

Righteousness and Peace Kiss: The Reconciliation of Authorial Intent and Biblical Typology¹

Robert L. Plummer

WHILE I WAS working on this article in my office, I received an urgent call from my wife and three young daughters. They were at the Louisville Zoo, and they had an important question: What is the plural form of “rhinoceros?”

Of course, as a professional theologian, I am skilled in the art of appearing competent while at the same time sidestepping difficult questions. I suggested the obvious: “rhinos.” But, the question remains. To persons familiar with the English language, there are two likely answers: rhinoceroses and rhinoceri. If I were to take a poll of the readers of this essay, opinions would be divided. A quick look at the Merriam-Webster online dictionary confirms that both spellings are, in fact, permissible.

This short anecdote illustrates my objectives in this paper. As we

approach some difficult Old Testament quotations in the New Testament, we can ask, “Is the use of this Old Testament text by a New Testament author best explained by author-oriented hermeneutics?” Many will answer yes. We can ask of the same text then, “Is this text best explained by typological interpretation?” And others will answer, “Yes, typology, is the best approach.”

I am proposing that maybe we can answer yes to both of those questions and end up being more faithful interpreters in the process.

INTRODUCTION

Listen to good evangelical sermons, and you will hear statements such as, “The Bible says,” or “The Apostle Paul tells us here,” or “The inspired Scripture reads.” Similarly, in less colloquial fashion, most evangelical commentaries and hermeneutics texts seek to root the meaning of Scripture in the conscious intent of the inspired human author.² In other words, we must know what a text *meant* to its original author before we can know

ROBERT L. PLUMMER is Associate Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He is also an Elder at Sojourn Community Church in Louisville, Kentucky. Dr. Plummer has served in missionary assignments of varying length in China, Israel, Trinidad, Ghana, Malaysia, and Turkey. He has written many scholarly articles and is the author of *Paul's Understanding of the Church's Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* (Paternoster Press, 2006) and *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Kregel, 2010).

what a text *means* for us today. The conscious intent of the divinely-inspired human author is the channel of meaning in which all other implications and applications must flow.

Most of us would affirm this statement, I imagine, but then an evangelical hermeneutical schizophrenia often develops. What do we do about those Old Testament texts which are quoted in the New Testament in such a way that they seem to go beyond and in some cases completely ignore the meaning of the Old Testament authors? One approach is to hold doggedly that the Old Testament prophets were in fact conscious of all Messianic sense that the New Testament ascribes to their writings.³ Such unrelenting author-oriented hermeneutics, while appealingly consistent, is beyond the bounds of most scholars' credulity. For example, let's consider a text: In Hos 11:1 and following, the prophet speaks of Israel's redemption out of Egypt and subsequent tragic unfaithfulness. Hosea writes,

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images (Hos 11:1-2).⁴

The author of the first Gospel, Matthew, picks up part of verse 1 and applies it to Jesus' return from Egypt after Joseph and Mary fled with the Christ child from the Bethlehem massacre. Matthew writes with reference to Joseph,

So he [Joseph] got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Matt 2:14-15).

If Hosea consciously had in mind the fulfillment of this text as the Messiah's return from Egypt, there is no indication in the Old Testament of

that fact. So, like Melchizedek, without lineage or precursor, Matthew's hermeneutical affirmation appears suddenly on the scene.

Looking at the context of Hos 11:1, it's not surprising that some thoughtful readers flee to *sensus plenior* as an explanation for Matthew's use of this text.⁵ *Sensus plenior* is a fuller, secret meaning of the text, unknown to prior human authors until the Holy Spirit revealed it through inspired New Testament writers. It's difficult to argue with this interpretive trump card, but most scholars also find it an intellectually unsatisfying way of dealing with intertextuality. Case in point: imagine an early Jew who has just read Matthew's Gospel for the first time now interviewing him for the local synagogue gazette:

Interviewer: "Matthew, please explain to me how this quotation from the book of Hosea respects the context in which it originally occurred."

Matthew: "Oh, it doesn't respect the context at all."

Interviewer: "What do you mean, Matthew?"

Matthew: "I am a divinely-inspired author of Scripture. I have access to secret meanings of Hosea's text of which he and no one else prior to me was aware."

Interviewer: "Well, what can make such idiosyncratic interpretation valid or persuasive to others?"

Matthew: "Well, of course, by the fact that I am divinely-inspired. That makes it true."

Interviewer: "It is hard to argue with that."

Matthew: "Yes, it is."

