

# CONCEPTUALISING FULFILMENT IN MATTHEW

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## Summary

*The question of how to understand the formula citations in the Gospel of Matthew is as important as it is disputed. This study begins by reviewing the avenues previously pursued for making sense of this collection of texts. Finding that typology is a helpful but ultimately insufficient means of making sense of Matthew's formula citations, a diachronic, narrational typology is proposed. Rather than seeing Jesus as the one who embodies abstract or limited typological concepts, we see that his life takes the shape of Israel's story. In assigning Israel's role to Jesus, however, Matthew also opens up new avenues for interpreting this story. And so we find Jesus giving new substance to a narrative whose shape is given by the scriptures of Israel. This conception of narrative embodiment in Matthew holds promise not only for understanding Jesus' relationship to the prophets but also for understanding his relationship to the law.*

## 1. Introduction

The so-called 'formula quotations' provide interpreters of the first gospel with a unique venue for probing the intentions and theology of Matthew.<sup>1</sup> Comparison with the other gospels and redaction critical studies have consistently highlighted not only that Matthew created the unique introductory formula that introduces these citations,<sup>2</sup> but that he

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<sup>1</sup> For convenience, we will refer to the author of the first gospel as 'Matthew'. However, this designation is not intended to make any claim about authorship. Unless otherwise attributed, all Bible translations in this essay are the author's.

<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989): 157.

(or his community) seems to be the one who culled the quotations from the Jewish scriptures and applied them to the traditions of Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

Looking at the unique elements of a text can very easily produce distorted claims about the purpose of the text as a whole—especially when the most substantial elements are held in common with other works. A warning along these lines seems to lie behind the title of a recent essay by Donald Senior: ‘The Lure of the Formula Quotations: Re-Assessing Matthew’s Use of the Old Testament with the Passion Narrative as a Test Case’.<sup>4</sup> Senior points out that the importance of fulfilment as a theme in Matthew extends beyond the formula quotations, and that Jesus’ relationship to the OT is an important thread that runs through the whole gospel in references and allusions not introduced by Matthew’s distinct formula. Far from challenging the scholarly attention paid to the formula quotations, however, Senior concludes that they represent Matthew’s broader theology of fulfilment as expressed by the narrator’s voice:

The depth and variety of Matthew’s appeals to the Old Testament in the passion narrative put into perspective the function of the formula quotations within the gospel as a whole. The formula quotations take their place within the full repertoire of ways Matthew uses the Old Testament to underwrite the story of Jesus for his community and, at the same time, to provide his community with a new reading of their scriptures in light of the faith in Jesus’ identity as the Messiah and Son of God.<sup>5</sup>

Senior goes on to say that the unique aspect of these citations is that they provide the reader with the narrator’s voice, his commentary on action occurring in the story. Thus, the formula quotations find their importance in providing a window through which we can see the central theme of Jesus’ relationship to the OT in Matthew.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Representative of these claims (though they differ in some important respects) are Krister Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968); Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel: With Special Reference to the Messianic Hope*, (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 18; Leiden: Brill, 1967); and Graham N. Stanton, ‘Matthew’s Use of the Old Testament’ in *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993): 346-63.

<sup>4</sup> In *The Scriptures in the Gospels*, ed. C. M. Tuckett (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 131; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997): 89-115.

<sup>5</sup> Donald Senior, ‘The Lure’: 115.

<sup>6</sup> Much to the same point is Luz, *Matthew 1-7*: 162. He posits the additional argument that Matthew’s grouping of the formula quotations in the prologue indicates a theme that the author wants to highlight as significant for the whole work.

## 2. The Problem of the Formula Quotations

Scholarly duels over the formula quotations have taken place on the ground of text-form (Do they reflect the LXX? the MT? a mixed form?<sup>7</sup> Is this similar<sup>8</sup> or in contrast to<sup>9</sup> other quotations and allusions in Matthew? Is Matthew responsible for the text form of the scripture citations<sup>10</sup> or is it his source<sup>11</sup>?) and theology or purpose (Does Matthew use them to justify the geography of Jesus' life?<sup>12</sup> Does he make up a geography to go with scriptures he knows? Are his purposes christological rather than geographical?<sup>13</sup>). An intermediate question, however, and the one that this study takes up, concerns how Matthew conceptualises fulfilment.<sup>14</sup>

The fourth entry under πληρόω in the most recent edition of the BDAG lexicon helps to stage the problem:

4. **to bring to a designed end, fulfill** a prophecy, an obligation, a promise, a law, a request ... etc.  
 a. of the fulfillment of divine predictions or promises. The word stands almost always in the passive *be fulfilled* ... and refers mostly to the Tanach and its words: τοῦτο γέγονεν ἵνα πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου (cp. 2 Chr. 36:21) Mt 1:22; cp. 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54, 56; 27:9...<sup>15</sup>

Two things bear pointing out. First, this entry defines πληρόω in keeping with the standard English connotation of fulfilment: a predictive prophecy has come to pass.<sup>16</sup> In addition, BDAG associates

<sup>7</sup> Stendahl, *School*.

<sup>8</sup> Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*.

<sup>9</sup> Stendahl, *School*; Georg Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit: Untersuchung zur Theologie des Matthäus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962).

<sup>10</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (3 vols; International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988): 1:32-58.

<sup>11</sup> Stanton, 'Matthew's Use'.

<sup>12</sup> Richard S. McConnell, 'Law and Prophecy in Matthew's Gospel: The Authority and Use of the Old Testament in the Gospel of St. Matthew' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Basil, 1964): 108-13; cf. Strecker, *Weg*: 93.

<sup>13</sup> Stanton, 'Matthew's Use', and Senior, 'The Lure'.

<sup>14</sup> We find a similar list in Luz, *Matthew 1-7*: 157, though he omits the question of how to conceptualise fulfilment.

<sup>15</sup> *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. F. W. Danker (3rd edn; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000): 828-9.

