Systematizing the Dispensational Hermeneutic
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Introduction

Poythress is arguably correct when he suggests that Schofield and by extension many dispensationalists are only *literalists* in the narrowest sense of the word when the future of Israel is of concern. This "dichotomist approach to interpretation" has been both a boon and a bane to dispensationalism.[1] Because of it, Dispensationalism has flourished across a wide theological spectrum. It has attracted followers who have little in common apart from their commitment to a "literal" future for Israel. Conversely, it has hindered dispensationalism from exercising much hermeneutical control beyond how one handles the primary passages addressing the future of Israel.

Systematics cannot exist in a purely inductive world. Induction entails the infinite and is therefore unbounded. All systems must be bounded or they devolve into chaos. For the theologian, Apologetics determines the relationship of the text to external data (general revelation, etc). The Analogy of Scripture determines the internal cohesion. However, analogy only enables assimilation; it does not enable segmentation. Systematics cannot exist without both. Coherence explains the unity; segmentation explains the diversity. Dispensationalists segment Scripture based on the progressiveness of revelation.

A systematic should not be viewed as an end in and of itself. The end game is always faith, i.e., to better understand and believe the text. Systematic Theology assists in quality-control for internal and external coherence. As such it must have dictums by which extracted materials are compared. For any system to exist, it must have these *constructs*. If a comprehensive dispensational hermeneutic is to emerge from this generation, assembly must begin at the most rudimentary level. If dispensationalism presents itself as merely a specialized hermeneutic that protects the physical future of all things Jewish, it will not survive. The dispensational hermeneutic must be an inclusive hermeneutic that accurately and systematically brings clarity and perspicuity to all scriptures.

If the *sine qua non* of Dispensationalism is literal interpretation, then one should rightly ask the follow-up question, what is the *sine qua non* of this literal method? How is it different from the historical grammatical method as practiced by non-dispensational interpreters? Foundations are funny in this way. Whenever there are two equal foundations, there will always be multiple outcomes. Where analytical contexts vary, outcomes will also vary. As long as dispensationalists only agree to agree on outcomes and not on methodology, they will always live in a house divided.

Given that most evangelicals would concede that the grammatical historical method of interpretation is the most appropriate, the essential question with which Dispensationalists must concern themselves is in what way their literal hermeneutic differs from the historical grammatical method as practiced by non-dispensationalists? Is there a hermeneutical aphorism

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[1]Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 17.

that, if applied ubiquitously, will consistently produce dispensational outcomes? The present formulations are in jeopardy as Blaising has skillfully observed:

> Ryrie set up an equation: dispensationalism = literal interpretation = clear-plain-normal hermeneutics = grammatical-historical interpretation. Then he claimed that only dispensationalists practiced consistently literal interpretation. If a person practiced consistently literal interpretation (as defined by the equation) then he or she would be a dispensationalist.[2]

Building on his own personal assessment that (1) "evangelical scholars" are "beginning to move toward a more consistent grammatical-historical interpretation,"[3] and that (2) this has "not led evangelicals to become classical or revised dispensationalists,"[4] Blaising opines:

> When we read Ryrie's claim that consistently "clear, plain, normal" hermeneutics is the essence of dispensationalism, we have to interpret that remark historically. It may have been true as an ideal or goal for revised dispensationalism, but the statement is not true as a comprehensive principle inclusive of classical dispensationalism.[5]

While dispensationalists are generally comfortable with the idea that only dispensationalists consistently practice literal interpretation, this clearly entails that dispensationalism is only a difference of degree and not of kind, i.e., that it does not affect hermeneutics as a science; it only affects it as an art.

If the dispensational hermeneutic is to be considered a requisite, then it requires a foundational statement that clearly defines how and why such is the case. Distinction can only exist in conjunction with clarity. A difference that cannot be defined is no difference at all. It must be more than a matter of extension; it must be a matter of partition.

