

"The Virgin Will Conceive": Typological Fulfillment in Matthew 1:18-23

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Introduction

What does Isaiah 7:14 mean in its own context? Does Matthew¹ show awareness of this context? Does he respect it, and, for that matter, how does he use the word "fulfilled"?² Is the validity of the way that Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14 affected by whether or not the Hebrew term *'almah* (אִלְמָה) refers strictly to a "virgin"?³ In this essay, I will address each of these issues as I seek to demonstrate the thesis that Matthew was not claiming that the OT prophet was making a future prediction about Israel's Messiah when he wrote, "Now the whole of this has happened in order that what was spoken by the Lord through the

1. Authorship of the first gospel is disputed (see, e.g., Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ* [Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000], 65-78). I follow E. Earle Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Boston: Brill, 2002), 36: "The second-century sources probably identify the four Evangelists correctly. The arguments against these identifications are not decisive and often rest on questionable assumptions. . . ."

2. See especially the aorist passive forms of πληρώω in Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23. Cf. also the use of the verb elsewhere in Matthew at 3:15; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35, 48; 21:4; 23:32; 26:54, 56; 27:9. For the formula ἵνα πληρωθῆι, which is used only in Matthew and John, see Matt. 1:22; 2:15; 4:14; 12:17; 21:4. For the formula ὅπως πληρωθῆι, see Matt. 2:23; 8:17; 13:35. Ellis writes of ἵνα πληρωθῆι, "Along with other 'fulfilment' formulas, it is favoured by the Hebraist missionaries to underscore their perception of salvation history as it is consummated in Jesus" (E. Earle Ellis, "Biblical Interpretation in the New Testament Church," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* [CRINT 2.1; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988; reprint Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004], 693). For extensive bibliography, see Warren Carter, "Evoking Isaiah: Matthean Soteriology and an Intertextual Reading of Isaiah 7-9 and Matthew 1:23 and 4:15-16," *JBL* 119 (2000): 503 n. 1.

3. Ulrich Luz (*Matthew 1-7* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989], 123-24) writes, "Luther declared his willingness to pay the 'stubborn, condemned Jews' a hundred guilders if Isa. 7:14 really means 'young woman' and not 'virgin.' He owes them."

prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'Behold, the virgin will have in the womb, and she will bear a son, and they will call his name Immanuel, which is, having been translated, God with us' (Matt. 1:22-23).⁴ The thesis of this essay offers one way to understand how it can be that Matthew *both* respects the OT contexts of the texts he cites *and* sees them being fulfilled in Jesus.

Not a few authors have held the position that Isaiah 7:14 predicted the coming of the Messiah in the distant future.⁵ On the other hand, some are extremely confident that this position is untenable, and Jensen goes so far as to say, "No critical scholar today holds that Isaiah directly foretold the birth of Jesus of a virgin."⁶ But it seems that this does not have to be an issue of being a "critical scholar" (with its overtones of the rejection of the supernatural), though it is an issue of interpreting Isaiah 7:14 in its own historical and literary context. One does get the impression that the sacrosanctity of this passage has kept some from allowing Isaiah 7:14 to mean what it appears to say,⁷ while, on the other side, an iconoclastic attitude, or at least the perception of such,⁸ has prevented

4. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. I deliberately seek to be as direct as possible in these translations. For the text form Matthew employed here, see Richard Beaton, *Isaiah's Christ in Matthew's Gospel* (SNTSMS 123; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 88-90.

5. See, e.g., Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chap. 33 (ANF 1:174); idem, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chs. 43 (ANF 1:216) and 66 (ANF 1:231); Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 21.4 (ANF 1:452); Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.34-35 (ANF 4:410-11); Patrick Fairbairn *The Typology of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963 [1845-47]), 1:380; Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982; reprint Wipf and Stock, 2002 [1939]), 84 n. 103; Robert Horton Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel: With Special Reference to the Messianic Hope* (NovTSup 18; Leiden: Brill, 1967), 226-27; Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 1:283-94; C. F. D. Moule, "Fulfillment-Words in the New Testament: Use and Abuse," *NTS* 14 (1968): 297; George M. Soares Prabhu, *The Formula Quotations in the Infancy Narrative of Matthew: An Enquiry into the Tradition History of Mt 1-2* (AnBib 63; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976), 251; Daniel Schibler, "Messianism and Messianic Prophecy in Isaiah 1-12 and 28-33," in *The Lord's Anointed* (ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 100 n. 55.

6. Joseph Jensen, "Immanuel," in *ABD* 3:393.

7. Thus Rikki E. Watts, "Immanuel: Virgin Birth Proof Text or Programmatic Warning of Things to Come (Isa. 7:14 in Matt. 1:23)?" in *From Prophecy to Testament* (ed. C. A. Evans; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004), 92: "Although it is widely recognized that Isa. 7:14 does not appear to predict a virginal conception, that as far as we can tell the oracle was not understood messianically in contemporary Judaism, and that Jesus' miraculous origin is hardly of major concern in the NT, the general opinion is that this has not prevented Matthew from ingeniously reading the Immanuel oracle as a prophecy of Jesus' virgin birth."

8. Luz (*Matthew 1-7*, 124) writes, "The traditional church interpretation . . . turns out to be evidence of Christian sin."

some who believe in the virgin birth (as I do) from accepting arguments regarding the context of Isaiah 7:14.⁹ My objective in this essay is to argue for an understanding of Matthew's use of Isaiah 7:14 which allows the text to mean what it says in its OT context. That is to say, I am not arguing against the virgin birth by saying that Isaiah was not predicting it. Matthew's testimony to the virgin birth of Jesus is sufficient for it to be established. The question for this study is how Matthew understands and claims fulfillment for the OT.

Affirming that when read in the broad context of Isaiah's messianic expectation the text does contribute to Isaianic Messianism, I will nevertheless argue here that in the immediate context of Isaiah 7 the statement in verse 14 refers to something that will take place during the life of King Ahaz.¹⁰ While it may be true that the prophecy has a dual application,¹¹ the interpretation I will present incorporates Matthew's understanding of the Isaianic context.¹² The crucial premise for my argument is that Matthew does not mean by *fulfillment* what many assume that he means (the realization of a future prediction). For example, Gundry writes that Matthew pursues a course of "transforming historical statements in the OT — those concerning the Exodus and the Babylonian Exile — into messianic prophecies."¹³ If it were shown that Matthew does refer to things long ago predicted now coming to pass when he uses fulfillment language, my thesis would be falsified.¹⁴

I am positing a clarification of one aspect of the range of meaning of the word "fulfill" (πληρώω). Delling describes the places where the word is used for

9. Raymond E. Brown notes, "The RSV was burned by fundamentalists in some parts of the United States because it used 'young woman' rather than 'virgin' in Isa. 7:14 — a sign to the book burners that the translators were denying the virginal conception of Jesus! The reading 'virgin' was imposed by a decision of the American bishops on the reluctant Catholic translators of the NAB" (*The Birth of the Messiah* [ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1993 {1977}], 146 n. 37).