<sup>16</sup> One can see this instinctive reading at work when scholars employ a prophecy-fulfilment schema in their discussions of the formula quotations. Thus J. Andrew Overman claims that Matthew uses this formula to introduce an event that took place

the formula quotations in Matthew with this idea by indicating these passages as the ones where we can find such a use of the verb in question.

The problem with the prophecy- or promise-fulfilment model is that a number of the OT texts cited by Matthew in these instances are neither prophecies nor promises; or, if they are, then they often had in view something quite different from a coming Messiah. For example, the following formula quotations, cited by BDAG, do not introduce messianic prophecy: 1:22 (virgin birth); 2:15 (son called out of Egypt); 2:17 (Rachel weeping); 13:35 (opening mouth in parables); and 27:9 (thirty pieces of silver).<sup>17</sup>

To this list of questionable direct fulfilments we might also add 26:54, 56 (Jesus must suffer); as well as 8:17 and 12:17, formula quotations which introduce references to Isaianic servant songs. The decision of whether to regard these as indicating fulfilment of prophecies or promises will depend in large part on how one deals with the strong interpretive tradition that understands Isaiah's servant to be Israel, or even the prophet himself, rather than a coming Messiah.<sup>18</sup> As hard as it is for Christian ears trained on the NT and Handel's *Messiah* not to read the 'servant songs' as Messianic predictions, it is by no means clear that fulfilment of these texts means that Jesus is and does what God had promised that the coming Messianic deliverer would be and do. Donald Juel has helpfully laid out the problem of associating a suffering servant with a Messianic figure. He demonstrates how these two traditions were kept quite separate in the Jewish exegetical tradition, concluding that within the stream of exegetical tradition in which the NT writers found themselves, 'It is difficult to understand how anyone who knew the Bible could say that "Christ [i.e. the

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in order to fulfil 'something which was predicted by a prophet' (*Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989]: 74).

<sup>17</sup> To much the same effect is Wilhelm Rothfuchs, *Die Erfüllungszitate des Matthäus-Evangeliums* (Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament 8; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1969): 114.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Hans-Jürgen Hermisson, 'Israel und der Gottesknecht bei Deuterjesaja', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 79 (1982): 1-24; Peter Wilcox and David Paton-Williams, 'The Servant Songs in Deutero-Isaiah', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 42 (1988): 79-102; Peter Fiedler, "'The Servant of the Lord": Israel (Isaiah 42:1-4) and Jesus (Matthew 12:18-21)', *Covenant Quarterly* 55 (1997): 119-29; Ulrich Berges, 'Who Were the Servants? A Comparative Inquiry in the Book of Isaiah and the Psalms' in *Past, Present, Future: The Deuteronomistic History and the Prophets*, ed. J. C. de Moor and H. F. Van Rooy (Leiden: Brill, 2000): 1-18.

Messiah] died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures.”<sup>19</sup> The conceptualisation of fulfilment proposed in this essay will provide a helpful way forward through the knotty question of the servant songs as well as the non-predictive passages listed above. In providing a way forward through these thorny problems the current essay will help set a trajectory for understanding fulfilment in Matthew.

Georg Strecker’s redactional study concludes correctly but begs the question we wish to take up when he finds: ‘In the Matthean redaction the prophetic word of the Old Testament is understood to be fulfilled in the “historical” fact’.<sup>20</sup> If we work with the notion of fulfilment put forward by BDAG, the problem with the formula quotations immediately becomes clear. The argument might go something like this: (1) fulfilment has to do with realisation of prophetic prediction or promise; (2) the OT references in the formula quotations do not by and large contain (messianic) prophetic predictions or promises; (3) therefore Matthew grossly mishandles scripture for his own ends. Q.E.D.

This is, in fact, the underlying argument behind an article entitled, ‘Matthew Twists the Scriptures’.<sup>21</sup> In this essay, Vernon McCasland highlights the dissonance between Isaiah’s prediction of a birth to a young girl for his own day and Matthew’s transformation of the passage such that it talks about Jesus born of a virgin. He sees Matthew postulating non-existent scripture to justify Jesus’ life in Nazareth. McCasland chides Matthew for his inability to understand the Hebrew parallelism behind the ‘two donkeys’ of Zechariah 9:9. According to this essay, Matthew has entangled himself in a morass of misunderstanding and intentional changing and distorting: the passages he cites are not (messianic) prophecies as Matthew seems to present them. This presses home the importance of assessing not only the success (or lack thereof) of Matthew’s employment of the OT, but also the more basic question of how Matthew himself sees Jesus relating to his scriptural source.

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<sup>19</sup> Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988): 12, cf. 119-33 (parenthetical addition original). Since Paul does, in fact, say this (1 Cor. 15:3), and did, in fact, know the Bible, our task consists in part in explaining the difficulty that Juel has found.

<sup>20</sup> Strecker, *Weg*: 57 (my translation).

<sup>21</sup> S. Vernon McCasland, ‘Matthew Twists the Scriptures’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80 (1961): 143-48.

### 3. Proposed Solutions

Here we enter the question of how to understand Matthew's hermeneutics. For convenience we can group the responses to the difficulties posed by Matthew's hermeneutics into three categories: (1) Some scholars assess Matthew and the OT texts by the standards of historical (grammatical-historical or historical-critical) exegesis and thereby determine that Matthew does violence to his scriptural texts; alternatively, some thereby determine that Matthew has read his sources with unparalleled precision. (2) Others assess Matthew's use of the OT in comparison with the *péshe* mode of exegesis known to us from Qumran. As an alternative to the *péshe* style of exegesis, Luz (for one) has drawn attention to Matthew's use of the word πληρόω and highlighted the differences between Matthew's exegesis and that of the Qumran community. (3) The third pair of alternative solutions involves whether Matthew's hermeneutics rely on typology or whether they rely on catchwords.