For most Dispensationalists *context* is generally acknowledged as "king"; yet, context is a control and not a foundation. Presently there is only the bifurcated foundation of history and grammar. Ideally, both of these are always a part of the process, but there is no adjudicator to determine which takes precedent in any given passage. The interpreter generally refers back to analogy and thereby does theology and not exposition. Thus the circle becomes vicious as opposed to virtuous.[6] If the dispensational hermeneutic is going to survive challenges similar to the present Progressive/Traditionalist imbroglio, it must have a more clearly defined prime directive. Theoretically, this directive should guarantee dispensational outcomes in *all* instances.

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[2]Craig A. Blaising, "The Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism," in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, by Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993): 36.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid., 36-37.

[6]A virtuous circle is a type of reasoning in which each subsequent favorable outcome is used to reinforce the original hypothesis. It is considered an acceptable or genuine form of reasoning. See Robert D. Coleman, "What is Circular Reasoning?" <http://www.numeraire.com/download/WhatIsCircularReasoning.pdf >, 2006.

The big house approach is failing.[7] Traditional Dispensationalists have allowed their hermeneutical waters to be muddied by supposed parallels to ancient Jewish interpretive methods, *sensus plenior*, double/multiple fulfillment, pietism/mysticism, and irreproducibility. All of these are solutions proposed to solve inductively generated anomalies supposedly found in an analogous text. The hermeneutical set must be bounded. It cannot survive with the wide range of diverse and contradictory axioms presently in play.

"Where Angels Fear to Tread": A Proposal

This writer is submitting for consideration the following proposal. *All Scripture has a univocal meaning which can only be ascertained at the point of transfer (historical/grammatical) between the immediate author and the initial recipient(s).* This "single meaning" may be *used* in different ways but *all* extensions are applications and not to be directly identified with the *sensus singular*.

Substantiation

In recent years *sensus singular* has been widely de-emphasized or rejected. Progressive such as Bock reject it outright,[8] while many Traditionalists struggle with the concept.[9] Yet, there is still a compelling case to be made that this principle ought to be instated (reinstated??) as *the* exclusive *sine qua non* for all interpretive endeavors.

Historical Support

Space does not permit any analysis but there are many past and present interpreters who have directly or indirectly supported this principle: Milton Terry, Bernard Ramm, A. Berkeley Mickelsen, Earl Radmacher, Robert H. Stein, Vern Poythress, Paul Lee Tan, Robert L. Thomas and Walter C. Kaiser. It is even affirmed by the Westminster Confession.

Direct Scriptural Support

In order to invoke an aphorism such as this one prior to any extensive examination of the particulars, one must have a sufficiently clear mandate from the text itself. The following passages are offered for this purpose.

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[7] "Almost anywhere one turns these days, he finds violations of this principle, however. As a consequence, evangelicals have drifted out "upon a sea of uncertainty and conjecture," as Terry predicted about a hundred years ago." Robert L. Thomas, "The Principle of Single Meaning," *Masters Seminary Journal* 12 (2001): 34.

[8] "The reason this writer rejects a "total" identification between the divine intent and the human author's intent is that in certain psalms, as well as in other Old Testament passages, theological revelation had not yet developed to the point where the full thrust of God's intention was capable of being understood by the human author. Darrell L Bock, "Evangelicals and the Use of the Old Testament in the New—Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 (1985): 308.

[9] "Seeing the authorial intentions of the divine author and the human author to be thoroughly identical cannot be justified." Raju D. Kanjummen, "The Single Intent of Scripture-Critical Examination of a Theological Construct," *Grace Theological Journal* 7 (1986): 109.

John 10:35

It is the Feast of Dedication and Jesus is in Jerusalem standing among the religious leaders of Israel. As the conversation unfolds these "leaders" pick up stones to stone Him based on the charge of blasphemy because he made Himself "out to be God." Jesus refers them to Psalm 82:6 where mere men are called *gods*. He maintains that He cannot be charged with blasphemy because "the Scripture cannot be broken" (οὐ δύναται λυθῆναι ἡ γραφή). The issue is primarily one of extension. Can a statement made by the Old Testament scriptures be meaningful and authoritative in this new setting? Has time or tradition (analytical context) in any way altered the fact that the Old Testament text referred to mere mortals as *gods*? Is there any hermeneutical construct that can break the original sense of the passage? Jesus thinks not.