10. So also Geoffrey W. Grogan, "Isaiah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. F. E. Gaebelein; vol. 6; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 63-64; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 209-13; John H. Walton, "Isa 7:14: What's in a Name?" *JETS* 30 (1987): 289, 297; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (WBC; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1985), 97-101; Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 147; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1993), 20.

11. As argued by J. A. Motyer, "Context and Content in the Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14," *TynBul* 21 (1970), 124, and R. H. Gundry, *Matthew* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 25.

12. Contra John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 103: "A second factor facilitated the use of Isa. 7:14 in Matthew. A hermeneutical method was in general use which allowed verses to be separated from their contexts."

13. Gundry, *Matthew*, 37. Similarly Michael Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew's Gospel: The Rejected-Prophet Motif in Matthean Redaction* (JSNTSup 68; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 226.

14. Cf. Grogan, *Isaiah*, 64.

the fulfillment of prophecy as follows: "'To complete,' 'to fulfill' prophetic sayings which were spoken with divine authority and which can thus be called directly the words of God."¹⁵ It is not clear, however, what sort of fulfillment he has in mind, and this complaint can be made against the relevant section of BDAG as well, where we read that the word is used of "the fulfillment of divine predictions or promises."¹⁶ The assessment of Davies and Allison is similarly vague: "Matthew's formula is a development of the early Christian use of πληρώω to indicate OT texts fulfilled in the story of Jesus."¹⁷ So these authors agree that "fulfill" (πληρώω) can be used to point to the fulfillment of OT texts, but is this a *predictive* fulfillment or a *typological* fulfillment? Delling makes reference to typological fulfillment in his discussion, but he cites only Luke 22:16 as a possible instance. This essay will propose that Matthew has typological fulfillment in view when he states that something has been fulfilled in 1:22; 2:15, 17, and 23. I know of no other treatment that has argued for the typological understanding I seek to set forth, not even studies of typology.¹⁸

When we examine the five texts cited in the first two chapters of Matthew's Gospel,¹⁹ we find that in their original contexts only Micah 5:2 might be construed as a prophecy about the distant future. And when Matthew cites this text he does not use a form of the word "fulfill" (πληρώω) but introduces the citation with the words, "for so it has been written through the prophet" (Matt. 2:5). In the other four cases, the verb "fulfill" is used, and each time, in Hagner's words, "the quoted texts themselves are . . . not even predictive of future events."²⁰ To draw the conclusion from this that Matthew has no regard for historical or literary context when he cites the OT²¹ would be to rush to a conclusion that assumes a meaning of the word "fulfilled" that Matthew might not, in fact, intend.

15. Gerhard Delling, "πληρώω," in *TDNT*, 6:295.

16. BDAG, s.v., 829.

17. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988-97), 3:574.

18. Cf. Fairbairn, *Typology of Scripture*, 1:380; Goppelt, *Typos*, 84 n. 103. My interpretation differs from J. Daniélou's *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers* (London: Burns & Oates, 1960), 15.

19. (1) Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:22-23; (2) Micah 5:2 in Matthew 2:5-6; (3) Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15; (4) Jeremiah 31:15 (with Genesis 37:30) in Matthew 2:17-18; and (5) no identifiable text in Matthew 2:23.

20. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, lv.

21. As, for example, Rudolf Bultmann and S. V. McCasland do. See Bultmann, "Prophecy and Fulfillment," trans. James C. G. Greig, in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics* (ed. Claus Westermann; Richmond, Va.: John Knox, 1963), 51-52; and S. V. McCasland, "Matthew Twists the Scriptures," *JBL* 80 (1961): 143-48; reprinted in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts* (ed. G. K. Beale; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 146-52 (reprint cited herein), see esp. 147, 149.

Predictive or Typological Fulfillment?

Concentrating mainly on the first text cited, Isaiah 7:14, I will argue that when Matthew speaks of the OT being "fulfilled" he refers to *typological* rather than *predictive* fulfillment.²² At the risk of oversimplification I offer these brief explanations of predictive and typological fulfillment.²³

Predictive fulfillment would require that when Matthew states that something has been fulfilled, he means that the prophet was speaking specifically of the coming of the Messiah in the distant future. As Young put it in his commentary on Isaiah with reference to 7:14, "This is prediction, and in the birth of Jesus Christ it found its fulfillment."²⁴ Matthew does appear to cite some OT texts this way (e.g., Micah 5:2 in Matthew 2:5-6), but, as noted above, in this instance he does not use the verb "fulfill" in the citation formula. If we maintain that Matthew has predictive fulfillment in view when he refers to the OT being *fulfilled* in Jesus, the OT contexts create problems for our proposed interpretations. If Matthew has predictive fulfillment in view, Bultmann's allegation might be on the mark: "the writers in the New Testament do not gain new

22. For excellent surveys of the issues generated by the technique called typology, see David Baker, "Typology and the Christian Use of the Old Testament," *SJT* 29 (1976): 137-57; reprinted in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts* (ed. G. K. Beale; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 313-30 (reprint cited herein), and R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (Vancouver: Regent College Press, 1998 [1971]), 38-43. For a study of the use of typology in the Old Testament, see Francis Foulkes, *The Acts of God: A Study of the Basis of Typology in the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1955; reprinted in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts*, 342-71, reprint cited herein). For typology in extrabiblical Jewish literature, see Goppelt, *Typos*, 23-58. Ellis ("Biblical Interpretation," 173) writes, "Typological interpretation had been employed earlier in Judaism [citing the exodus as the model or 'type' by which the OT prophets understood God's subsequent acts of redemption of Israel and the Gentiles; cf. Isa. 40-66] and became, in early Christianity, a basic key by which the scriptures were understood." So also William Horbury, "Old Testament Interpretation in the Writings of the Church Fathers," in *Mikra*, 766: "Typology . . . is already found within the OT (as in passages on a new exodus). . . ." For the typological use of the OT in the OT prophets, see also Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols.; OTL; trans. D. M. G. Stalker; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1962, 1965), 2:323: "They looked for a new David, a new Exodus, a new covenant, a new city of God: the old had thus become a type of the new and important as pointing forward to it" (cf. 272, 365); Walther Eichrodt, "Is Typological Exegesis an Appropriate Method?" trans. James Barr, in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, 234: "even in Old Testament prophecy itself typology is already playing a part" (citing numerous examples, 234-35).

23. For other brief descriptions of the relationship between typology and prediction-fulfillment, see Eichrodt, "Typological Exegesis," 229; Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew's Gospel*, 226.

