

Matthew's Use of Hosea 11:1

Introduction

In our last lesson, we saw that the Greek word *πληρόω*, when used in a fulfillment formula, does not necessarily mean the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy. There are several examples of fulfillment formulas in the New Testament which actually refer to historical events rather than prophetic statements. Matthew's quotation from the book of Hosea is such a case.

In the book of Exodus, we read the account of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt:

And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: "Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn." ' ' " (Ex. 4:21-23)

The prophet Hosea was God's spokesman. He referred to this event when he wrote:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son (Hos. 11:1).

As we can see, Hosea was referring to the historical event of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Matthew quoted this text when he wrote the account of Jesus being taken to Egypt by His parents.

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son." (Mt. 2:13-15)

According to Matthew, this event occurred in order “that it might be fulfilled (*πληρώω*) which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet.” Matthew used the Greek word *πληρώω* in a fulfillment formula and yet the text in the Old Testament was not a prophetic prediction. Hosea was simply stating a historical fact.

Matthew’s use of Hosea 11:1 is a problem that Bible teachers have wrestled with for some time. Various explanations have been offered over the years to resolve this problem, but most have serious flaws which undermine the literal, historical-grammatical method of interpretation. Dr. Andy Woods lists four inadequate explanations for Matthew’s use of Hosea: 1) predictive prophecy, 2) *sensus plenior*, 3) exposition in Judaism, and 4) prefigurement typology. Dr. Woods favors a view known as *analogical correspondence*.

In this lesson, we will explore the *analogical correspondence* view. This position is a better explanation for Matthew’s quotation of Hosea. If you are interested in reading about these other views, please refer to the paper *THE USE OF HOSEA 11:1 IN MATTHEW 2:15* by Dr. Andy Woods.¹

Analogical Correspondence

An examination of the Biblical texts shows us that Hosea was merely stating a historical fact—God delivered Israel out of Egypt. When Hosea wrote the text that Matthew quoted, he was not looking forward predicting a future event. Instead, Matthew was looking backward to the history of Israel in order to draw analogies (comparisons or correspondences) with the events depicted in Hosea 11:1. So then, in what sense did the child Jesus fulfill Hosea 11:1 when His parents took Him to Egypt? The concept of *analogical correspondence* is a good explanation which upholds the sound method of literal, historical-grammatical interpretation.

An analogy is a comparison between two things for the purpose of explanation or clarification. When you draw an analogy between two things, you compare them in order to illustrate a point.

¹ Woods, Andy. *THE USE OF HOSEA 11:1 IN MATTHEW 2:15*.
<http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/documents/articles/11/11.pdf?x=x> (accessed Aug 9, 2017)

New Testament writers occasionally used *πληρόω* in a fulfillment formula to create an analogy from an Old Testament event. This literary device employed by some authors of the New Testament is known as *analogical correspondence*. Matthew used the historical events referred to by Hosea as an analogy. He drew parallels or comparisons between the historical event of Israel's coming out of Egypt to the child Jesus being brought by Joseph and Mary back to their native land. Matthew used the Old Testament event to "fill in" or "complete" (*πληρόω*) the picture by way of analogy or comparison.

Charles Dyer explains:

When God calls His son "out of Egypt" in Hosea 11 the event is history, not prophecy. Hosea is looking back 700 years to the first Exodus from Egypt. He is not looking forward 700 years to Christ's return from Egypt following the death of Herod. How then is Matthew using *plēroō* with his fulfillment formula? The answer is found both in an understanding of the range of meanings for *plēroō* and in an understanding of the argument of the book of Matthew.