A comparison of contexts with Psalm 82 is striking. There, Yahweh takes "His stand in His own congregation" in the "midst of his rulers" (v. 1). He declares that they "do not know nor do they understand. They walk about in darkness" (v. 5). Yahweh then says, "I said, 'You are gods, and all of you are sons of the most high.' Nevertheless you will die like men and fall like any one of the princes" (vv. 6-7). Returning to the New Testament, God (Jesus) again stands in the midst of His congregation and again they do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God.

The clause in question, *Scripture cannot be broken*, is parenthetical to the argument. It is a self-contained syllogism that the Jewish leadership could not publicly reject. That syllogism would look something like this.

Major premise:	The Scriptures cannot be broken.
Minor premise:	The Scriptures call certain men set apart by God, "gods."
Conclusion:	Whoever is so set apart by God is rightly called "god."

Based on this foundation Jesus reasons:

Major premise:	Whoever is so set apart by God is rightly called "god."
Minor premise:	Jesus is so set apart (sanctified and sent) by God.
Conclusion:	Jesus is rightly called "god."

Jesus is building his case on the *unbreakability* of Scriptures. Because of the manner in which He invokes it, it must be considered axiomatic. It is treated as an external and irrefutable foundation for all that follows.

The Greek word used here is λυθῆναι, an aorist passive infinitive of λύω. The basic meaning is *to loose*, but its semantic range makes it impossible to certify any single denotation. Context is everything. Jesus is offering this axiom as a *Cartesian indubitable* or *irreducible* upon which to found His argument. Such an irreducible must by definition be immutable, infrangible and indestructible. The understanding of Scripture *most* compatible with this description is what is commonly called the literal method of interpretation, specifically when that method affirms single meaning as defined at the point-of-transfer. Single meaning is entailed in an absolute sense by the simple fact that Jesus understood this to be a fixed foundation for His argument. The point-of-transfer locus is implied by the fact that Jesus expected all them to clearly comprehend it.

Revelation 22:18-19

This is the final of three similar injunctions.[10] For the purpose of this study one must clarify what is meant by *adding to* and *taking away from* the text. It cannot be dealing with canonicity or the Bible would have ended with the Pentateuch. It cannot be referring to word-count, morphology, literary format, etc., or the text could not be translated. It seems unlikely that it is specifically announcing the end of revelatory gifts.[11] The injunction must relate to concepts and not to forms and/or methods for it is the *words* of the text that cannot be altered. *Adding* and *taking* are best understood as complementary as opposed to distributive. Like *jot and tiddle* and *image and likeness*, they are much stronger in tandem than when understood independently. Their sense is a reinforced assertion that the message is not to be manipulated in any conceivable fashion.[12]

There seems to be a very thin line, if there is a line at all, between finding additional meaning in a passage and *adding to* a passage. It would seem even more troublesome to further designate this additional meaning as a textually taught methodology and enjoin non-apostles to freshen passages. The most compatible position is that held by literalists who believe in single meaning as it exists at the point-of-transfer.

2 Peter 1:19-21

2 Peter 1 is the most extended New Testament discussion of epistemology.[13] False teachers have infiltrated the churches and Peter writes to those having "a faith of the same kind as" his (v.1). This implies that there are those who have a different kind of faith, i.e., the false teachers. Peter's argument is straightforward. Two faiths may be equated only when they are founded upon the same knowledge. "Grace and peace" are multiplied to the readers by this true

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[10]See Deuteronomy 4: 2 ("You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.") and Proverbs 30:6 ("Do not add to His words or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.").

