORD. . . ." Further, the official prophetic "voice" is that which goes before the revelation of the "glory of the LORD."



## 7. MINISTRY IN CAPERNAUM

The following citation is a typical "fulfillment formula quotation," indicating purpose, which is characteristic of Matthew. Since the hermeneutical aspects of such a quote have already been treated in some detail, we shall here comment only briefly. Of particular interest in Matthew 4:15-16 is the translation.

### Matthew 4:15-16 (Isaiah 8:23-9:1 MT)

- . . . in order that it might be fulfilled what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying,
- 15.) The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali  
Towards the sea, beyond the Jordan,  
Galilee of the nations,
- 16.) The people who were sitting in darkness saw a  
great light,  
And to the ones who were sitting in the region  
and shadow of death  
Light dawned on them.

### Translation

Although Matthew's translation may evidence some influences from the Septuagint, there are significant divergences. Matthew apparently translated independently according to his purpose; and yet is accurate.

Verse 15. Verse fifteen merely selects the regions designated in Isaiah 8:23. Since Matthew simply cites the Scripture, the nouns should be understood according to the sense of their original context, that is, as simple place names. Rather

than read "Zebulun" and "Naphtali" as vocatives,<sup>68</sup> therefore, we may regard them simply as nominative absolutes. It is difficult to tell whether the subsequent phrases of verse fifteen are five geographic designations,<sup>69</sup> or whether they stand in apposition to "Zebulun" and "Naphtali." Isaiah 8:23 allows the latter, since the designations, "towards the sea" (הַיָּם הַיָּבֵיטָה) and "beyond the Jordan" (עַבְרַת הַיַּרְדֵּן) parallel "Zebulun" and "Naphtali."<sup>70</sup> "The region of the nations" then designates the same general area. In effect, Isaiah designates the same area three times and in three different ways, thus exhibiting Hebrew parallelism. A glance at a map of the twelve tribes in Canaan demonstrates that Zebulun lied "toward" the Mediterranean Sea, while Naphtali stretched "along" the upper Jordan. Following the fall of Israel, the same area became known as the "region of the nations." By New Testament times, the region was known formally as Galilee. עַבְרַת is an adverbial noun which indicates "a region over against," while the parallel, הַיָּבֵיטָה calls to mind "the way toward."<sup>71</sup> Matthew's εὐσέλι, which is unusual Greek,<sup>72</sup>

68. sic, Robertson, op. cit., p. 469.

69. sic, Lenski, op. cit., p. 165.

70. Is. 9:1 (RSV), ". . . . In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time וְהִגְדִּילָהּ [וְהִגְדִּילָהּ] he will make glorious הַיָּבֵיטָה the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations."

71. cf. Benjamin Davidson, The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), s.v. עַבְרַת and הַיָּבֵיטָה.

72. Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., s.v., εὐσέλι.

accurately renders the sense of the Hebrew, and should be regarded as an adverbial noun parallel to πέραν. While πέραν commonly means "across," it may also connote the sense, "on the edge of."<sup>73</sup>

Although Matthew lists the five regions, we need not understand him to intend five distinct regions. The immediate context of Matthew 4:15-16 would certainly suggest that Matthew understands Isaiah to refer to what was then Galilee. We might note the parallel context in Mark, where Jesus' ministry is to Galilee in general.<sup>74</sup> Likewise, in Luke, Jesus goes into Galilee after He is baptised; He goes to Capernaum after being rejected in Nazareth.<sup>75</sup> Thus, in Matthew, Jesus "withdrew into Galilee," and went to Capernaum only after leaving Nazareth. Interestingly, Nazareth is in the region designated by "Zebulun. . . towards the sea," whereas Capernaum, at the time of Christ, is the chief town in the area designated by "Naphtali. . . beside the Jordan." Jesus literally fulfilled the prophecy in His movements.

Verse 16. Matthew also accurately gives the sense of the Hebrew in verse sixteen. Matthew well understands the prophet to thus say "dwelling in" by the word ההולכים,<sup>76</sup> and translates with a corresponding participle of like meaning, καθήμενος.