#### ***3:1 Matthew Gets It Wrong (or Right)!***

McCasland's essay 'Matthew Twists the Scriptures' boldly and pointedly embodies the reactions many modern readers have had when contrasting Matthew's use of the OT scriptures with their original OT contexts. On McCasland's reading, Matthew's representation of Isaiah 7:14 as a prophecy of Jesus' virgin birth is a two-fold misinterpretation: Matthew realises neither that Isaiah speaks of an event in his own lifetime, nor that the Hebrew word *עַלְמָה* refers not to a virgin but rather to a young woman.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, he charges Matthew with misunderstanding Hosea 11:1's reference to the exodus of the past as a prophecy of the future and Zechariah 9:9's synthetic parallelism as a prediction of a Messiah coming on two donkeys.<sup>23</sup> The upshot of McCasland's critique of Matthew is that historical-critical exegesis of Matthew is incompatible with historical-critical exegesis of the evangelist's sources. A sub-point of this broader critique is that some passages Matthew sees 'fulfilled' are either not prophecies at all, or else prophecies that had long since been fulfilled.

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<sup>22</sup> McCasland, 'Twists': 144, 145.

<sup>23</sup> McCasland, 'Twists': 144-45.

In response to McCasland, Norman Walker issued a point-by-point rejoinder.<sup>24</sup> Walker assesses Matthew on the same ground of historical exegesis, but with opposite results. He concedes that Isaiah 7:14 had an initial fulfilment in Isaiah's day, but then looks to the broader sweep of that portion of Isaiah, climaxing in chapter 9, which generates hope of a future deliverer.<sup>25</sup> Walker also sees in the LXX rendering of עֲלִמָּה as παρθένος that the LXX translators themselves were looking for a virgin to conceive in her virginity—something Matthew was therefore justified in claiming had come to pass in the situation of Mary.<sup>26</sup>

John Sailhamer has issued a similar appeal on behalf of Matthew's faithful handling of Hosea 11:1.<sup>27</sup> Sailhamer begins his defense of Matthew using Brevard Childs's assessment of the canonical form of the OT prophet. Childs contends that the form of the book as contained in the OT canon sets all of Hosea's oracles of judgment within a more ultimate trajectory of hope for eschatological deliverance.<sup>28</sup> Based on this alone, Sailhamer makes the following startling claim:

In Hos. 11:1-4, then, the historical exodus is understood as a metaphor. It is an image of future redemption... The messianic sense that Matthew saw in the words of Hos. 11:1, 'out of Egypt I have called my son', was already there in the book of Hosea. Matthew did not invent it. He, better than we, understood the *sensus literalis* intended by the historical author of the book of Hosea.<sup>29</sup>

To say the least, this interpretation of Hosea 11:1 is strained.<sup>30</sup> The idea that Hosea, as a book, contains hope for eschatological deliverance in no way prejudices the question of how Hosea 11:1, as a verse, is itself functioning. In fact, Hosea 11:1-4 does not look to the future deliverance that one can find elsewhere in the book.<sup>31</sup> These verses

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<sup>24</sup> Norman Walker, 'The Alleged Matthaean Errata', *New Testament Studies* 9 (1963): 391-94.

<sup>25</sup> Walker, 'Errata': 392.

<sup>26</sup> Walker, 'Errata': 392.

<sup>27</sup> John H. Sailhamer, 'Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15', *Westminster Theological Journal* 63 (2001): 87-96.

<sup>28</sup> Sailhamer, 'Hosea 11:1': 88. Sailhamer is interacting with Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979): 374-84. Sailhamer grossly overstates the convergence of his own position with that of Childs.

<sup>29</sup> Sailhamer, 'Hosea 11:1': 88-89.

<sup>30</sup> This is ably highlighted in the rejoinder by Dan McCartney and Peter Enns, 'Matthew and Hosea: A Response to John Sailhamer', *Westminster Theological Journal* 63 (2001): 97-105.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005): 132-34.

represent the judgment side of the judgment-salvation dialectic that pervades the canonical form of the prophet. The past-tense reference to the exodus from Egypt is obvious; and one wonders whether Sailhamer's literal reading of 11:1 as a messianic prophecy is going to send us hunting for a 'literal fulfilment' of obstinate Baal worship in the time of Jesus as 'prophesied' by Hosea 11:2.<sup>32</sup> Douglas Stuart, who wants to preserve an element of Messianic prophecy for Hosea 11:1, must resort to *sensus plenior* rather than *sensus literalis* for the task.<sup>33</sup> Even so, the idea that Jesus gives a fuller sense to the word 'call', as Stuart claims, seems to be an expedient employed for the sake of maintaining Matthew's integrity as an exegete.

Walker's essay fares only little better than Sailhamer's. Even with an LXX translation that more clearly indicates true virginity, Isaiah 7:14 has a place in the immediate context that the later prophecies of a coming prince of peace do not override.<sup>34</sup> Matthew's indications of fulfilment do not mesh with the historical-critical or grammatical-historical indications of his source texts. To the extent that this is the ground of the argument, McCasland gets the better of it. As Dan McCartney and Peter Enns have said, 'Strict grammatical-historical exegesis in fact demonstrates to us that the apostles were doing something other than grammatical-historical exegesis'.<sup>35</sup> The intentions of the OT authors or the LXX translators cannot account for Matthew's vision of Jesus fulfilling the scriptures. And yet, other more fruitful ground has been proposed for understanding the first evangelist's use of the OT in his formula quotations.

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<sup>32</sup> For Hosea's reference to calling Israel out of Egypt as meaning that God had called Israel out of Egypt (at the time of the Exodus), see Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary of the Book of the Prophet Hosea* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974); Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible, 24; New York: Doubleday, 1980); Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (Word Biblical Commentary, 31; Waco: Word Books, 1987).

<sup>33</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*: 178. On the usefulness of *sensus plenior* for understanding NT hermeneutics, cf. Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999): xxxi-xxxiv.

<sup>34</sup> A line of interpretation similar to that of Walker, and subject to the same critique, can be found in D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (Expositor's Bible Commentary 8; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984): 79-80.

<sup>35</sup> McCartney and Enns, 'Response to Sailhamer': 99.