[11]For an example of this position see Robert L. Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy in Rev 22:18," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32 (1989): 201-16. However, if one allows that this announces the end of revelatory gifts then it is secondarily implied that those with said revelatory gifts may add to or subtract from the text. Scripture requires that even its authors be subject to existing content. The prophets are subject to the prophets (1 Corinthians 14:32). Jesus himself denied altering the existing text and forbade other to do so. "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them,* he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:18-19). Paul in warning Timothy about false teachers who would manipulate the text declared all the Scripture that Timothy had known from childhood to be immediately and equally "inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

[12]This would include even noble purposes. All who manipulate the text do not do so out of evil intents. When Eve was questioned by the serpent she upgraded the prohibition that God had originally given. It certainly follows that if one cannot touch the fruit, it is impossible to eat the fruit. However, the fatal results of this encounter suggest that maybe that initial liberty taken with the *word* may have belied a deeper and temporarily invisible problem.

[13]Some form of the two words most frequently used for knowing or knowledge occurs nine times in this chapter.

knowing (v 2). The eight qualities listed in verses 5-7 are rendered neither useless nor unfruitful by this true knowing (v. 8). This knowledge was delivered by eye-witnesses who were present for the content they announced (v. 16). Now Peter says there is a "more sure" accounting of this knowledge, i.e., the Scriptures. He says that the reader must know this "first of all" (τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες). Peter uses this phrase twice in the book. Here it designates the unchanging foundation for a proper epistemology. In 3:3 it designates the "unchanging foundation" for the improper epistemology used by the false teachers.

  No shortage of material has been produced discussing the meaning of "prophetic word made more sure," "one's own interpretation," and "by an act of human will." None of these discussions need affect the assertion made in this study. Peter considers the nature of Scripture to be of *first* or irreducible importance to a growing and productive knowledge of God that results in the same kind of faith as Peter's. *What has happened*, even if it be from the beginning, never overrules *what is written*.

  The present situation among dispensationalists is somewhat analogous. Some have recently suggested that the intervening years between the Old Testament and the New Testament in some way matured the meaning of the text. They argue that this has been the way it is with mankind and with texts since the creation of the world. What they fail to realize is that this text is unlike any other text. It was not produced "by an act of human will but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." Therefore, it is first-order or direct knowledge and impervious to even the highest-order of human experiences such as an eye-witness account.

<center>Secondary Scriptural Support</center>

  While the following suggestions may not be compelling in and of themselves, they do provide circumstantial support to the central thesis.

1 Timothy 3:16

  When Paul chooses to describe the text as God-breathed, he uses a compound noun that associates the status of the text with an action taken by God. Clearly there are no verbal concepts (tense, voice, mood, etc.) grammaticalized by this noun. However, there is still semantic value retained simply by reason of the fact that Paul had other options available to him. The verbal notion of "breath" within the communication process only occurs at the point of transfer.

1 Peter 2:21

  "Men moved by the spirit spoke" (ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν). The main action or message here is that men spoke. The emphasis, however, is on the fact that the *Holy Spirit* moved them. Φερόμενοι is a present, active, participle and as such only grammaticalizes temporal content in conjunction with the main verb. In this case both actions occur simultaneously. Thus, it would seem that only the act of speaking/writing is covered by the Holy Spirit's movement. The divine guarantee is uniquely fused with human intent at the point of transfer.

Numbers 23:19, 1 Samuel 15:29 Titus 1:2, Romans 3:4 and Hebrews 6:18

Lying requires context. Even for God, it can only occur at the point of transfer. This is commonly understood in all situations of life. What a person says only has clarity in relationship to the person to whom he makes that statement. Someone overhearing a conversation has no claim to the content of that conversation. For example, if a professor tells a student that he/she has received an A in a particular course, other students who overhear the statement, "I gave you an A," cannot accuse the professor of lying because they did not get an A.

Conversely, even a factually accurate statement can be used to deceive if the speaker knows that the hearer will misinterpret that statement. Under human circumstances, one could hardly be expected to know every possible way that his/her statements might be taken. This is not true for God. He is omniscient. Since He takes responsibility for the content of scripture and since He knows exactly how His intended audience will understand His statements, the meaning of such statements crystallize exclusively as a *un-lie* in the act of transfer. There is no other place in the process of communication where all of the necessary components always exist. In order for the text to be deception free, i.e., not a lie, God must take responsibility for both intent and reception.