73. The corresponding prep., περί means, "concerning," "around the place." cf., Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., s.v., περί.

74. Mk. 1:14.

75. Lk. 4:14ff.

76. Davidson, op. cit., s.v., ההולכים: "Kal. Part. act. m. pl."

The singular participle agrees with the noun, ὁ λαός. Likewise, the aorist, εἶδεν well corresponds with the preterite, ·לָרָא, although the singular verb agrees in number with its Greek subject. It is possible that Matthew's phrase, "great light," is more emphatic than the Hebrew,<sup>78</sup> yet the wording also serves to do poetic justice to the translation in view of the subsequent parallel phrase. The participle, καθήμενος, also accords with ·לָשָׁבַע. The καὶ between the two datives, χώρα and ὁ κλάδος, serves not to distinguish two regions, but to connect the two words into one concept by means of a hendiadys. Thus, Matthew represents, in effect, the sense of the Hebrew verbatim.

#### Interpretation

Matthew's hermeneutic must be described as literal. One will observe that Matthew's usage accords with the context of Isaiah 9:1-12, in which we read:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:  
 . . . and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

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77. Ibid., s.v., ·לָרָא.

78. LXX reads, ἴδρα εὖ φῶς μέγα.

79. Is. 9:6 (AV).

## 8. HE TOOK OUR DISEASES

The following citation represents a typical "fulfillment formula quotation," characteristic of Matthew, which indicates purpose. The translation is quite straight forward. Nevertheless, Matthew's usage of the Scripture warrants our examination.

Matthew 8:17 (Isaiah 53:4)

. . . in order that it might be fulfilled what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, "He took our weaknesses and bore our diseases."

### Translation

Matthew's translation more literally conveys the sense of the Hebrew than that of the Septuagint.<sup>80</sup> Matthew renders ⲬⲰⲓ, which properly means "lift,"<sup>81</sup> with ἔλαβεν, "took." The literal meaning of ⲓⲓⲛⲉⲛ is "our weaknesses,"<sup>82</sup> which is τὰς ἀσθενείας ἡμῶν in Matthew. ⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩ,<sup>83</sup> which means "bear," or "carry," is ἔβαρτασεν. Finally, ⲓⲓⲛⲉⲛ,<sup>84</sup> which means "pain," "grief," or "sorrow," Matthew translates as νόσους, which means "diseases." One should observe, however, that the

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80. LXX reads, οὗτος τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν φέρει  
καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν ἐδυνάταται.

81. Davidson, op. cit., s.v., ⲬⲰⲓ.

82. Ibid., s.v., ⲓⲓⲛⲉⲛ.      83. Ibid., s.v., ⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩ.

84. Ibid., s.v., ⲓⲓⲛⲉⲛ.

Greek, νόσους, also carries the idea of "feeling;" and is more subjective than the English designation, "disease!"<sup>85</sup>

### Context

Following the sermon on the Mount, chapter eight proceeds with Jesus' healing ministry. He cleansed the leper (8:1-4). He healed the centurion's servant (8:5-13). After He healed Peter's mother-in-law (8:14-15), we read:

When it was turning evening they brought to him many who were demon possessed, and He cast out the spirits with a word; and all who were sick He healed. . . . (8:16)

It is after the word, "He healed,"<sup>86</sup> that Matthew refers us to Isaiah 53:4 with the words, "in order that it might be fulfilled. . ."

The question then arises as to whether Matthew intends to say that Isaiah 53:4 was fulfilled by Jesus' healing ministry, and therefore convey the understanding that Isaiah 53:4 referred to literal healing. Verse sixteen would suggest such an understanding. The immediate context further implies that the healing consists of "taking away."

However, the two phrases of the Hebrew verse, as well as the translation, constitute a poetic couplet which in effect conveys the idea of "bearing" or "carrying," as a burden. Since the context of Isaiah 53 speaks of the suffering servant on whom

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85. Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., s.v., νοσέω: "be ailing with." The English verb of the noun νόσος might be "pained" rather than "diseased."