24. Young, *Isaiah*, 1:294.

knowledge from the Old Testament texts, but read from or into them what they already know."²⁵

As we consider typological fulfillment, we begin by noting with Alsup that "Much of what was later used to discredit typology was based on the misperceptions of typology as allegory stemming from developments within [the] patristic period."²⁶ Typological fulfillment is neither allegory nor *sensus plenior*,²⁷ and in contrast to predictive fulfillment, it does not necessarily maintain that the prophet is looking into the distant future and prophesying about something outside his own historical context.²⁸ Rather, typological fulfillment in the life of Jesus refers to the *fullest expression of a significant pattern of events*.²⁹ Thus, typological interpretation sees in biblical narratives a divinely intended pattern of events. Events that take place at later points in salvation history correspond to these and intensify their significance.³⁰ As Ellis writes,

25. Bultmann, "Prophecy and Fulfillment," 54. See also Richard T. Mead, "A Dissenting Opinion about Respect for Context in Old Testament Quotations," *NTS* 10 (1964): 279-89, reprinted in Beale, ed., *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts*, 153-63, see esp. 154-55, where Mead alleges that in Matt. 2:18 "the historical Old Testament situation is thoroughly disregarded." Contrast Goppelt (*Typos*, 204), arguing that in their use of typology the NT authors respect the meaning of OT texts: "When Christian salvation is read into the OT, both the OT and the reality of Christ are distorted."

26. John E. Alsup, "Typology," in *ABD* 6:684. See Goppelt, *Typos*, 203-5, where he argues that "the *Epistle of Barnabas* . . . has abandoned the most important aspect of NT typology."

27. Hagner seems to conflate *sensus plenior* with typology. He describes *sensus plenior* as "a fuller or deeper sense within the quoted material not understood by the original author but now detectable in the light of the new revelatory fulfillment" (*Matthew 1-13*, lvi). Thus far what he is describing can be called *sensus plenior*, but in his next sentence he brings in what seems to be better described as typology, drawing no distinction between the two: "This is not an arbitrary, frivolous misuse of the texts, as is sometimes claimed, but a *reasoned practice that assumes a divinely intended correspondence between God's saving activity at different times in the history of redemption*" (emphasis added). The italicized words are similar to the definition of typology adopted here, emphasizing historical correspondence and escalation. See the helpful discussion in Douglas J. Moo, "The Problem of *Sensus Plenior*," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 179-211, esp. 202: "The *sensus plenior* is to be distinguished from typology; the former has to do with the deeper meaning of words, the latter with the extended meaning of things."

28. See France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 39-42. Some of the typology in the OT, for instance in Isaiah 40-66, is looking beyond its own historical context into the eschatological future.

29. Delling ("πληρώω," in *TDNT*, 6:296) writes, "Fulfillment means that in the today of the NT God's saving will achieves its full measure in the Christ event. The NT concept of fulfillment is summed up in the person of Jesus."

30. E. Earle Ellis, "Foreword" to Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos* (trans. Donald H. Madvig; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982; reprint Wipf and Stock, 2002 [1939]), x. Baker rejects "increase" or "progression" from type to antitype as a characteristic of typology ("Typology and the Chris-

"typology views the relationship of OT events to those in the new dispensation not as a 'one-to-one' equation or correspondence, in which the old is repeated or continued, but rather in terms of two principles, historical correspondence and escalation."³¹

In order to argue that *typological* rather than *predictive* fulfillment is in view in the early chapters of Matthew, this study will focus primarily on Matthew's first use of the "fulfillment" formula. Other texts will be brought in as corroborating evidence after both Isaiah 7 and Matthew 1 have been examined.

The Context of Isaiah 7:14

Isaiah 7:1 identifies the historical time frame in which the sign of Immanuel was given: "And it came about in the days of Ahaz, son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah."³² Isaiah 7:1-6 gives insight into the political context that the sign of

tian Use of the Old Testament," 326). But since the Christians conceive of themselves as those upon whom the "ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11), all things — including the fulfillment of types — take on greater significance (see also Matt. 11:11, where the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than John the Baptist, the greatest OT prophet). Even in the OT the "new Exodus" will make the "former things" to be forgotten (Isa. 43:18-19). Eichrodt ("Typological Exegesis," 233-34) writes, "typology is concerned with the depiction in advance of an eschatological, and therefore an unsurpassable, reality, which stands toward the type in the relation of something much greater or of something antithetically opposed." Similarly Foulkes, *The Acts of God*, 343, 356. Darrell L. Bock (*Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern: Lucan Old Testament Christology* [JSNTSup; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1987], 49-50) identifies the presence or absence of escalation as the feature that distinguishes typology from analogy.

31. Ellis, "Foreword," x; Goppelt, *Typos*, 202. Horbury ("Old Testament Interpretation in the Writings of the Church Fathers," 766) writes, "Typology can be said to differ from allegorical interpretation in that it takes seriously the historical setting of an OT law or event; type and antitype identify some correspondence between different stages in a sacred history, whereas allegory elicits timeless truth from beneath the veil of the biblical 'letter,' which may be regarded as having no reference to history." The entry on "types" in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd ed.; ed. E. A. Livingstone; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), is similar: "In theology, the foreshadowings of the Christian dispensation in the events and persons of the OT. . . . A Christian type differs from allegory in that the historical reference is not lost sight of. Types are looked upon, however, as having a greater significance now than was apparent in their pre-Christian OT context" (1649); so also Goppelt discussing Philo (*Typos*, 52). Eichrodt ("Typological Exegesis," 225) writes: "The so-called *tupoi* . . . are persons, institutions, and events of the Old Testament which are regarded as divinely established models or prerespresentations of corresponding realities in the New Testament salvation history. These latter realities, on the basis of 1 Peter 3:21, are designated 'antitypes'" (cf. 227, where Eichrodt distinguishes between allegory and typology).

32. In this discussion I am concerned only with the text of Isaiah as it stands. For a discus-

Immanuel addresses. The king of Syria, Rezin, has aligned himself with Pekah, the son of King Remaliah of Israel — the northern kingdom in the divided realm of Israel and Judah (7:1).³³ Their plans to attack the southern kingdom of Judah (7:1-2, 5-6) in order to set up a puppet king there (7:6) were made known to Ahaz, the king of Judah, and these plans quailed him and his people (7:2).

Yahweh responds to Ahaz's fright by sending Isaiah to meet Ahaz (7:3). Isaiah is to reassure Ahaz that what Syria and Israel are planning will neither stand nor come to pass (7:7). Rather, the enemies of Judah will have their heads broken (7:8-9).³⁴ Ahaz is urged to ask for a confirming sign from Yahweh that he might trust that the danger from the north will not materialize (7:10-11).³⁵ Ahaz refuses to "test Yahweh" (7:12), but Isaiah sees the refusal to ask for a sign as an indication of faithlessness. He responds to Ahaz's refusal with a denunciation (7:13) and the sign of Immanuel (7:14).

The sign of Immanuel is not limited to the statement in 7:14; it continues through chapter 8. The statement in 7:16 roots the sign of Immanuel firmly in the historical context with which the chapter is dealing, "For before the boy knows to reject the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are terrified will be deserted."³⁶ This appears to mean that a child will be born in the near future, and that before this child is old enough to discern good and evil the threat from Syria and Israel will be resolved by the devastation of Ephraim, the northern kingdom of Israel, and Syria. This devastation seems to be the subject of 7:17-8:10, as the prophet describes the coming of Assyria against Syria, Israel, and then Judah. The devastation of the land appears to result in underpopulation because of the many slain (7:21-25), and it is apparently this scarcity of people that results in the abundance of food Immanuel will en-

sion of the redactional history of the text, see H. G. M. Williamson, "The Messianic Texts in Isaiah 1-39," in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. John Day; JSOTSUP 270; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 244-50.