1 Corinthians 14:22

Prophets are subject to the prophets. There is a very clear argument entailed in this passage. If the spirit of prophecy (active prophets) is to be subject to the prophets (existing prophecy), the existing prophecy must be absolutely stable. If the spirit of the prophets is permitted to freshen or manipulate existing prophecy, then there is no standard by which prophets can be judged.

A Test Case: Matt 2:11

This study is suggesting that if interpreters would consistently and conscientiously apply the single-meaning principle, the result should be a more consistent and viable dispensationalism. This writer has chosen Matthew 2:11 as a test case because it is frequently offered as one of the most difficult passage to reconcile with *sensus singular*. If there is hope for this passage, could there not be hope for all such anomalies?

A Contextual Analysis of Matthew 1-2

No Old Testament writer manipulates a genealogy to produce the kind of mathematical symmetry displayed in Matthew's. That Matthew calls attention to that symmetry (1:17) only serves to heighten the reader's anticipation of some greater significance than that conveyed by the unmarked data. These three groups of fourteen are without formal or dynamic precedent.[14]

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[14]Both numbers have symbolic significance. Fourteen is the numeric value of David's name and three for the nascent church with its Trinitarian content is symbolic of God.

Note the following contrivances. The first group of fourteen includes three women by name, each of whom would be of some embarrassment to Jewish proprieties.[15] The second group of fourteen references only one woman, Bathsheba. The text does not name her.[16] The final group of fourteen is headed by a circumstance (captivity) and not a person. Additionally, it only lists thirteen generations. All of these abnormalities are intentional markers and must be accounted for in any understanding of the infancy narrative and perhaps the whole book.

1:1-17 is a discrete literary unit marked by *inclusio* and *anaphora*.[17] Claire suggests that the genealogy itself is used to both introduce and foreshadow the content of the Infancy Narrative. It also appears to foreshadow the content of the whole book.[18] Thus, in these opening verses Matthew achieves two distinct and important purposes. The unaffected genealogy is, in and of itself, a strong component in Matthew's argument. The numerical affectations only serve to highlight this Davidic element (Fourteen is the numerical value of the name *David* in Hebrew.). However, the affectations applied to the segments (Abraham to David; David to captivity, and captivity to Jesus) are not in and of themselves meaningful to the heir-of-David argument. They appear to foreshadow the shape of the broader discourse rather than reinforce the immediate. In effect, by using three groups of fourteen, Mathew is telling the reader two things: this is what I am going to say (Jesus is the true Davidic King) and this is how I am going to say it (three main sections or arguments).[19]

The three movements within the genealogy have distinct characteristics which foreshadow content. From Abraham to David the King/Seed was not publicly identified. From David until

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[15]"The surprising inclusion of four Old Testament women in Christ's genealogy has generated much discussion by those who recognize the typical genealogical form used in Matthew 1:1–18. Though the reference to Tamar, Rehab, Ruth, and "the wife of Uriah" provides historical information that is not part of the genealogy proper, the mention of these particular matriarchs and not others seems to be an intentional and significant feature of Matthew's portrayal of the Messiah. Why did Matthew include the names of four women in a patriarchal genealogy of Messiah? And why did he choose these women and not other more prominent matriarchs?" John C. Hutchison "Women, Gentiles, and the Messianic Mission in Matthew's Genealogy," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (2001): 152.

[16]She, like the first three, introduces an embarrassing episode into the genealogy, i.e., she committed adultery with David and was at least partially complicit in the murder and cover-up. It is interesting to note that from David on no other female is mentioned in the genealogy. This is meaningful. Only the *legal right* to the throne is in play from Solomon to Joseph. All female participation reroutes through Nathan as demonstrated in Luke's genealogy. This *may* account for the omission of Bathsheba's name (the virgin conception makes the woman less relevant to the legal claim espoused by Matthew) and the lack of any references to women from that point on in the genealogy. She was the last woman of genetic consequence in the genealogy but not via Solomon.