86. Greek, ἐθεράπευσεν, from θεραπεύω.

would be laid "the iniquity of us all," and since the theme of Isaiah 53 concerns propitiation, some would see a problem with Matthew's usage. Thus, M'Neile writes,

Mt. . . . makes no reference to the propitiatory value of the Servant's work; he quotes only v. 4, and quotes the wording of it mechanically, as in other instances, to illustrate the immediate incident, using the Greek verbs in their collateral force of 'to take away.' The passage, as Mt. employs it, has no bearing on the doctrine of the Atonement. . . .

Should we describe Matthew's citation as a merely "mechanical" quotation, then, by implication, his hermeneutic would be literalistic. The basis of such an explanation would be the assumption that Matthew's usage does not really do justice to the context of Isaiah 53.

#### Interpretation

Lest one jump to a premature conclusion, let us again examine Matthew's assertion regarding both the Scripture which he cites, as well as the fulfillment which he describes. First, Matthew states that Jesus "healed" in order that "what was spoken might be fulfilled." The point of the statement is that Jesus' healing ministry occurred for a purpose, namely, that Jesus' activity accord with the Scriptures. Furthermore, the formula, "in order that. . . ," indicates that the witness would explain what had occurred in Jesus' ministry by simply pointing us to the Scriptures. In effect, Matthew explains Jesus' healing ministry with the Scripture, instead of explaining the Scripture by

pointing to Jesus' healing. Matthew assumes that the Scripture speaks clearly on its own without further exposition.

Second, Matthew's concept of Jesus' healing was certainly not limited to the physical. Matthew bears witness to the fact that Jesus' authority to heal diseases actually demonstrated His authority to "take away" sins. Thus, in the same context of Jesus' healing ministry, we read in chapter nine,

But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins"--he then said to the paralytic--"Rise, take up your bed and go home." And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

However, the Scripture would not be fulfilled without Jesus' healing ministry. Whereas the Septuagint tended to spiritualize by translating the lifting of weakness in terms of forgiveness of sins, Matthew understood the promise of Isaiah 53 to concern the healing of the whole man. The corresponding fulfillment of God's promise in Isaiah 53 could not occur without physical healing. This understanding of Matthew's follows a literal interpretation of the words in Isaiah 53. Yet Matthew's citation of Isaiah 53:4 serves to put Jesus' healing into perspective.

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88. Mat. 9:4-8 (RSV).



## 9. JESUS INTERPRETS THE SCRIPTURES

Thus far we have examined a sampling of Matthew's Scripture citations which occur in the witness to the life and ministry of Jesus. Now we shall include a sampling of those instances in which Jesus himself interprets the Scriptures.

### In Temptation

Matthew 4:3-4 (Deut. 8:3)

And approaching, the tempting one said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, say that these stones may become bread." But He answering said, "It has been written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word proceeding through the mouth of God.

We note briefly that the text follows that of the Septuagint. Jesus introduces the Scripture with the simple, "It has been written." The perfect passive indicative, *ἔγραπται*, indicates that what was once written remains in effect.

It is significant that Jesus uses a passage which was spoken originally to Israel. According to Deut. 8:3, God afflicted Israel with hunger and fed her with manna "in order that" (LXX, *ἵνα*) He might teach them that "man shall not live by bread alone. . . ." Hence, the words of Deut. 8:3 relate the purpose and will of God. The Gospel of Matthew here depicts Jesus as being obedient to God's intent and purpose for Israel.

One might infer that Jesus' use of Scripture is in line with God's purpose and will. Hence, there is not an arbitrary, literalistic use of Scripture. Instead, Jesus application is intended to accord with God's purpose.

Matthew 4:6-7 (Ps. 91:11, 12; Deut. 6:16)

And he said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it has been written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it has been written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"

It is significant that Satan understands Psalm 91 to refer to the Christ, and Jesus seems to accept such Messianic usage. Yet Jesus rejects Satan's use of the passage. Satan's usage of the passage is in opposition to its original context, where God's promise in vv. 11-12 follows obedient trust, "Because you have made the LORD your refuge. . ."<sup>89</sup> Satan was probably aware that the Psalm spoke of the Messiah's triumph over himself. Verse thirteen reads, ". . . the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot." Should Jesus have succumbed to the devil's temptation by putting God's love to the test, the intent of the Psalm would thus have been violated.