Matthew wrote to the Jews, and much of his gospel is devoted to proving to his Jewish readers that Jesus Christ is their Messiah. In the first part of the book Matthew draws a series of parallels between Jesus and the nation Israel. In effect, Matthew seeks to prove that Jesus is the Messiah because he is the embodiment of all that the nation of Israel as God's son should have been. He succeeded where the nation as a whole had failed.²

Consider the following comparisons between Israel and Jesus:

- Israel, the disobedient son, was called from Egypt (Hos. 11:1). Jesus, the obedient Son, was called from Egypt (Mt. 2:15).
- Israel was "baptized" as a nation in the Red Sea (Ex. 14; 1 Cor. 10:1-2). Christ was baptized by John the Baptist (Mt. 3).
- Israel disobeyed God within three days after the Red Sea baptism (Ex. 15:22-26). When Jesus was baptized, God the Father spoke from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Mt. 3:17).

² Wesley Willis and John Master, *Issues in Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 55.

- Israel went into the wilderness where she was tempted for forty years and failed miserably (Exodus-Numbers). Christ went into the wilderness where He was tempted for forty days and met every temptation successfully (Mt. 4).
- Israel went to Mount Sinai to receive God’s law (Ex. 19). Christ “went up on a mountainside” and explained the law (Mt. 5-7).
- Israel broke the law before Moses could carry the tablets down from the mountain (Ex. 32). Christ said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Mt. 5:17).

Matthew was painting a picture by comparing the failure of Israel with the obedience of Jesus. Israel’s gaps of disobedience were fulfilled or completed by Jesus, the obedient Son. Charles Dyer describes the comparative analogy depicted by Matthew:

Matthew used Hosea 11:1 because his purpose was to show that Christ succeeded as God’s Son while Israel failed as God’s son. Christ “realized the full potential” or “filled completely” God’s designs for Israel when He called them from Egypt. Thus, Matthew was not using *plēroō* to point out a veiled prophecy in Hosea. Instead, he was looking back and focusing on the contrasts between Israel’s failures as God’s son and Christ’s obedience as God’s Son. Hosea had only Israel in view in his prophecy, and even though Matthew uses *plēroō* with a fulfillment formula, Matthew’s quote of Hosea 11:1 does not make the passage a predictive prophecy.³

Dr. Roy Zuck also points out parallels between Israel and Jesus:

When God the Father “called” His Son “out of Egypt,” it was analogous to His calling Israel out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus. What was in one sense incomplete is now filled up or brought to a climax. Several analogies are evident between Jesus and Israel: both were in “exile” in Egypt; both, being the objects of God’s love, were delivered; both came out of Egypt; both passed through the waters (Ex. 13:17–14:31; Matt. 3:13–17); both were tested in the wilderness (Ex. 15:22–17:15; Matt. 4:1–11); in both cases the multitudes were fed with “manna” from heaven (Ex. 16; Matt. 14:13–21; 15:29–39). From these parallels it is

³ Ibid. 56.

evident that Jesus was seen as the ideal Israel. His experience was an enlargement of the experience of the nation.⁴

Matthew's Audience

Most Bible scholars agree that the Gospel of Matthew was written to a Jewish audience. As such, Matthew was attempting to prove that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah predicted in the Old Testament. Matthew used an analogy to draw points of correspondence between Israel (the disobedient son) and Jesus (the obedient Son). This literary device helped him to fill in the pieces of the puzzle demonstrating that Jesus fit the qualifications of the Jewish Messiah. By using *analogical correspondence*, the Jewish readers of Matthew's Gospel would be able to see how Jesus *fulfilled or completed* the picture that Matthew painted for them as he portrayed the Messiah of Israel.

Conclusion

Those who would like to make a case for allegorical interpretation of God's Word claim that Matthew changed the meaning of Hosea's words. They say that Matthew "spiritualized" the text of Hosea which gives readers of the Bible today the right to use the same method of allegorical interpretation. However, this theory violates the principle of literal, historical-grammatical interpretation.

The view of *analogical correspondence* supports the principle of literal, historical-grammatical interpretation. It also fits well with the purpose of Matthew's Gospel and would be understood by its Jewish readers. This view is also consistent with the broad range of the semantic meaning of the Greek word *πληρόω* even when used in a fulfillment formula.

[Sanford Bible Church](#)

⁴ Zuck, Roy B. *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth*. Ed. Craig Bubeck Sr. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1991. 267-268. Print.