[17]"Unfortunately, the 'signals' which mark the beginnings or endings of units in ancient texts are not as easily recognized by the modern eye. Therefore, through text linguistics the critic attempts to identify unit boundaries in the discourse. Identification of turning points in the development of the author's discussion provides a beginning place for the isolation of units which have various functions in the discourse." George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 49.

[18]Dan Claire, "Fulfillment and Foreshadowing in the Matthean Infancy Narrative," Unpublished oral presentation to the Evangelical Theological Society, November, 2007. Claire's presentation at ETS did not discuss "foreshadowings" beyond the Infancy Narrative but this writer assumes that he too would project the influence beyond the first two chapters.

[19]Diverse purposes do not impeach *sensus singular*. This is comparable to a preacher who announces that he has three reasons to believe a particular doctrine. He is using his proposition to communicate both the subject and the organization of that content.

the captivity the King/Seed was visible and openly acknowledged by the populace. From captivity until the Messiah the genealogy of the King/Seed was again buried amidst the many trials experienced by the nation. This roughly approximates the traditional understanding of Matthew and of the life of Christ in general.[20]

The three movements in the genealogy also correspond to the three divisions within the Infancy Narrative. The first movement of the genealogy lists three Gentile women. One such mention would be unusual but three are clearly a marker. Each of these women introduces an unexpected twist to the narrative. Who would have thought that the seed of blessing would have travelled such a circuitous route? This is comparable to unusual "twists" in Matthew 1:18-25.

The second movement in the genealogy, David to Captivity, corresponds to Matthew 2:1-12. In both the king is openly acknowledged. For Matthew two distinct worldly authorities, the magi and Herod, explicitly recognize the newborn child as a newborn king. The final movement of the genealogy, captivity to Jesus, corresponds to Matthew 2:13-23.[21] It is here that the major discontinuity issues emerge.

<div align="center">Matthew 2:15 and Hosea 11:1</div>

Traditionally interpreters have almost universally assumed that Matthew was using the Hosea 11:1 quotation to refer to Jesus' return from Egypt.[22] As such, this reuse is unquestionably at odds with what Hosea is saying. Claire suggests, based on his understanding of the genealogy, and this writer concurs, that neither Hosea nor Matthew are arguing that Jesus would come out of Egypt but rather that Messiah would call Israel out of Egypt/captivity. Thus, the *son* in question is not Jesus but Israel. The fact that the third "fourteen" is headed by "captivity" (like Egypt) and only has thirteen generations (Jesus is both thirteenth and fourteenth) foreshadows this shift in perspective.

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[20]"Traditionally this span of time has been divided into a **year of obscurity**, a **year of popularity** and a **year of rejection**." Robert H Gundry, *Survey of the New Testament*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 112. "In any case, our Lord's public ministry lasted approximately three and a half years and may be divided into three periods, which have traditionally been called 'the year of obscurity,' 'the year of public favor,' and 'the year of opposition.'" David J. MacLeod, "The 'Year of Obscurity': Jesus in the Shadow of John the Baptist," *Emmaus Journal* 10 (2001): 157. See also Bruce M. Metzger, *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), 113-14.

[21]Technically, this is not a novel arrangement for the first two chapters of Matthew. Brown suggests it in his commentary on Matthew but with different content. Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company), 52-54. E Frank Tupper suggests this is "the single most important work for interpreting Matthew's story of the birth of Jesus . . . . These different scenes in the infancy narrative are carefully crafted, they reflect discernible patterns, and they answer specific questions." E. Frank Tupper, "The Bethlehem Massacre: Christology and Providence" *Review and Expositor* 88 (1991), 401.