So Jesus answers by contradicting the substance of Satan's temptation, namely, to put God to the test, with God's word, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God." Again, Matthew depicts Jesus as obedient to God's purpose: 1.) by not tempting God and 2.) by overcoming Satan's temptation.

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89. Ps. 91:9 (RSV).

Concerning John the BaptistMatthew 11:10 (Ex. 23:20, Mal. 3:1)

This is he concerning whom it has been written,<sup>90</sup>  
 "Behold, I send forth my messenger before your  
 face, who will prepare the way of you before you.

Translation

The words, "Behold, I send forth my messenger before  
 your face," agree verbatim with the LXX of Ex. 23:20. There-  
 fore, Gundry writes,

Here is a composite quotation in which the first half  
 agrees with the LXX of Ex. 23:20, and the second half  
 shows a very slight influence from the Hebrew text of  
 Mal 3:1. The combination of these two OT passages is  
 probably<sup>91</sup> pre-Christian, since it occurs in Jewish lit-  
 erature.

The quotation appears to be a generally recognized translation  
 since it is the same in all three Gospels.<sup>92</sup> The chief points  
 of contact, "Behold, I send forth my messenger," and "who will  
 prepare," link the reference to the prophecy of Mal. 3:1. It  
 is significant that the ὅς with the future, κατασκευασέτω  
 ("who will prepare") accurately gives the sense of the piel of  
 the Massoretic Text's יִצְוֶה,<sup>93</sup> in Mal. 3:1. The use of the  
 personal pronoun, σου ("before your face" and "your way") con-  
 tinues the orientation set in the first half of the verse.

90. Greek, οὗτος ἔρχεται ἔμπροσθέν σου ἵνα προετοιμάσῃ τὴν ὁδὸν σου.

91. Gundry, op. cit., p. 11.

92. Mk. omits ἐμπροσθέν σου; Lk. omits ἐγώ.

93. The ὅς with the future indicates purpose. See Robertson, op. cit., p. 960.

Interpretation

Jesus clearly identifies John as the object of the prophecy. Jesus' usage of the Scripture here corresponds to the "this is that" Peshar interpretation.<sup>94</sup> Yet we must describe His hermeneutic as literal, since He understands the preparatory messenger to literally prepare the way for the following, "messenger of the covenant" מִיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ,

"the Lord in whom you delight" אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ  
יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

Concerning Jcnah

Matthew 12:40, 41b

For just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so will be the Son of man in the heart of the earth. . . . behold, a greater than Jonah is here.

We include Jesus' reference to Jonah because Jesus here uses the Scripture in a truly typical way. Jesus refers to Jonah's experience in the whale's belly as a "sign" (σημεῖον). Of course, the scribes and Pharisees asked for a sign which would show and prove Jesus authority. Jesus promised them such a sign in His resurrection. But by a play on words, He also referred to the example, or pattern, of Jonah's experience as a sign, that is, a type of Jesus' own coming experience. Yet it is clear that the witness to Jonah's experience did not witness to Jesus, but

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94. See p. 32.

to Jonah, since in Jesus, "a greater than Jonah is here." Furthermore, it is clear that the "sign" which Jesus promised was His own resurrection from the dead, since that reference followed the future verb, δοξοποιεῖται, while the reference to Jonah was historic. Therefore, even though Jesus refers to Jonah as a "sign" or type, He nevertheless understands and interprets the witness to Jonah literally.

### Concerning Parables

#### Matthew 13:14-15 (Is. 6:9-10)

And is fulfilled in them the prophecy of Isaiah, saying, "In hearing you will hear, and by no means understand; and (S)eeing you will see and not recognize, for this people's heart is hardened and they closed their eyes, lest they might see with (their) eyes and hear with (their) ears, and understand with (their) heart and turn back, and I will heal them.

#### Translation

The translation of Is. 6:9-10 which we read in Matthew agrees exactly with the Septuagint, except that Matthew omits the two plural possessive pronouns in the LXX v. 10, αὐτῶν.