### 3:2 פִּשְׁרָא (or πληρόω)?

With the appearance of the Dead Sea Scrolls, new vistas opened for understanding the hermeneutical milieu of Judaism in the Second Temple period. Krister Stendahl's landmark work *The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament* argued for a close relationship between the *pésheer* mode of interpretation employed in the Habakkuk commentary and Matthew's use of the OT.<sup>36</sup> The similarity between the *pésheer* interpretations of the DSS and Matthew's fulfilment citations comes from a shared commitment to scripture together with similar convictions that the time of fulfilment has come to pass.<sup>37</sup> The 'actualizing nature' of the scriptural interpretations, claims Stendahl, justifies speaking of a *pésheer* type of quotation in the formula quotations.<sup>38</sup>

For our purposes, the most important result of Stendahl's work is that it draws the discussion of Matthew's hermeneutics into the realm of turn-of-the-era Jewish hermeneutics. Given Matthew's first-century Jewish context, the *pésheer* proposal comes much closer to assessing Matthew on its own terms than do the historical-critical proposals analysed in the previous section.

Although Stendahl and Richard Longenecker have both pointed out that an eschatological conviction is a necessary condition for the *pésheer*-type exegesis we see at Qumran, Gundry has rightly countered that this is not a sufficient condition for so labelling fulfilment-hermeneutics.<sup>39</sup> Longenecker finds that Matthew's 'lay[ing] stress on the fulfilment of God's redemptive activity in the person of Jesus Christ' is sufficient for applying the *pésheer* label to his handling of scripture.<sup>40</sup> This, however, would qualify all NT hermeneutics to bear the *pésheer* label, which then becomes sufficiently broad to cover everything and thereby ends up denoting very little. That is to say, such an identity between fulfilment and *pésheer* does not draw us any closer to conceptualising how Matthew sees Jesus relating to the OT—a vision of Matthew's that seems to distinguish him from at very least the other synoptic gospel writers (not to mention other NT authors) and

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<sup>36</sup> Stendahl, *School*. The first edition was published in 1954 and was thus a groundbreaking work in bringing the NT into conversation with the Scrolls.

<sup>37</sup> Stendahl, *School*, esp. 193.

<sup>38</sup> Stendahl, *School*: 200-1.

<sup>39</sup> Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*: 173-74.

<sup>40</sup> Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*: 128.

does not match up with the expectations reflected in the lexical definition of πληρόω that applies itself to the formula quotations.<sup>41</sup> We will thus be looking to step beyond Longenecker's conclusions even while agreeing with much of his argument.

Ulrich Luz raises some other objections, highlighting the differences between פִּשְׁר at Qumran and πληρόω in Matthew.<sup>42</sup> Luz sees the essential difference as this: 'פִּשְׁר begins with the text and interprets it; πληρόω begins with the historical event and understands it as the fulfilment of predictions.'<sup>43</sup> Rooted in the Christian tradition, its narratives, and its claims that these narratives fulfilled the Scriptures, Matthew has drawn scripture into conversation with the traditions he relates.<sup>44</sup> Thus, *péshe* exegesis and Matthew's hermeneutic are distinct not because of an inherent hermeneutical method implied in each word but because of how the words from the OT are used in their original and interpreted contexts.

Luz goes on to claim that πληρόω is a Christological word, by which elements of Matthew's understanding of Jesus' messianic role are drawn to the foreground.<sup>45</sup> In Luz's view, this takes on a two-fold cast, corresponding to the prophets and the law: 'As Jesus has "fulfilled" by his life the prophetic predictions, so Matthew has also emphasized comprehensively and *programmatically*, through Jesus' complete obedience, the demands of law and prophets through Jesus.'<sup>46</sup>

To be sure, Luz has done well to point out that a commitment to Scripture and a conviction about the time of fulfilment are not, in themselves, sufficient grounds for applying the label *péshe* to one's hermeneutics.<sup>47</sup> But here again we find ourselves running aground on the notion that Jesus fulfils prophetic *predictions*. This is often not the case. To the retrospective look to the Exodus in Hosea 11:1 (Matt. 2:15) we might add the present-tense description of weeping in Ramah

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<sup>41</sup> Longenecker, of course, recognises the unique manner in which Matthew employs the OT (*Biblical Exegesis*: 117-39).

<sup>42</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*: 156-64.

<sup>43</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*: 158.

<sup>44</sup> The NT authors' practice of starting with the material of Christian tradition and studying the OT in light of this is also highlighted as a distinction between Christian interpretation and Judaism by Longenecker in *Biblical Exegesis*, xxvii.

<sup>45</sup> Luz, *Matthew*: 162.

<sup>46</sup> Luz, *Matthew*: 162.

<sup>47</sup> In substantial agreement with Luz on this point is Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*.

in Jeremiah 31:15 (Matt. 2:18). A better way to conceptualise fulfilment in Matthew is required. Unlike the salvation-historical linearity that one finds in Luke-Acts, Matthew's engagement with the OT does not trade on the currency of (messianic) prophecies coming to pass. However, neither Stendahl's *pésher* proposal nor the πληρόω proposal of Luz provides us with the conceptual framework for making such a distinction. We see the need for such a framework when we recognise that the formula quotations are not bound to prophetic predictions. These citations, representative of Matthew's broader employment of the OT, press us to reconceptualise the concept of fulfilment in this gospel.