33. Israel is referred to as Ephraim in 7:2, 5, 8, 9, 17, etc. Cf. Siegfried Hermann, "Ephraim (Person)," in *ABD* 2:551.

34. The head-shattering language may echo Genesis 3:15, calling Ahaz to trust in Yahweh's promise.

35. Whether Isa. 7:10-25 is continuing the encounter with Ahaz on the highway to the fuller's field (7:3) or represents a later proclamation does not affect the thesis of this study. From a literary perspective, the juxtaposition of the two oracles to Ahaz with no indication of a change in time or place would seem to indicate that the two are to be read together.

36. "The sign cannot refer to Jesus, argued Ibn Ezra, since it calls for verification in the near future" (Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39* [AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 2000], 233). "Some authors emphasize the difficulty of relating Immanuel to Isaiah's historical context in order to favor a more strictly messianic interpretation" (Joseph Jensen, "Immanuel," in *ABD* 3:393).

joy when he has matured enough to know the difference between good and evil (cf. 7:15 with 7:22).³⁷

Significantly, there is no direct evidence that the child to be born will be from the line of David, and it appears from the near context that the child might be Isaiah's (8:3),³⁸ though this is disputed.³⁹ The reference in Isaiah 8:18 to Isaiah and the children given to him being signs and portents in Israel fits with the three children named (Shear-jashub, Immanuel, and Maher-shalal-hash-baz) being his.⁴⁰ The relevance of the birth of the child to the threat from Syria and Israel is seen again in 8:3-4, where Isaiah fathers a child (8:3), and the word comes that "before the child knows how to call, 'my father,' or, 'my mother,' the wealth of Damascus [Syria, 7:8] will be carried away along with the spoil of Samaria [Israel/Ephraim, 7:9] before the king of Assyria." This statement appears to elaborate upon 7:16, and if that is the case, it is tempting to identify Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:1, 3) with Immanuel (7:14; 8:8, 10).⁴¹

The identification of Maher-shalal-hash-baz with Immanuel appears to be corroborated by 8:5-7, where Rezin and Pekah are still in view (8:6), and the promise that they will be swept away by the king of Assyria is restated in 8:7. The overflowing flood of the Assyrian army will not stop in the north, however, but will continue down into the land of Judah, the land of Immanuel (8:8).

The promise to Ahaz from 7:7 that the plan of Syria and Israel "will not stand (לֹא יִקְוּם)" was verified by the promised sign of Immanuel (7:14), and this appears to be restated in 8:10. Following the breaking (רָעַע) and shattering (חָתַת) of the peoples (8:9; cf. the breaking of Ephraim [חָתַת] in 7:9), the promise comes again: "but it will not stand because of Immanuel (לֹא יִקְוּם כִּי עִמָּנוּ) (אֵל)" (8:10).⁴² This restates the assurance to Judah that they will not be over-

37. So Joseph Jensen, "Immanuel," in *ABD* 3:394. For other options, and the dialogue is extensive, see the discussion and bibliography cited in Rikki E. Watts, "Immanuel," 98-99.

38. "Ibn Ezra, followed by Rashi, identified the young woman as Isaiah's wife and Immanuel as his son" (Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 1-39, 233). Cf. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:173-74. This was Jerome's view as well, and H. G. M. Williamson in 1998 called it "increasingly popular" ("The Messianic Texts in Isaiah 1-39," 245; see too the bibliography he cites in note 15).

39. For an argument against this view, see Walton, "Isa 7:14: What's in a Name?" 295-97. Cf. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 1-39, 233: "by now the scholarly debate on the designation of the woman and the name of the child practically defies documentation." Rikki E. Watts concludes, "the text as it stands offers nothing specific. . . . It is also worth noting that if Shear-jashub is not himself the remnant, nor Maher-shalal-Hash-Baz the spoiler, then it is unlikely that this second child is himself somehow 'God with us'" ("Immanuel," 96).

40. Cf. H. G. M. Williamson, *Variations on a Theme: King, Messiah and Servant in the Book of Isaiah* (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster, 1998), 102-3.

41. Cf. Motyer, "The Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14," 124.

42. Most English translations follow the Greek translation of the OT at 8:10, rendering

come by Syria and Israel: the plan will not stand because God has given a sign to his people — Immanuel, God is with us — and this sign guarantees his promise for them. The words of Isaiah 8:12, "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and neither fear nor tremble (plural verbs) at what he (singular pronominal suffix, referring to Ahaz in 7:2?) fears," could be referring to the conspiracy between Syria and Israel to unseat Ahaz. Since Ahaz has apparently rejected Isaiah's message (7:12-13), Isaiah commits his words to his disciples (8:16) and resolves to wait for Yahweh (8:17), noting that he and his children are "signs and portents in Israel from Yahweh of hosts who dwells on Mount Zion" (8:18).

Thus, it seems that in the context of Isaiah 7-8, the promise of the birth of a child who will be named Immanuel is a sign that guarantees God's promise that the plan concocted by Syria and Israel to dethrone Ahaz and replace him with one they can control will not stand. God's people were threatened and uncertain. God promised through Isaiah that they would be delivered from these circumstances, and the promise of deliverance was guaranteed by the birth of a child. This child would be born to a mother who could have been a virgin when the promise was made, or perhaps she was simply a young woman of marriageable age — depending upon the meaning of the Hebrew word 'almah (עַלְמָה). But there is no indication in the text that this woman would not conceive through intercourse with a man.⁴³ If, as I have suggested, the birth of Maher-

עִמָּנוּאֵל not as I have it here, "Immanuel," but along the lines of, "It will not stand, for God is with us" (ESV, HCSB, NAB, NASU, NIV, NRSV, NLT, TANAK, etc.). These translations do not follow the Greek translation at 8:8, however, where most transliterate "Immanuel," but the TANAK renders, with the Greek, "with us is God." BHS indicates no distinction in the spacing of עִמָּנוּאֵל — it is spaced the same way in 7:14, 8:8, and 8:10. The Vulgate, like most ETs and LXX, has "Emmanuhel" at 7:14 and 8:8 and "nobiscum Deus" at 8:10. The Targum interprets "your land, O Immanuel" in 8:8 with "your land, O Israel," and "because of Immanuel (or, for God is with us)" in 8:10 as "for God is our help (or, because in our help is God, our God)."