#### Interpretation

There has been considerable discussion concerning the implications of the Lord's use of this passage, particularly in terms of the doctrine of election.<sup>95</sup> To a large extent, one's understanding of the Lord's hermeneutic depends on the meaning

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95. See Gundry, op. cit., p. 33-34.

of the conjunction, ὅτι, in verse thirteen, where Jesus gives His reason for speaking in parables. The issue is whether Jesus actually told parables in order to harden the people, or rather because of their hardness. One may list three reasons for understanding Jesus' answer to be the former.

- 1.) In verse eleven, divine action may suggest divine purpose: ". . . to them it has not been given."
- 2.) Matthew's ὅτι in v. 13 reads ὅτι in Mark's parallel reference. The force of Matthew's ὅτι should then be telic. Consequently the καὶ beginning the introductory formula in v. 14 continues the idea of purpose.
- 3.) ἵνα with the subjunctive, ἵνα, indicates purpose, in Mt. 13:15.

Consequently, Jesus would, therefore, understand the Scripture to necessitate the "hardness" of the people. The fulfillment of prophecy occurs by means of Jesus' parables. Jesus would in effect say that he tells parables in order that the Scripture of Isaiah 6:9-10 would be fulfilled--that is, because God has elected the people to be hardened.

On the other hand, there is ample reason to understand the ὅτι to mean simply "because" or "for."

- 1.) Divine action may be a response to the "hardness" of sin.
- 2.) ὅτι in fact means "because" or "for." Even the consecutive is not strong enough to denote purpose. The ὅτι of Mark 4:12 is without the subjunctive and need not indicate divine purpose.

- 3.) The subject of the strong purpose statement within the quote, in verse fifteen, is the intent of the people themselves, not the purpose of God.

It is because of the stubbornness of the people that Jesus told parables to them. Consequently, that which follows "QTL" in v. 13 describes that stubbornness. Likewise, the statement regarding fulfillment in v. 14 is of a descriptive nature, as opposed to final. That is, the nature of the prophecy in Isaiah was not itself predictive, but intended for the hearers of that prophet. Nevertheless, that which the prophet uttered in judgment to his contemporaries was "fulfilled" in those who were hardened toward Jesus. Hence, Jesus understood the "prophecy," though uttered to the people of Israel at the time of the prophet, to be applicable for all time. Its fulfillment, however, was only in connection with Jesus and the Gospel.

The Gospel of Matthew does, however, bear witness to the fact that Jesus told parables for the purpose that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.<sup>97</sup> Hence, there was a divine purpose behind this aspect of Jesus' activity. Yet the purpose for which Jesus was to speak parables was, according to Psalm 78:2, to reveal mysteries, not to hide them.

Jesus does seem to imply in Matthew 13:10ff that the parables would further harden the obdurate. Perhaps we should describe Christ's response to the stubbornness of the people as consequent purpose. Because of persistent stubbornness God may

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97. Mt. 13:34-35.

purpose full obduracy. Nevertheless, the original cause of God's hardening is the stubbornness of the people.

### Concerning the Resurrection

Matthew 22:29b-32 (Ex. 3:6, 15?)

. . . You err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. . . And concerning the resurrection of the dead, Did you not read what was said to you by God, saying, "I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob?" He is not a God of dead (men) but of living.

The Sadducees asked Jesus about the hypothetical case of the woman with seven husbands and her subsequent status in the resurrection, thus hoping to force Jesus into humiliation. Jesus first answered by accusing the Sadducees of ignorance with respect to both the Scriptures and the power of God. He answered the real issue, which concerns the resurrection, on the basis of Scripture.

### Interpretation

Argumentum ad Hominem. According to Longenecker, Matthew 22:29ff is an example in which Jesus would confound His antagonists on their own exegetical grounds.

Jesus. . . employed the verbal casuistry of the day in his exegetical discussions. But he evidently did so ad hominem, for it is significant that his more atomistic and ingenious treatments of Scripture are in the context of polemical debate.