### 3:3 Typology (or Catchwords)

One attempt at reconceptualising fulfilment in Matthew has come through the device of typology. In two essays from the early 1980's Victor Eldridge probes the usefulness of typology as the key for understanding Matthew's hermeneutics in the formula quotations.<sup>48</sup> Eldridge bases his pursuit in part on the idea that one of the unifying factors of the formula quotations is 'a distinctive type of exegesis which appears to pay scant attention to the original Old Testament context of the verses quoted'.<sup>49</sup>

Typology draws one closer to Matthew's method inasmuch as it does not depend on fulfilment of a prophetic prediction, but looks instead to a recurring pattern which is attributed to divine agency.<sup>50</sup> Eldridge follows the definition of typology given by A. B. Mickelsen as 'a correspondence in one or more respects between a person, event, or thing in the Old Testament and a person, event, or thing closer to or contemporaneous with a New Testament writer. It is this *correspondence* that determines the meaning in the Old Testament narrative that is stressed by a later speaker or writer'.<sup>51</sup>

As Eldridge goes through the formula quotations he finds the typological explanation to be of only limited value. He sees the possibility of a typological recurrence of God's saving activity making

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<sup>48</sup> Victor Eldridge, 'Typology – The Key to Understanding Matthew's Formula Quotations?' *Colloquium* 15 (1982): 43-51; 'Second Thoughts on Matthew's Formula Quotations', *Colloquium* 15 (1983): 45-47.

<sup>49</sup> Eldridge, 'Typology': 43.

<sup>50</sup> Eldridge, 'Typology': 44.

<sup>51</sup> A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963): 237 (*italics original*).

the connection between Isaiah 7 and Matthew 1, but the obvious link of the miraculous virgin conception makes the salvation typology unlikely.<sup>52</sup> A similar problem presents itself with Matthew's use of Psalm 78:2 ('I open my mouth in parables') in Matthew 13:35. Eldridge finds that Longenecker's attempt to find in it a typological correspondence in which God has ordained a more 'meaningful antitype in the days of eschatological fulfillment' to 'stretch the normal understanding of typology to its limits'.<sup>53</sup> Instead, Eldridge asserts that Matthew is interested here in the key-word παραβολαῖς from the LXX.

In Eldridge's view, the typology paradigm works considerably better for Matthew 2, especially Matthew's use of Hosea 11:1. Matthew 2 is replete with typological parallels to the story of Moses, and a typological salvation by means of flight to or from Egypt establishes a connection between not only Moses and Jesus but also Israel and Jesus.<sup>54</sup> This particular line of argument is taken up much more extensively by Dale Allison.<sup>55</sup> Allison has put forward a powerful and compelling case that Matthew 1–2 in particular contains an extensive Moses typology, and that the citation of Hosea 11:1 is part of this.<sup>56</sup> A Moses typology per se, however, is not sufficiently broad to explain even the formula quotations found in preliminary chapters of Matthew. To take but one example, Strecker points out that the virgin birth does not fall within a specifically Mosaic typology.<sup>57</sup>

Eldridge concludes his essay on typology with a mixed review of the usefulness of that device for understanding Matthew's hermeneutics. In his second essay on Matthew's formula quotations, Eldridge suggests that key-word association provides a more fruitful way forward than typology.<sup>58</sup> Taking up the more challenging scriptures cited in the formula quotations he finds that παραβολαῖς might have 'triggered the evangelist's interest' in Psalm 78:2; that Nazareth evokes a similar sounding word in a fashion similar to

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<sup>52</sup> Eldridge, 'Typology': 44.

<sup>53</sup> Eldridge, 'Typology': 47, citing Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975): 148.

<sup>54</sup> Eldridge, 'Typology': 45.

<sup>55</sup> Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

<sup>56</sup> Allison, *New Moses*: 140.

<sup>57</sup> Strecker, *Weg*: 54-55.

<sup>58</sup> Eldridge, 'Second Thoughts'.

Hebrew paronomasia, thus generating Matthew 2:23; and that the thirty pieces of silver Judas received triggered the allusion to Zechariah 11:13 (cited as Jeremiah) in Matthew 27:9.<sup>59</sup> If one recognises that the ‘suffering servant’ passages were widely accepted in the early church to be direct predictions of the Messiah, Eldridge goes on, the remaining fulfilment citations can all be accounted for by reference to key-word ideas without recourse to the original use of the verse in its OT context.<sup>60</sup> Thus the words ‘Egypt’ and ‘virgin’ account for Matthew’s use of Hosea 11 and Isaiah 7 while a tradition of two donkeys sends Matthew to Zechariah 9. Free association of words might be one important factor for understanding Matthew’s use of the OT scriptures.

As an explanation for how Matthew conceptualises fulfilment, the catch-word theory is somewhat lacking. As a last resort we might concede that Matthew’s citations were generated in this way. But such an explanation produces a rather empty conception of fulfilment: Matthew hears in the Jesus-traditions unique recurrences of biblical language. Fulfilment thus means special application of the biblical words to Jesus. This is closer to the actual strategy of Matthew than what the BDAG entry would lead us to expect, but we wonder whether the apparent progress made in recognising the typological function of some of the formula citations should be swept aside in favour of this less fruitful proposal.

#### 4. Conceptualising Fulfilment in Matthew

Both Eldridge and Carson issue warnings against a wooden insistence that one conception or hermeneutic can account for every use of the formula quotations.<sup>61</sup> And yet, it seems that to a certain extent the typological proposal has made some progress inasmuch as it provides one way of conceptualising fulfilment that does not require Jesus to be fulfilling predictive prophecies or promises. To take Allison’s work as an example, saying ‘Jesus is like Moses’ is not how we tend to conceive of Jesus as one who fulfils prophecy, but might it better approximate what Matthew had in mind?

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<sup>59</sup> Eldridge, ‘Second Thoughts’: 45.

<sup>60</sup> Eldridge, ‘Second Thoughts’: 46, 47.

<sup>61</sup> Eldridge, ‘Typology’: 48-49; Carson, *Matthew*: 28-29.

Indeed, it seems that the more clearly a scholar keeps in view that Matthew is not telling his readers how Jesus fulfils a predictive prophecy or messianic promise the better are that scholar's readings of the passages in question. Can we then articulate how Matthew understands the relationship between Jesus' life and the scriptures of Israel when he says, 'This came about to fulfil what was written'?

Several scholars have noted that the necessary presuppositions for a fulfilment motif include a fixed conviction about the arrival of the eschaton together with a commitment to the scriptures.<sup>62</sup> In addition, Longenecker has drawn attention to the typological and corporate elements in first century Jewish thinking.<sup>63</sup> In both of these ways, the following proposal is quite in step with Longenecker's reading of Matthew's formula quotations. In the end, however, we find that typological explanation lacks the explanatory power to account for Matthew's understanding of fulfilment.