43. Joseph Jensen, "Immanuel," in *ABD* 3:395. Gundry suggests that "we should have expected 'ishah if marriage were contemplated before conceiving and giving birth. The adjective [יְהוָה] emphasizes the state of the 'almah's pregnancy, as if it had already begun; so that we must understand she conceives and bears in her status as 'almah. . . . Second, if marriage is not contemplated, 'almah is used in the sense of a young married woman. To this writer's knowledge, such a meaning for 'almah has never been demonstrated" (*The Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel*, 226-27). Gundry's suggestion that pregnancy is viewed as if it has already begun is countered by Jensen ("Immanuel," in *ABD* 3:393): "the young woman . . . will conceive (or: has conceived — the Hebrew does not clearly specify). . . ." Similarly, Grogan (*Isaiah*, 63). The usage of 'almah is, of course, endlessly disputed. It seems to me that neither of Gundry's objections derive from an exegetical analysis of Isaiah 7, but from the prior conviction that Isaiah is predicting what would take place 700 years later when Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. Rikki E. Watts writes, "Did Isaiah envisage this as a miraculous virgin birth? It is now widely agreed that

shalal-hash-baz is the realization of the promise, then the child appears to have been conceived when Isaiah “drew near to the prophetess” (8:3). This is my reading of the passage, but my argument is not falsified if the child is Ahaz’s, or if one of the other proposed interpretations is adopted. The child’s name, Immanuel, is apparently a reflection of the confidence of those who believed that God would keep his promise and protect them by his presence. In the wider context, there are pointers toward a child to be born who will be Mighty God (9:6),⁴⁴ but the child immediately in view in Isaiah 7:14 is a child whose birth will be relevant during the life of Ahaz. As Oswalt puts it, “To suppose that the sign did not occur in any sense until 725 years after the fact flies in the face of the plain sense of the text.”⁴⁵

Taken as a whole, Isaiah is a book fraught with Messianism, and this can be poignantly felt in chapters 7–11. It might be that Matthew read Isaiah 7:14 more in light of the many messianic statements in Isaiah and the OT than in the light of its immediate context in chapter 7, and if so, then perhaps Matthew read Isaiah 7:14 as a predictive prophecy of *the* Messiah.⁴⁶ But this interpretation does not appear to fit either Matthew or Isaiah. Matthew’s fulfillment formulas in chapters 1 and 2 do not support this suggestion, as will be seen below, and in contrast to many passages in Isaiah that bear no explicit historical connections, there are many historical notices in chapters 7 and 8 which serve to anchor Isaiah 7:14 to a particular point in Israel’s history. Taken in the context of Isaiah 7, it

he did not and, had it not been for Matthew’s use of this text, it is extremely doubtful if anyone would ever have read it so” (“Immanuel,” 100).

44. Oswalt (*Isaiah 1–39*, 246) insists that “such extravagant titling was not normal for Israelite kings,” but Blenkinsopp suggests the translation “Hero Warrior” (*Isaiah 1–39*, 246, cf. 250). It is curious that Isaiah 9:6 is not cited in the NT as a proof-text for the deity of the Messiah (Appendix IV of NA²⁷, “Loca Citata Vel Allegata,” lists only Luke 1:32 next to Isa. 9:6, but the correspondences in wording do not constitute a citation), nor does it seem that those who heralded Jesus as the Messiah were necessarily expecting that he be God incarnate. The “Son of God” language has these overtones, but it can be explained as referring to a human ruler who rules the way God would growing out of 2 Sam. 7:14 (cf. the peacemakers who are called “sons of God” in Matt. 5:9). It may be that in the case of Isa. 9:6 we have *sensus plenior*, Isaiah speaking better than he knows (for biblical recognition of *sensus plenior*, see John 11:51–52).

45. Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 208; similarly Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 124.

46. So J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1930), 291–92. Rikki E. Watts (“Immanuel,” 104) insists that there is no “evidence that Isa 7:14 was ever understood in terms of a future messianic hope,” but Hagner suggests, “Two things in particular were responsible for the later perception of this secondary level of meaning: the name given to the child . . . and the surrounding passages. . . . The promised son of Isa 7:14 thus became readily identifiable as that son of David who would bring the expected kingdom. . . . Accordingly, probably sometime in the third century B.C., the Greek translators of Isa 7:14 apparently regarded the passage as having a deeper meaning, as yet unrealized” (*Matthew 1–13*, 20).

is hard to deny that verse 14 directly predicts a child who would be born *during* rather than *after* Ahaz’s life, and perhaps this accounts for the fact that Isaiah 7:14 “does not appear to have been widely cited in early Jewish literature and never in connection with a messianic figure.”⁴⁷ Williamson rightly states, “in the immediate context the prediction of [Immanuel’s] birth is securely tied to the prevailing historical circumstances of the reign of Ahaz, so that a long-range messianic prediction is ruled out, at least at the primary level.”⁴⁸ If it is the case that the sign applies to Ahaz’s day, and if Matthew respected the Isaianic context, what did he mean that the birth of Jesus “fulfilled” what was spoken in Isaiah 7:14?

The Context of Matthew 1:22–23

By opening with the statement that Jesus the Messiah is the son of David, son of Abraham, the Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as the fulfillment of the promises to David and Abraham (1:1). A genealogy containing three sets of fourteen is then presented (Matt. 1:2–17).⁴⁹ This genealogy is geared to engender an expectation that the last days have come. “The new, Messianic age has dawned.”⁵⁰

In the last days, all that was spoken by the prophets would be fulfilled. As Davies and Allison note, “The early church found in the Scriptures the declared will of divine providence and believed that the life of Jesus in its every detail completely fulfilled that will. Thus arose the NT’s distinctive sense of fulfillment and its distinctive *πληρώω*-formulas.”⁵¹ All of history was to culminate in the coming of the Kingdom of God. Yahweh would judge the nations from Jerusalem, the capital of the globe to which the nations would stream to learn his Torah (Isa. 2:1–4). Gloom would be banished, dawn would bring great joy, and the oppressor would be “broken as [in the past when God had delivered his people through Gideon] on the day of Midian” (Isa. 8:23–9:3 [ET 9:1–4]).⁵² The

47. Beaton, *Isaiah’s Christ in Matthew’s Gospel*, 91.

48. Williamson, *Variations on a Theme*, 109.

49. The letters of the name David according to *gematria* add up to fourteen (7 + 4 + 16 + 7 = 44), and, perhaps also of significance, in the three sets of fourteen there are six sets of seven, Messiah Jesus being the “head of the seventh seven, the seventh day of history, the dawn of the eternal sabbath” (Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:162). Davies and Allison cite parallels (1 *Enoch* 93.1–10; 91.12–17), but note that “Matthew expressly writes of three fourteens, not six sevens.” See too the comments on *gematria*, *ibid.*, 163–65, where they conclude, “The name, David, is the key to the pattern of Matthew’s genealogy.”

50. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 79.

51. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:211.

52. Foulkes (“The Acts of God,” 343) writes that the prophets and historians of Israel “could assume . . . that as he had acted in the past, he could and would act in the future.”

wilderness would become as the Garden of Eden (Isa. 51:3). With all these blessings would come a "branch from the stem of Jesse" (Isa. 11:1). His reign would be marked by the Spirit of Yahweh (11:2), resulting in just judgment (11:3-5) and the end of the age-old enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (11:8). There is little indication that these promises would not all be realized together, so the already/not yet dimension of the Kingdom Jesus brings is a surprise for all who are looking for the consolation of Israel.