The "atomistic treatment of Scripture" presupposed the belief

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98. Longenecker, op. cit., pp. 69-70.



of the Sadducees that every word of the written Torah possessed validity.<sup>99</sup> It is in line with the understanding that Jesus' hermeneutic was "atomistic" that M'Neile would classify the Lord's argument as an argumentum ad literam.<sup>100</sup>

Argumentum ad literam. Certainly it is fair to describe Jesus argument as an argumentum ad literam. That is, Jesus draws His conclusion from the literal words themselves. Yet such an argument on the part of Jesus need not invalidate His conclusion. Nor need we describe the Lord's usage of the Scripture as human condescension, and therefore imply that His hermeneutic, per se, is in effect unsound, while conceding at the same time that His conclusion is true.

Such a description of Jesus' hermeneutic in fact is based on a critical analysis which would sit in judgment on the Lord's argument. Besides the argument which the Lord gives from Scripture, we should note what Jesus said concerning the passage itself. First, the words of the text were in fact God's words: "Did you not read what was said. . . by God." Second, Jesus understood "what was spoken" as addressed to those of His time: ". . . what was said to you. . ." Jesus statements evidence an omni-historical appreciation for the word of God. Third, Jesus'

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99. Ibid., p. 68. Other examples of such ad hominem hermeneutics by Jesus, Longenecker calls Madrashic syllogism: gal wahomer (light to heavy), Mt. 7:11, Lk. 11:13, Mt. 10:25, Lk 12:28; gezerah shawah (analogy), Mk. 2:25-28, Mt. 21:3ff, Lk. 6:3-5, Mt. 12:5-7; again gal wahomer, Jn. 7:23, Jn. 10:34ff, (pp. 68-69).

100. M'Neile, op. cit., p. 322.

argument in fact indicates full regard toward each word of "what was spoken." Jesus indeed presents the doctrine, "He is not God of dead (men) but of living," as a representation of "what was spoken."

In describing Jesus' argument as based on the literal words, we need not assume that His hermeneutic is literalistic, that is, without regard for the contextual sense of the passage. The words which Jesus quotes constitute God's own identification of Himself, and hence, commend themselves to an omni-historical and literal representation. Exodus 3:15 further commends the sacredness of the formula which Jesus quotes:

God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD [Yahweh (I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE)] the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': this is my name for ever, and thus <sup>101</sup>I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

Conclusion. To be sure, we must recognize Jesus' authority in His interpretation, and hence, in His teaching, of what the words of the text suggest. Matthew 22:32 is an instance in which Jesus actually gives an exposition of Scripture. It is evident that He intends to represent an idea which the words of the text intimate. Furthermore, it is evident that He would understand those words in their strict literal sense. Yet the conclusion which He renders need not follow strictly mechanical processes. We must recognize that His hermeneutic follows a full understanding of the Scriptures as well as of the power of God.

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101. Ex. 3:15 (RSV).

## CONCLUSION

Paradoxically, one's endeavor to determine hermeneutical principles in Matthew's Gospel will itself involve hermeneutical principles and presuppositions. Doubtless, one's understanding of the nature, form, and purpose of Holy Writ will substantially influence his conclusions. Consequently, one's approach will likewise manifest itself in the manner in which he describes Matthew's use and interpretation of the Old Testament. Ultimately, the approach will prevail upon one's determination of that which is normative, and in fact may predetermine what one will regard as a normative hermeneutic.

The present writer's approach has been primarily grammatical, endeavoring to set forth the evangelist's own assertions and witness regarding the Scriptural references. Implicit in the examination were the following questions: 1.) What guided the evangelist in his selection, use, and interpretation of the Scriptures? 2.) An essential corollary to the first question is the following: What is the evangelist's understanding and intent with regard to his own witness? 3.) Finally, what does he say or report regarding the Scripture which would weigh on our own use of the Scripture. Upon our examination of the citations in Matthew, a sampling of which we have reported

on in some detail, we would suggest the following generalizations and conclusions.