In discussing Jesus' flight to Egypt, and the Hosea citation associated with it, several commentators make a point that has not been fully worked out with reference to the formula quotations in general. Eldridge concludes his assessment of Matthew 2: 'Jesus is the embodiment of Israel, the ideal Israelite. He is recapitulating the experience of the nation in his own life.'<sup>64</sup> Similarly, Allison marshalls the work of Luz and of R. T. France to indicate that Jesus recapitulates and completes the exodus in himself, and that Jesus is the true Israel, typologically paralleling and fulfilling what took place in the past.<sup>65</sup> Allison later states that Matthew's use of Hosea 11:1 implies this equation: Jesus = Son = Israel.<sup>66</sup>

Building on this scholarship that has come before, we recognise the usefulness of conceiving of 'fulfilment' in Matthew's formula citations as indications that Jesus is embodying the stories and scriptures of Israel, thereby showing himself to be the true Israel.<sup>67</sup> This differs from a prophecy-fulfilment schema that unfolds in a linear fashion and gives

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<sup>62</sup> Stendahl, *School*: 183-84, 190-201; Strecker, *Weg*: 123; Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*: 174; Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*: 78-79; 127.

<sup>63</sup> Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*: 127.

<sup>64</sup> Eldridge, 'Typology': 45.

<sup>65</sup> Allison, *New Moses*: 141, citing Luz, *Matthew 1-7*: 146, and R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985): 86.

<sup>66</sup> Allison, *New Moses*: 199.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*: 128.

rise to the salvation history schemas of the Twentieth Century.<sup>68</sup> But there is a diachronic, narrative dimension to Jesus' 'fulfilling' the law and prophets that typological arguments have not yet captured.

The law and the prophets provide the true 'shape' of what it looks like to be Israel: they plot the past, present and future of the people of God. The narrative perspective allows us to see that Jesus did not simply come to embody principles or even fulfil prophetic predictions, but to take the story of Israel to himself. Thus, Jesus 'fills' the words of the OT scriptures as an actor bringing a new interpretation to the role, and a new conclusion to the story. This conclusion must, ultimately, burst beyond Israel itself.

Matthew's appeal to Isaiah 7 as OT precedent for a virgin birth is one of the more thorny cases of 'fulfilment' in the gospel. Eldridge rightly feels the strain of seeing God's salvation of his people as the common typological thread.<sup>69</sup> Matthew reads the verse from Isaiah as providing a shape for the story of Jesus: not only the virgin birth but also the presence of God with his people ('Immanuel') come about again with Jesus. Only now, both elements are different. The meanings of both words are changed, literalised, Matthew would say fulfilled, as Jesus the substance fills up the scriptures of Israel in a substantially new and unexpected way, which yet retains the shape of the original plot.

The narrative perspective allows us to see that Matthew is not necessarily looking for patterns of activity, but for moments in a plot that is unfolding for the second time, only now with a different player cast in role of Israel. Jesus fills up the story of Israel through a supernatural birth, and becoming both the child of promise and God with God's people.

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<sup>68</sup> David B. Howell has described and evaluated tripartite and bipartite salvation-historical proposals for understanding Matthew (*Matthew's Inclusive Story: A Study in the Narrative Rhetoric of the First Gospel* [Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, 42; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990]). The tripartite proposals typically see a history divided into Israel, call of Israel, and gospel to the Gentiles, often with the stated or implied position that God has rejected the Jewish people. A bipartite view of salvation history is typically delineated as consisting of two epochs: the time of promise and the time of fulfilment. Although beyond the purview of the current essay, our proposal for conceptualising fulfilment in Matthew undermines the 'rejection of Israel' proposals for understanding a linear *Heilsgeschichte* in the first evangelist such as those Howell engages.

<sup>69</sup> Eldridge, 'Typology?' 44.

In working out the Moses typology of the first evangelist in *The New Moses*, Dale Allison cites this description of Jewish typology:

By means of retrojective typologies, events are removed from the neutral cascade of historical occurrences and embellished as modalities of foundational moments in Israel's history.<sup>70</sup>

Typological representation is fluid enough to allow for the major changes that Matthew introduces between the original and latter instantiations while maintaining a sufficiently strong connection to imply that the same God who worked in the first instance is at work in the latter as well. And yet, it is precisely because the Moses typology studied by Allison is not sufficiently broad to cover other uses of the fulfilment citations that we question its ultimate explanatory power. The point is not simply that God is at work again, nor even that a new exodus is recurring under a new Moses. For Matthew, the full compass of Israel's story, as plotted not only in the law but also in the prophets, is being replayed by a new character who gives new substance and meaning to the old lines.

Narrative embodiment might even provide an avenue for conceptualising Matthew's two-donkey reading of Zechariah 9:9. We have already seen that Matthew's re-narration of Israel's scriptures and story have given him vision to see a new, unprecedented reading of 'virgin' and 'God with us' from Isaiah 7. Having recognised this hermeneutical strategy we do not need to credit Matthew with misunderstanding Hebrew parallelism to account for the two donkeys in his rendering of the 'Triumphal Entry'.<sup>71</sup> The narrative shape provided by the OT narrative is the same: the king mounted humbly on his royal beast.<sup>72</sup> But the substance of the 'fulfilment' is different, it is more; it brings a new meaning to bear on the old words—a meaning that no one would have thought of before being convinced that Jesus was himself the embodiment of not only God's fulfilled promises but even of Israel itself.

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<sup>70</sup> Allison, *New Moses*: 15.

<sup>71</sup> Indeed, he may have rejected parallelism intentionally, as David Instone-Brewer has suggested ('The Two Asses of Zechariah 9:9 in Matthew 21', *Tyndale Bulletin* 54 (2003): 87-98).