[22]Evans is typical, "Jesus' departure from Egypt, Matthew tells us, fulfills the prophecy, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son." Craig A. Evans, "The Function of the Old Testament in the New," in *Introducing New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Scot McKnight, *Guides to New Testament Exegesis,* Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 174. See also Thomas: "Sometimes the NT uses a non-prophetic OT passage such as Hos 11:1 and treats it as though it predicted a NT occurrence. Hosea wrote about the historical exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt, but Matthew applies the same words to Jesus' departure from Egypt with His family after their flight there to escape the murderous intentions of Herod the Great." Robert L. Thomas, "The New Testament Use of the Old Testament," *Masters Seminary Journal* 13 (2002):86.

It is frequently overlooked that Hosea does not use Egypt to *signify* Egypt. He uses it to invoke *condition* not *location*. This is metonymy, a common literary figure in both Hebrew and English. The symmetry between Hosea and Matthew runs deep. Gomer is taken out of harlotry only to return to harlotry. Her second rescue is the permanent one. So it is with Israel: from first bondage (literal Egypt) to freedom and back to second bondage (figurative Egypt) where she will remain until Messiah rescues her. Hosea is prophesying that future Israel will be recalled out of a future-Egypt just as the historical Israel was called out of historical Egypt. This parallels Gomer who *called* and *recalled* out of harlotry.[23]

Consider Israel's situation in Egypt just before she was first called. She was ruled by a foreign power. A foreign king was killing all the male children. Were conditions any different in the Israel of Messiah's day? Both Hosea and Matthew are reusing an existing text in a manner completely compatible with *sensus singular*.

Conclusion

Evans suggests that efforts to conform a New Testament writer's reuses to a thorough-going *sensus singular* are both wrong-headed and detrimental. He writes:

> There is therefore no need either (1) to criticize the NT writers for not always providing the kind of exegesis that we moderns value so much and think is valid, or (2) to foist unnatural interpretations upon the Scriptures in order to demonstrate that the NT writer has given the OT passage no other sense than what we moderns believe to have been the original.[24]

Rather than foisting an unnatural meaning on the text, this proposal actually helps clarify the meaning of the text. Only by accepting *sensus singular* and not critiquing reuses such as Matthew's can the reader ever hope to fully understand his message.

> Notice what is clearly at stake here. Do the principal author (God), and the instrumental author (the Scripture writer) supply us with one truth-intention, whose meaning is to be found in the intention of the human writer and the sense conveyed by his words or with two or more independent or related meanings, of which one or more of the meanings are totally unknown to the human writer? If a passage does have a double meaning or a multiplicity of meanings, then who or what shall authoritatively decide the limits of the truth of that passage? . . . If later ramifications are found to be located in words which a

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[23]Interestingly, the broader imagery in Hosea corresponds to the pattern used by Matthew in his genealogy. Using Hosea and Gomer as a paradigm, the reader sees Gomer in harlotry, Gomer in a marriage, Gomer back in harlotry; and Gomer's final restoration. This corresponds to Hosea's vision of God's dealings with Israel: Israel in Egypt, Israel in the Promised Land; Israel in Egypt; and Israel's final restoration. That Hosea is using Egypt in a figurative fashion is evident within the greater context. Compare Hosea 9:3 (They will not remain in the Lord's land, But Ephraim will return to Egypt, and in Assyria they will eat unclean food.) with Hosea 11:5 (They will not return to the land of Egypt; but Assyria—he will be their king because they refused to return to Me.) The use of geographical entities as a platform to speak of later political entities is not uncommon in the prophetic books. Babylon is frequently used as a figure for the end time economic and political entity governed by Antichrist. Antiochus Epiphanes is used in a similar fashion as a prefiguration of the Antichrist in Daniel. What is important here is that Matthew is not doing anything with the Exodus text that Hosea did not already do.

[24]Evans, "The Function of the Old," 193.

previous writer ignorantly wrote, what shall be the authority status of these more-than-literal senses?[25]

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[25]Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Eschatological Hermeneutics of 'Epangelicalism': Promise Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 13 (1970): 94.