1.) It is essential that the student of the Gospel of Matthew distinguish correctly the relation between the formal and material principles of the Gospel. Matthew wants to be understood as a witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah and King. The witness understands and presents the Scriptural references as integral parts of that Gospel to which he bears witness.

One would, therefore, violate the evangelist's intent by describing those Scriptural references as an expansion on the Gospel, as though the evangelist was guided by presumed Gospel presuppositions. Such an analysis confuses the guiding motive of the evangelist with the message of the evangelist. Such an approach will inevitably result in Gospel reductionism which endeavors to sit in judgment over the Gospel witness, to discern that which is truly the Gospel and that which is merely "interpretation." While trying to discover the "Gospel" which would then become the normative hermeneutical principle, one will consequently undermine the full witness to the Gospel. For Matthew, on the other hand, the Scripture references are the Gospel. His assertions regarding the particular passages are in fact an integral part of his overall witness, and may not be separated from a supposed Gospel core. Consequently, we should not refer to Matthew's so called Reflexionszitate

as mere editorial comments, as though they are separate from, and less important than, the real Gospel.

We would cite Shires as an explicit example of the tendency to describe the New Testament writers' hermeneutic as a reduced Gospel:

. . . on the whole the independently formed gospel tradition about Jesus carefully controls and directs N.T. usage of Scripture, which is thus kept in a subordinate place. It is the gospel, with its record of key events and their basic interpretation—that determines<sup>102</sup> the selection of supporting Scriptural passages.

A more indirect form of the Gospel reductionism is to describe the evangelist's guiding hermeneutic as a set of "beliefs." Thus, S. L. Edger wrote of the whole New Testament:

Certain beliefs influenced greatly the interpretation of these Old Testament passages by the early church. The first was that Jesus was the Messiah.

The second belief was that Jesus was God. . .

The third belief was that Jesus was the Suffering Servant of Deutero-Isaiah. . .

Allied with this belief was the interpretation of certain passages which referred to Israel as having fulfillment in Christ. . .

Another belief was that the Christian church was the new Israel, and that prophecies originally directed towards the Jewish nation would now find their fulfillment in the new Christian community. . .<sup>103</sup>

One will observe that the above writers in fact describe select points which were taken from the Gospel, and then represent those points as guiding hermeneutical "principles."

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102. Shires, op. cit., p. 40.

103. S. L. Edgar, "New Testament and Rabbinic Messianic Interpretation," New Testament Studies V (1958), pp. 52-53.

2.) It is crucial that the student of the Gospel of Matthew recognize the essential continuity of revelation. Matthew wants to be understood not as an addition to, but a continuum of, and in unity with, Old Testament revelation. This important corollary to the previous point is evidenced by two considerations. First, Matthew's witness explicitly asserts such unity in references to the Old Testament Scripture--particularly in references regarding fulfillment. Matthew understands the Scriptures to contain that to which he bears witness. Second, the Gospel of Matthew, in toto, intends to bear witness to Jesus Christ, who is Himself the fullness of God's revelation.<sup>104</sup> That to which Matthew bears witness, namely, the good news of Jesus Christ, is the fulfillment of revelation, and is in fact revelation itself.

Matthew's assertions concerning the Scriptures, as well as his use of the Scriptures, also indicate that Scripture is revelation: ". . . what was spoken through the prophet." Furthermore, since the Gospel of Matthew, in toto, intends to bear witness to Jesus, it follows that the evangelist would have us regard his witness (in toto) as revelation.

3.) It was the Lord Jesus Himself who guided Matthew in the interpretation of specific Scripture passages. That which guided Matthew was not the message, that is, hermeneutical

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104. cf. Heb. 1:2, 2:2, Gal. 4:4, Jn. 1:1-18.

presuppositions of faith. Rather, Jesus personally gave to Matthew the Gospel which Matthew in turn related under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This third insight follows at least two considerations. First, the nature of the Gospel of Matthew as a witness to the good news of Jesus suggests that Jesus Himself is the guide. The object of a witness is by definition the source and content of that witness. Second, the New Testament elsewhere states that Jesus taught the disciples the correct understanding of the Scriptures:

Then he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, . . ." You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you. . .<sup>105</sup>

4.) Finally, under the guidance of the above three considerations, one may then determine that which is normative for himself in understanding and interpreting Scripture. On the basis of our previous study of Matthew, we would list the following conclusions:

- a. Matthew does not present a systematic theology of hermeneutics.
- b. Matthew does not present mechanical rules or "principals" of interpretation.