After the genealogy, the opening chapters of Matthew show the recapitulation of the history of Israel in the life of Jesus. Following Matthew 1:18-25, which will receive more attention shortly, Jesus is presented as in danger from an evil ruler, much as Moses was. Just as the nation found itself in Egypt, and just as Moses was to command Pharaoh to release God's son Israel, so now God's son Jesus is summoned from Egypt. Just as there was weeping when the nation went into exile, so there was weeping after Herod slaughtered the infants of Bethlehem. Just as a voice in the wilderness heralded the return from exile, so John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus. Just as the nation was tested in the wilderness before passing through the Jordan to possess the land, Jesus was baptized in the Jordan before being tested in the wilderness (see Matt. 1-4). At the head of these correspondences (and several others) between the life of Jesus and the history of Israel stands the account of Jesus' birth in Matthew 1:18-25.

In Isaiah's day, Judah was under threat from Syria and Ephraim. In the days Matthew narrates in his opening chapters, the nation is under threat from Rome, whose constant presence testified to the nation's ongoing subjugation.⁵³ In Isaiah's day the king, though a descendant of David, was faithless. In the days described in the first chapters of Matthew, the king over Jerusalem is also faithless, but now he is not even Jewish, to say nothing of the fact that he is not a descendant of David.⁵⁴ On the name of the child Carter observes a possible connection, "As with Isaiah's Immanuel, the child Jesus is a sign of resistance to imperial power. The name Immanuel contests imperial claims that Domitian is a *deus praesens* (Statius, *Silv.* 5.2.170) or θεός ἐπιφανής."⁵⁵ It seems that in Isaiah's day a believing remnant hoped to experience the fulfillment of the promises of God. Isaiah encouraged this remnant to believe that the birth of a child of promise was God's way of guaranteeing that he would deliver those faithful

53. Carter ("Evoking Isaiah," 507-8) writes, "The Isaiah texts evoke a situation of imperial threat, thereby establishing an analogy with the situation of the Gospel's authorial audience also living under imperial power, that of Rome, and also promised God's salvation (1:21)."

54. Carter ("Evoking Isaiah," 508) notes that response to the prophetic word colors the context: "The Isaiah texts . . . also raise the questions of how people will respond."

55. Carter, "Evoking Isaiah," 513. I am not necessarily convinced that Matthew is as late as Domitian.

to him (Isa. 8:20). A believing remnant within Israel persisted in the first century,⁵⁶ and for them too, the birth of a child of promise is a sign that God is going to keep his promises. Indeed, the early Christians saw all the promises confirmed in Jesus (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20).⁵⁷

In addition to the historical correspondences between the details of Isaiah 7 and the time of the birth of Jesus, there is also an aspect of *escalation*, whereby the meaning of these events is intensified by the coming of the Messiah and the period in salvation history that begins with his arrival. Just as the significance of the time is increased, so also are the details from Isaiah 7 to Matthew 1. When we compare Isaiah 7 with Matthew 1, we see that whereas a woman who, perhaps, was a virgin conceived a child when Isaiah drew near (Isa. 7:14; 8:3), Joseph "was not knowing her until she bore a son; and he called his name Jesus" (Matt. 1:25). So while the woman in Isaiah 7:14 may or may not have been a virgin, Matthew testifies that Mary was and makes it explicit that she remained so until after Jesus' birth. Whereas the deliverance guaranteed by the birth of a child in Isaiah has to do with the threat from Syria and Ephraim, the deliverance guaranteed by the birth of the child in Matthew goes deeper: "he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).⁵⁸ The child of which Isaiah speaks will be named "Immanuel" because his birth testifies to God's faithfulness to his promise not to abandon his people Israel (e.g., Deut. 31:6).⁵⁹ The child whose birth Matthew narrates, by contrast, will represent in his own person God's presence with his people (cf. Matt. 28:20).⁶⁰

On this understanding, the sense in which Matthew's narrative *fulfills* Isaiah 7:14 has everything to do with *historical correspondence* and *escalation*,

56. See esp. Luke 2:25-35, 36-38, where Simeon and Anna are representatives of this remnant who welcome the birth of Jesus.

57. Carter ("Evoking Isaiah," 510-11) points out that these correspondences "are part of a larger pattern of God's ways of working." He cites themes of "resistance and the refusal to trust God's saving work, of imperial power as a means of divine punishment, and of God's saving the people from imperial power," and notes that "similar themes . . . could be elaborated in relation to the exodus, to prophetic views of Babylon's roles . . . , to the Deuteronomic view of exile . . . , to 2 Maccabees' perception of Antiochus Epiphanes as punisher of the people and as the one from whom God will liberate the people . . . , and to Pompey's violation of Jerusalem and the temple."

58. Similarly Rikki E. Watts, "Immanuel," 213: "In this case, at least 'fulfillment' seems better understood in paradigmatic terms: as Yahweh had acted in the past, so he would act again. Matthew sees Isa. 7:14 not as a proof-text for some long foretold virgin birth . . . but instead as a scriptural elucidation of the significance of Jesus, which elucidation works only if Jesus is already believed to be the climax of Israel's history."

59. For more on this theme in the Pentateuch, see James M. Hamilton Jr., "God with Men in the Torah," *WTJ* 65 (2003): 113-33.

60. Cf. also Carter, "Evoking Isaiah," 511.

whereas it has to do with *predictive fulfillment* only when Isaiah 7:14 is read as a contribution to Isaianic Messianism rather than as a contribution to Isaiah 7. Thus, Matthew can be seen to be respecting the context of Isaiah 7–8 and claiming that Isaiah 7:14 is indeed *fulfilled* (typologically) in the birth of Jesus. Davies and Allison write, “Later Judaism apparently did not understand Isa. 7:14 messianically; at least we have no positive evidence that it did. What Jewish traditions we do have connect the verse with Hezekiah (Justin, *Dial.* 43; *Exod. Rab.* on 12.29; *Num. Rab.* on 7.48). Thus the application of Isa. 7:14 to the Messiah is evidently peculiarly Christian.”⁶¹ This peculiarly Christian reading of Isaiah 7:14 is informed by the peculiar events of the birth of Jesus.

If this proposal is on the mark, the nuance of the Hebrew word *‘almah*, so much discussed, is *irrelevant*. Taking Matthew’s citation of Isaiah 7:14 as an instance of typological fulfillment, we see that there is historical correspondence and escalation, regardless of whether the Hebrew word refers strictly or primarily to a virgin. Thus the charge made by Bultmann and many others that “the Old Testament text only becomes of use when it is understood in a sense contrary to the original wording, according to the LXX text”⁶² is eviscerated. The whole discussion of what *‘almah* means, particularly in Proverbs 30:19 and Song of Songs 6:8, turns out to have been a red herring. Isaiah 7:14 does not predict that one day 700 years in the future the virgin Mary will give birth to the Messiah, nor does Matthew claim that it did. Matthew saw a particular pattern of events in Isaiah 7–8, and he claimed that this pattern of events was *fulfilled* in the corresponding, intensified pattern of events surrounding the birth of Jesus at the dawn of the new age. In the life of Jesus the pattern came to its fullest expression.