<sup>72</sup> Clay Alan Ham, *The Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd: Matthew's Reading of Zechariah's Messianic Hopes* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), argues that Matthew's use of Zechariah is in step with other ancient traditions of reading Zech. 9:9 as Messianic prophecy. He does not, however, take up the issue of the two donkeys.



Reconceptualising fulfilment in terms of a broadly conceived re-narration and re-embodiment of Israel's story allows the OT to be the OT while simultaneously allowing Matthew to be Matthew,<sup>73</sup> neither twisting the former to fit the latter, nor disparaging the latter as incompetent to handle the former. This approach opens the possibility that Matthew is engaged in a program of intentional, creative reapplication of the OT to a person whom he believes to have breathed new life into the character of Israel.

The virgin birth and the entry on two donkeys are two passages which perhaps create the most cognitive dissonance for modern day exegetes. A challenge to our theory of Jesus' story embodying the story of Israel might, however, be levelled from a different angle: from its ability to account for the etiology of the potter's field in Matthew 27:7-9. This seems to have less to do with Jesus and his story than with the purchased field. And yet, in the Zechariah passage which Matthew cites, the thirty pieces of silver serve as the condemnable price set on YHWH's shepherd or, perhaps, YHWH himself. The irony that Davies and Allison pick up in the gospel narrative ('the Messiah, so far from being honoured, is worth only the price of a slave'<sup>74</sup>) is precisely the irony of Zechariah 11:13 ('Then YHWH said to me, "Throw it to the potter—this noble price at which I was valued by them"').<sup>75</sup> So here again we find a transformation of a passage in the prophets that originally spoke of an event in the past. The shepherd of God's people (cf. Matt. 2:6, 9:36, 26:31) is now more literally bought for thirty pieces of silver, and the money is once again given to the potter. The original story of Israel is literalised, its drama relived, its content given new substance.

The conceptualisation of fulfilment proposed here not only helps us get hold of 'fulfilment' of non-predictive OT passages, it also provides a grid for incorporating the 'suffering servant' passages into our picture

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Rothfuchs, *Erfüllungszitate*: 113-17.

<sup>74</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:570.

<sup>75</sup> The connection between the price of thirty pieces of silver, the treasury, and the potter's field seems to be dependent on a word play between the MT יָצַר (*yétsar*), 'potter', and אוֹצָר (*'otsar*), 'treasury', as represented in the Syriac. Cf. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*: 133. On the sarcastic nature of God's response to the shepherd's wage, cf. Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (Word Biblical Commentaries, 32; Waco: Word, 1984): 271-2; David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi: A Commentary* (Old Testament Library; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1995): 96-7; *pace* Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9-14* (Anchor Bible, 25c; New York: Doubleday, 1993): 278-9.

of Jesus' relationship to the OT in the first gospel. In Eldridge's second pass at the formula quotations, when he suggests that catchwords are the key for understanding them, he sets aside the four servant passages because the early church seems to have accepted them as direct messianic prophecies.<sup>76</sup> It should not be overlooked, however, that the formula quotations are still uniquely Matthean, and that Matthew uniquely applies 'bearing weaknesses and taking infirmities' (Matt. 8:17) to Jesus' healing ministry.

However, reading the servant citations in terms of a re-narration of Israel's story occurring in the life of Jesus allows us to account for them within the framework of Matthew's gospel. In a gospel where Jesus embodies the exodus by coming out of Egypt, the shoot of Jesse by living in Nazareth, and the coming king by riding on two donkeys, we can also see Jesus embodying the suffering of Israel, the suffering and exiled servant of God. Matthew applies to Jesus words originally spoken with reference to Israel. This could be either because Matthew was a bad reader of scripture or because he has cast Jesus as the true and ideal Israel, fulfilling not only Israel's calling but also key elements of Israel's sordid story.

Matthew is free to use various hermeneutical strategies in his work. Repeating a fulfilment formula does not bind him to repeat his hermeneutic. The evidence, however, supports the idea that a common hermeneutical method binds the formula citations together.<sup>77</sup> If we look to a narrative embodiment that moves away from abstract typological concepts such as 'salvation' and closer to the particular story of Israel as told in the law and prophets we consistently find Matthew telling us that Jesus' life is taking the shape of Israel's story—not in terms of fulfilling predictive prophecies, but rather in terms of embodying and filling up its story in unexpected ways.

## **5. Extending Fulfilment beyond the Formula Quotations**

The importance of this study goes beyond understanding the formula quotations themselves into our grasp of the first gospel more generally, as Jesus' relationship to the scriptures and the Jewish people lie at the heart of the work. Senior's essay on the citations establishes this

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<sup>76</sup> Eldridge, 'Second Thoughts': 46.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Eldridge, 'Typology': 43.

point.<sup>78</sup> Our thesis will be strengthened if it has explanatory power in other portions of Matthew's gospel, such as the much-mooted claim in 5:17-20 that Jesus did not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfil.<sup>79</sup> Our study thus far has focused on the prophets. Does the notion of Jesus filling up the shape Israel's story with new and unexpected substance help us make sense of the law as well?<sup>80</sup>

The question at issue here is how to square the expectation Jesus generates in 5:17, where he says that he did not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfil, with the content of the antitheses that follow, in which he contrasts the law ('you have heard it said...') with his own teaching ('but *I* say to you...'). Frank Thielman articulates the problem thus:

Because this opening statement has focused on keeping the Mosaic law in the smallest particulars ... we might expect Matthew's understanding of the law to be concerned with how to live in conformity with even the smallest details of Mosaic code. When Jesus illustrates the meaning of 5:20 in the following verses, however, the reader discovers that Matthew has in mind a kind of conformity to the requirements of the Mosaic law different from what we might first expect.<sup>81</sup>

As is so often the case in dealing with the relationship between the Testaments, the challenge before us is to keep from falling off the horse either on the side of wooden uniformity or on the side of Marcionite discontinuity.