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105. Lk. 24:44-49b (RSV). cf. Lk. 24:27, Mt. 26:24, Mt. 26:56, Mk. 9:12.

- c. Matthew consistently asserts that the particular Scripture is, per verbum, God's own word.
- d. Matthew's witness consistently points us to the Scriptures as the source and norm for all doctrine and practice.
- e. Matthew's interpretation of Scripture is consistently literal, as opposed to allegorical or literalistic. His referential statements are such that we need not regard his interpretation to violate the original context. Likewise, typology, as a hermeneutical principle, per se, should not be ascribed to Matthew, since Matthew understands prophetic statements to refer to Christ.
- f. Matthew consistently directs us to Scripture as though "what was spoken" were quite clear on its own. Even in Jesus' exposition of Ex. 3:6 the Lord asks, "Did you not read what was written?"

One will observe that the four final points relate specifically to the witness' reference to the Scriptures and what he asserts about them. That Christ is the content of Scripture does not constitute a hermeneutical principle, per se. It is rather a doctrinal matter, which follows the consideration that promises of salvation must have Christ in view. The continuity of revelation further implies that Christ is in the Old Testament. One might think of other doctrinal considerations, such as Christ's divinity, which may weigh on one's approach to and understanding of the Scriptures.



## APPENDIX

### Groupings of Various Types of References

#### References Explicitly indicating purpose:

|       |                         |          |
|-------|-------------------------|----------|
| 1,22  | 1. Virgin Birth         | Is 7,14  |
| 2,14  | 2. Flight from Herod    | Hos 11,1 |
| 2,23  | 3. Called a Nazarine    | Prophets |
| 4,13  | 4. Into Capernaum       | Is 9,1   |
| 8,16  | 5. Healing the sick     | Is 53,4  |
| 12,14 | 6. Unobtrusive Ministry | Is 42,1  |
| 13,34 | 7. Entry into Jerusalem | Ps 78,2  |
| 21,4  | 8. Entry into Jerusalem | Is 62,11 |

#### References to fulfillment without indicating purpose:

|       |                            |           |                        |
|-------|----------------------------|-----------|------------------------|
| 2,16  | 1. Sorrow in Bethlehem     | Jer 31,15 | ("Then was ful")       |
| 3,4   | 2. John the Baptist        | Is 40,3   | ("This is he")         |
| 11,9  | 3. John the Baptist        | Mal 3,1   | ("This is he")         |
| 13,14 | 4. Hearing Parables        | Is 6,9    | ("In them is ful.")    |
| 15,7  | 5. Hypocrites              | Is 29,13  | ("Well did Is Proph.") |
| 27,9  | 6. Thirty Pieces of Silver | Jer 32,6  | ("Then was ful.")      |

#### Other References

|       |                         |           |                       |
|-------|-------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| 2,4   | 1. Christ in Bethlehem  | Mic 5,1   | (purpose implied?)    |
| 4,3   | 2. Christ Tempted       | Deut 8,3  | ("It is written")     |
| 5     | 3. Sermon on the Mt.    |           | ("It was said")       |
| 15,4  | 4. 4th comm.            | Ex 20,12  | ("God commanded")     |
| 19,4  | 5. Marriage and Divorce | Gn 1,27   | ("Have you not hrd?") |
| 21,12 | 6. Cleansing the Temp.  | Is 56,7   | ("It is written")     |
| 21,15 | 7. Children's praise    | Ps 8,3    | ("Have you not hrd?") |
| 21,42 | 8. Rejected Stone       | Ps 118,22 | ("Did you never rd?") |
| 22,23 | 9. The Resurrection     | Ex 3,6    | ("Have you not rd?")  |
| 26,31 | 10. Scattered Flock     | Zch 13,7  | ("It is written")     |

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