Typological Fulfillment in Matthew

If we reject typological fulfillment as a hermeneutical key with which to unlock the fulfillment language in Matthew, we are forced either to ignore the OT context or to conclude that “Matthew shows little awareness that the prophets might actually have been delivering oracles of crucial relevance to their original audiences.”⁶³ With this perspective, it would indeed be difficult to “remove the interpreter’s frustration with Matthew’s use of the OT,”⁶⁴ and this would support the conclusion that Matthew’s exegetical methods are illegitimate and

61. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:213.

62. Bultmann, “Prophecy and Fulfillment,” 53.

63. David D. Kupp, *Matthew’s Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God’s People in the First Gospel* (SNTSMS 90; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 167.

64. Kupp, *Matthew’s Emmanuel*, 169.

should not be practiced by modern interpreters of the Bible. If, on the other hand, typological fulfillment is practiced in the NT, might the NT’s interpretations of the OT serve as an example of how modern interpreters should read the text?

The following brief explanations are offered in an attempt to embrace the perspective that might have driven Matthew’s “fulfillment” formulas. Hosea 11:1 is famously cited in Matthew 2:15. In its OT context, this verse is manifestly not a prediction that one day the Messiah will be summoned from Egypt. Rather, the reference in Hosea 11:1 to God’s son is a reference to the nation, as the statements preceding and following the words Matthew cites show. Before the words “and out of Egypt I called my son” (Hos. 11:1b) are the words, “When Israel was a youth I loved him” (11:1a). Then 11:2a reads, “They called to them, thus they went from before them” (so BHS), or, as most English translations have it (taking into account the Greek and Syriac translations), “Just as I called them, so they departed from my presence.” This seems to be a reference to the nation of Israel being brought out of Egypt and sustained in the wilderness only to rebel against Yahweh, who had redeemed them. Matthew neither introduces this quotation because he is unable to find a better “proof-text” nor because he has failed to understand what Hosea was saying. Rather, Matthew cites these words because just as the nation, the collective son of God, was led out of Egypt by the pillar of fire and cloud to failure in the desert, so Jesus, the singular Son of God, was summoned out of Egypt and then led out to the desert by the Spirit to succeed against temptation (Matt. 4:1–11).⁶⁵ The historical circumstances correspond to one another, but the stakes are higher and Jesus is found faithful where the nation grumbled and rebelled.⁶⁶ The fulfillment of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15 is typological, as the elements of historical correspondence and escalation show.

France describes Jeremiah 31:15 as a “note of gloom in a chapter of joy.”⁶⁷

65. Similarly R. T. France, “The Formula-Quotations of Matthew 2 and the Problem of Communication,” *NTS* 27 (1981): 233–51, reprinted in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts*, 114–34, see 125–26.

66. For a similar assessment, see Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality*, 156–60. Against what I have articulated, John H. Sailhamer writes, “When Matthew quoted Hos 11:1 as fulfilled in the life of Christ, he was not resorting to typological interpretation. Rather, he was drawing on the *sensus literalis* from the book of Hosea and it, in turn, was drawn from Hosea’s exegesis of the *sensus literalis* of the Pentateuch” (“Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15,” *WTJ* 63 [2001]: 91). I am sympathetic with Sailhamer’s presentation, particularly with his argument that the OT is thoroughly messianic. He appears to have reservations about the legitimacy of typology (he refers to Matthew “resorting to” it again in his conclusion [96]). For somewhat more harsh objections to his argument, see Dan McCartney and Peter Enns, “Matthew and Hosea: A Response to John Sailhamer,” *WTJ* 63 (2001): 97–105.

67. France, “Formula-Quotations,” 128.

The chapter is replete with announcements that Yahweh will bring his people back from exile, but that good news necessarily entails the bad news — exile is coming. So, for example, there are references to those who survive the sword (31:2), to rebuilding and return to joy (31:4-5), to a return to the land (31:8), to the fact that the one who scattered Israel will shepherd them (31:10). But all of these promises of restoration assume that destruction is coming. Thus, it is not precisely correct to say, “In citing Jer. 31.15, Matthew has chosen the one verse in Jeremiah 31 that is negative in outlook.”⁶⁸ The promises of restoration in the future are simultaneously promises of destruction in the present, as the broader context of Jeremiah shows. The reality of these coming woes accentuates the relief guaranteed by Yahweh’s everlasting love for his people (31:3). Verse 15 is in this same vein: a matriarch of Israel, Rachel, is depicted as a figurative mother weeping for those slain in the devastating judgment that will come, but this is immediately followed by the call not to weep (31:16) because the future is hopeful (31:17).

The historical correspondences here are not hard to recognize.⁶⁹ The historical situation is anything but “thoroughly disregarded.”⁷⁰ In Jeremiah’s day, the devastation wrought by the enemies of the people of God is going to be swallowed up in the merciful salvation Yahweh will work for Israel. At the birth of Jesus, the wicked king Herod calls for the cruel murder of the babies of Bethlehem, but the lamentation deepens the joy felt that the Messiah escapes to bring salvation. And the salvation he brings is enriched because the pain has made it more precious.

Jeremiah’s promises of the return from exile included God raising up David their King to lead them (30:9). The people returned to the land and waited for the Messiah, and Matthew proclaims that now, at long last, Jeremiah’s oracles of the return from exile are fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. Jeremiah is pointing to the future restoration of God’s people in these chapters, but the words cited in Matthew 2:18 are not predictive words.⁷¹ Rather, it seems that Matthew is pointing to the correspondence between the weeping of the nation as it was sent into

68. Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew’s Gospel*, 38.

69. Pace Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew’s Gospel*, 41: “references to the context of Jeremiah 31 prove altogether elusive”; and Soares Prabhu, *Formula Quotations*, 261: “scarcely anything in the narrative links up with the quoted text.”