Although the antitheses draw few modern scholars to the side of pure displacement, the claim can be found that the antitheses which follow give nothing more than God's true intention for the Mosaic law itself. David Garland argues for this position: 'Rather than abrogating the law, challenging its authority, giving a new law, or interpreting it "in a higher key"..., Jesus restores its original intention'.<sup>82</sup> The

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<sup>78</sup> Senior, 'Lure'.

<sup>79</sup> In the context of a larger study on the formula quotations, Rothfuchs outlines the importance of holding together law and prophets in the first gospel (*Erfüllungszitate*: 110-13).

<sup>80</sup> The approach taken in this study of beginning with the formula citations and then probing Matt. 5:17-20 is advocated in Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Dallas: Word, 1982): 141-42; cf. Rothfuchs, *Erfüllungszitate*: 110-13.

<sup>81</sup> Frank Thielman, *The Law and the New Testament: The Question of Continuity* (New York: Crossroad, 1999): 50-51.

<sup>82</sup> David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1993): 63; to much the same effect is Overman, *Matthew's Gospel*: 86-89.

principal argument that Garland points forth is that translating the adversative  $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$  as 'but' indicates a stronger contrast than Matthew intended. Instead, Garland suggests 'and', indicating that Jesus is now giving his interpretation, which differs from the customary.<sup>83</sup>

The contents of the antitheses themselves weigh heavily against the interpretation that Jesus' polemical target is 'the customary interpretation'. With only one possible exception, Jesus does not cite what he takes to be errant interpretations of the laws and set his interpretation over against the customary reading; he sets his own teaching as a counterpoint to the law itself. Moreover, Matthew's summary comment indicates that his intention in the Sermon was to portray Jesus as one speaking from his own authority in contrast to the scribes (7:29). The difference is not simply that Jesus is giving a better, more challenging interpretation, but that he is setting himself up as a teacher with his own authority, not an authority derived from the subject matter of the law.

The narrative embodiment we suggested for prophetic fulfilment is helpful here. First, it allows us to recognise that Jesus is replaying the law-giving moment of Israel's story. It also enables us to recognise once again the measure of continuity between the shape of the OT text cited and the event in Jesus' life, while also allowing us to recognise that Matthew indicates that a new and different substance has come when Jesus 'fills it up'. In step with this are Allison's conclusions: 'As the *pleiron* of 5:20 and the *perisson* of 5:47 imply, Christian righteousness means doing more. So although there is continuity with the past, there is also newness in the present, and it does not surprise when 5:21-48 goes beyond the letter of the law to demand even more.'<sup>84</sup> In this case, the facet of the Israel story that Jesus fills up is the law, and as before the new substance is different from the old while taking much the same shape.

Both Thielman and Richard Hays have employed the metaphor of 'pointers', suggesting that the law's commands point toward a more radical ideal.<sup>85</sup> In Matthew's gospel, this 'pointing' need not be a

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<sup>83</sup> Garland, *Reading*: 64.

<sup>84</sup> Allison, *New Moses*: 183.

<sup>85</sup> Thielman, *The Law*: 51-52; Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Cross, Community, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996): 95-96. The upshot of this metaphor is different for the two scholars, however. Thielman sees the teaching of Jesus nullifying the Mosaic commandment by calling for such a radical change that the

function inherent in the law itself. It is only when the law scene of Israel's story is played by Jesus that it takes on the fuller meaning, the new substance. It is only in Matthew's story that we come to see that the laws point to something beyond themselves—something that Jesus himself brings to light.

As with the formula quotations and their references to the prophets, so here with reference to the law, Jesus does not embody what was always the *sensus literalis* of the OT. Instead, the OT gives shape to the ministry of Jesus such that, in retrospect, the OT can be seen as a witness to something greater than itself whose substance has come with the one who fills the shape of its story with new meaning.

## 6. Conclusions

Returning to the lexicographical issues we addressed at the beginning of this essay, how might we conceptualise Matthew's use of the word πληρόω? I would suggest that we come closer to conceptualising Matthew's understanding of fulfilment if we think of it in terms of the first definition of πληρόω: to make (something) full. The law and the prophets provide the true 'shape' of what it looks like to be Israel: they plot the past, present and future of the people of God. To shift metaphors from narrative to pottery: the life of Jesus, like water filling up a sculpted vase, takes the shape of true Israel while at the same time giving new substance to Israel's prophets, and even to Israel's laws. Old Testament words apply to Jesus in ways that differ from the meaning they held in their original contexts, while maintaining a degree of similarity between the events of Jesus' life and the original event spoken of or prophesied. The narrative perspective allows us to see that Jesus did not simply come to embody principles or even fulfil prophetic predictions, but to take the story of Israel to himself, over the course of his life and ministry on earth, until such a time as the story of Jesus overflows the story of Israel and goes to all the earth (28:16-20). To push the vase metaphor just one step further, it allows us to see how Matthew can make strong claims about the necessity of following Jesus for maintaining fidelity both to God and to the scriptures of Israel:

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legislation will become unnecessary. Hays suggests that the antitheses point instead to the law's inner intent.

Jesus is himself the necessary, life-giving substance that the OT does not hold without him.

The formula quotations in Matthew are as important as they are problematic. Finding the key to unlocking Matthew's understanding of Jesus' relationship to the OT in these passages opens the way for understanding Jesus' scripture-fulfilling ministry in the gospel as a whole. The conceptualisation of fulfilment on offer in the standard lexicon, when carried into an investigation of the formula quotations themselves, exacerbates the dissonance between Matthew's use of the OT and the OT verses in their original contexts. Although an Israel typology has been helpfully applied to some of the formula quotations, it does not carry sufficient explanatory force for conceptualising fulfilment in Matthew.

Once the insights of the typological are incorporated into the narrative approach suggested here, we are in possession of a notion of Jesus 'filling up' the story of Israel which provides a comprehensive conception for understanding Matthew's use of the OT across the formula quotations and, in addition, the 'fulfilment' statement of 5:17-20. The proposal outlined here allows Matthew's readers to respect the dissonance between the meaning of words and phrases between Matthew and his sources while at the same time appreciating Matthew's transformation of them as he applies them to the life of Jesus.