70. Contra Mead, “Dissenting Opinion,” 154-55.

71. For the text form of the citation of Jer. 31(LXX 38):15 in Matt. 2:18, see Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew’s Gospel*, 36-38, and for more detail, Maarten J. J. Menken, “The Quotation from Jeremiah 31(38).15 in Matthew 2:18: A Study of Matthew’s Scriptural Text,” in Steve Moyise, ed., *The Old Testament in the New Testament* (JSNTSup 189; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 106-25.

exile and the weeping of the women of Bethlehem when their babes were slain. Just as the nation was exiled, Jesus was exiled to Egypt, from which, like the nation, he would be summoned to conquer the land. From these historical correspondences — and from the increased significance of the Messiah’s conquest of the land — the fulfillment in view in Matthew 2:17-18 appears to be of a typological rather than a predictive stripe. If we reject typological fulfillment in these Matthean “fulfillment formulas,” we must conclude with Knowles, “Matthew’s use of Jer. 31.15 does not take account either of its biblical context or of its predominant interpretation in the Jewish schools and synagogues.”⁷² Since Matthew is seeking to persuade his contemporaries, and since there is evidence of typological interpretation in both the OT and in early Jewish literature,⁷³ this way of viewing the material seems more plausible.⁷⁴

There is no OT text that states that the Messiah will be called a Nazarene, prompting many explanations of the words, “that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, that he shall be called a Nazarene” (Matt. 2:23). Eusebius connects the villages of Nazareth and Cochaba to those who were able to trace their Davidic descent (*Hist. eccl.* 1.7.14), which might indicate that families of the line of David had used words like “branch” (נֶצֶר) (Isa. 11:1) and “star”

72. Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew’s Gospel*, 43, cf. also 39: “the verse evidently appeared to Matthew so applicable to the fate of Herod’s victims that he ignored its original intent.” As I understand typology, it draws attention to the divinely intended pattern of events which are seen to correspond to what takes place in the life of Jesus and later the church, and whose significance is heightened by the new stage in salvation history. Therefore, I cannot agree with Knowles’s assertion that “Matthew’s use of Jer. 31.15 . . . represents the essence of typology,” though it suffers from “Ignoring altogether the original context of the passage” (*Jeremiah in Matthew’s Gospel*, 51-52, see a similar typological explanation of Hos. 11:1, maintaining that it too is cited “entirely out of context” on pp. 225-26). Knowles acknowledges that typology is marked by historical correspondence and escalation (229 and n. 1). Though contemporary critical OT scholars do not always do this, Matthew would have based his understanding of Israel’s history on the text of the OT, which is to say that he would have based it upon the OT context. I do not see how we can say that Matthew is pointing to historical correspondences between the life of Jesus and the history of Israel and disregarding the context of the OT passages he cites.

73. See especially Pseudo-Philo 12:3, which is quoted below in the conclusion of this study. Comparisons with earlier events in the history of Israel appear in Pseudo-Philo at 17:3; 32:1, 16; 40:2; 45:2; 54:2. These comparisons appear to reflect perceived historical correspondences between events at different points in Israel’s history, and thus Baker would call them *typology*. Bock, on the other hand, might classify them as *analogy* since escalation is not explicit (see note 30 above).

74. Knowles (*Jeremiah in Matthew’s Gospel*, 44) agrees with Bultmann: “Matthew’s exegesis does not focus in the first instance on the text at hand, but rather, beginning with the revelatory event of Jesus’ life, seeks a scriptural text that will reaffirm what is, in effect, already known” (see nn. 21 and 25 above).

(Aramaic, כּוֹרְכָא) (Num. 24:17) to name their villages because of the messianic significance of these terms. The fulfillment formula in Matthew 2:23 might thus refer to the way that the hope for a shoot from the root of Jesse is realized. Most explanations of this fulfillment formula appeal in some way to the word “branch (נֶצֶר)” in Isaiah 11:1. The lack of a text predicting what Matthew claims here makes it difficult to see this instance of the fulfillment formula in Matthew as the fulfillment of a prediction about the future from the standpoint of the OT prophet. The “fulfillment” is, again, pointing to the broader hope for the Davidic “branch,” and the move to Nazareth corresponds to this hope reflected in the naming of the village. When Jesus moves to Nazareth, the hope for the Davidic branch reflected in the naming of the village comes home.⁷⁵ If this is correct, Matthew is claiming that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies of a “branch man.” A typological understanding — emphasizing historical correspondence and escalation — would then be able to incorporate a text like Zechariah 6:11-12, where the high priest Joshua is heralded as “the Branch.”

Conclusion

I have argued that Isaiah 7:14 points to a child who will be born during the lifetime of King Ahaz, and that Matthew respects the historical context of this prophecy in Isaiah 7, claiming in Jesus a *typological* rather than a *predictive* fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. The chief characteristics of typological interpretation are historical correspondence and escalation, and I have argued that this approach can help us understand the “fulfillment” language in Matthew 2:15, 17-18, and 23. This seems to have been a common method of interpretation, as we can see from the words of Matthew’s contemporaries. For instance, it seems that Matthew was not the only early Christian to use “fulfillment” language to point to typological fulfillment. Bock argues that the citation of Isaiah 61 in Luke 4:17-19 as being “fulfilled” in Jesus (4:21) is an instance of “typological-prophetic” fulfillment.⁷⁶

75. This explanation of Matt. 2:23 would appear to be strengthened by Carter’s observation (“Evoking Isaiah,” 506): “An audience elaborates the gaps or indeterminacies of a text to build a consistent understanding not by supplying whatever it likes but by utilizing the tradition it shares with the author. The common traditions provide the audience with a frame of reference, the ‘perceptual grid,’ for its interpretive work. Precisely this phenomenon is evident through the Gospel’s opening genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17). The list of names (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc.) requires the audience’s elaborative work by evoking its knowledge of much more extensive and common traditions.”

76. Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern*, 108-11, 276. See also the fulfillment language in Luke 22:16, where Jesus says that he will not again eat the Passover until it is “fulfilled”

The same is true of Pseudo-Philo, who describes in his *Biblical Antiquities* at 12:3 the people’s response to Moses when he comes down from the mountain with the law and a shining face as follows: “And while he was speaking, they did not heed him, so that the word spoken in the time when the people sinned by building the tower *might be fulfilled*, when God said, ‘And now unless I stop them, everything that they will propose to do they will dare, and even worse.’”⁷⁷ As in Matthew, so here — the words that are fulfilled are not predictive words; rather, the author is pointing to both historical correspondence and escalation. This technique might also inform what Matthew intends when he describes Jesus fulfilling all righteousness in 3:15 and the law in 5:17, but these texts are beyond the scope of this project. My objective here was to present a plausible case that Matthew understood and respected the context of Isaiah 7:14.

in the Kingdom of God. Delling writes, “The passover is a reminder of deliverance from Egypt; along these lines the OT and the eschatological events are perhaps contrasted as type and antitype” (“παῖρως,” in *TDNT*, 6:296).

77. LAB 12:3, as translated by Donald J. Harrington in *OTP* 2:320 (original italics removed and emphasis added). I gladly thank Preston Sprinkle for alerting me to this reference. The nearest parallel to this in Pseudo-Philo seems to be 56:1, “And in that time the sons of Israel desired and sought for a king, and they gathered to Samuel and said, ‘Behold now you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. And now appoint over us a king to govern us, because the word has been fulfilled that Moses said to our fathers in the wilderness, saying, ‘Appoint from your brothers a ruler over you.’” The text alluded to, Deut. 17:15, is a command rather than a prediction. See the other comparisons with earlier events in Israel’s history in Pseudo-Philo cited in n. 73 above.