A sort of middle road between unwavering author-oriented hermeneutics and *sensus plenior* is biblical typology. According to a biblical typological approach, the authors of the New Testament shared a number of assumptions that justify their Messianic reading of Old Testament texts—which, on face value, did not have obvious Messianic implications. The main assumption deals

with God's divine sovereignty and intentionality in history. God has intervened in history in ever-increasing but corresponding ways. Thus, later saving interventions can be seen as fulfillments (i.e., divinely-orchestrated correspondences) of earlier ones. This typological pattern is especially pronounced when dealing with God's *climactic* intervention in the sending of the Messiah. Previous deliverances, saving events, saving persons, cultic and royal establishments find their fulfillment in the final saving event, final saving person, final saving sacrifice and final Davidic King.⁶

In my assessment, biblical typology is undeniably what the New Testament authors are doing. To deny biblical typology is to deny that the sun is shining and that the grass is green. Yet, must we simply embrace an interpretive schizophrenia at this point—applying a strict author-oriented hermeneutic to most texts but unpredictably swerving into biblical typology in those rare instances of necessity? Does a dually-authored text (i.e., written by humans, yet at the same time fully inspired by God) demand this unique sort of dual hermeneutic? Admittedly, the meaning of biblical typological texts *can* be rooted in the conscious authorial intent of the *New Testament* human author. But, what of the *Old Testament* author (the author of the quoted text as it originally appeared)? Do we simply cut the Gordian knot of the original author's intent by drawing our sharpened saber of biblical typology? Is there no way to reconcile the Old Testament human author's conscious meaning of his text with later New Testament usage?

In the remainder of this article, I am not going to argue that all typological prophetic quotations in the New Testament can be rooted in the conscious interpretive intent of Old Testament authors. Such an argument would need to be supported by hundreds of pages of discussion of specific texts. My scope is more limited. I would like to propose, in a very preliminary fashion that the Old Testament authors' conscious intent and any later usage in the New Testament can and should

be more closely related. I am saying that this closer relationship seems to be a promising and neglected line of inquiry. I would like to explore this thesis with one significant New Testament example in light the entire Old Testament book from which the text is quoted. As we have already been looking at Hos 11:1 and Matt 2:15, we will continue that line of inquiry.

HOSEA: A TEST CASE

As we have already seen, in the immediate context of Hosea 11:1, the Old Testament prophet gives no indication that his text has future Messianic significance. That is, the text does *not* read like this:

I, Hosea the prophet tell you this: in the future the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem. People will try to kill him, but his mother (his virgin mother) and his father (his adopted father, of the line of King David) will flee with him to Egypt. Yes, and then after that evil king trying to kill him dies (whose name is Herod, by the way), he will come back to the Promised Land and it will then be said, "Out of Egypt I called my Son."⁷

Frankly, most Christians in the pew (and possibly many pastors too!) assume that if they looked up the Old Testament reference it would read something like this.

We're going to have to look a little more broadly in Hosea if we are going to find authorial *permission* to use his text in the fashion that Matthew has. Possibly that is a better idea than conscious intent—*genuine authorial permission* based on Hosea's reference to prior events and texts and the unfinished lines he draws out in the direction of the future.

In essence, I am asserting that Hosea quite consciously sees himself mid-way on the dimly lit stairsteps of revelation. He looks down the stairs which are lit well (the previous revelation) and sees the prior interventions of God and sees correspondences to them in his own day—a repetition

of steps in parallel fashion. Similarly, Hosea looks up the stairs—again quite consciously—seeing the stair steps of future revelation repeated in ever climactic pattern. Hosea also recognizes that there is a *top* to the stairs—a final climactic saving intervention of God, at which point, all the stairway will be illumined—and the line of successive saving steps will be unmistakably visible. So, though Hosea does not apparently consciously know of the Messiah’s coming flight into Egypt, *he gives implicit permission for later readers who witness subsequent divine revelation to find that correspondence in his text.*

Let’s have another fictitious interview and then look at specific texts in Hosea that support my assertion.

Plummer: “Pardon me, Hosea. I am from the distant future, and I’ve come back to chat with you. I was peeking over your shoulder, and I just noticed that you wrote about God calling his Son out of Egypt. Is that passage about Jesus?”

Hosea: “Who is Jesus?”

Plummer: “Jesus is the Messiah who conquers sin and death forever.”

Hosea: “Hallelujah! I did not know his name, but I knew he was coming. But, what do you mean by asking, ‘Is this text about Jesus?’”

Plummer: “Well, in the future, when the Messiah is born, the evil king reigning at that time tries to kill him, so his virgin mother and adoptive father flee with him to Egypt. When all is safe, they come back to the Promised Land. Matthew, one of God’s spokesmen in Jesus’ day, says that this text of yours is pointing to this very flight of the Messiah into Egypt.”

Hosea: “Yes, I see. In my text, I explicitly note that in the Jewish nation’s sojourn in Egypt, it looked like God’s promises had failed—that the descendents of Abraham would be enslaved forever outside of the Promised Land—yet, God intervened to deliver them. His promises did not fail. So, in the final climactic intervention of God—in the sending of his Son—not just

the nation, but his true, unique Son—it also appeared that God’s promises were in question. Indeed, if the Son had to flee from the Promised Land, how would the Messiah rescue the lost sheep of Israel while living as a refugee in Egypt? Yet, just as before, God miraculously intervenes to save and return his chosen one.⁸ And, though the prior son Israel (son with a lower case) failed, this unique Son (Son with an upper case)—succeeded. Amazing! The historical parallels show God’s consistent intentions! Of course, not knowing exactly how God would repeat his deliverance, I was not fully conscious of this typological correspondence until you told me. But, *I knew later deliverances were coming. I wrote this text, consciously knowing it might be reiterated in a later, parallel, heightened saving event.* Yes, yes, of course that is a valid use. I give implicit permission for the events in my text to be seen as forerunners to future events, *just as I myself draw out lines of correspondence to the prior interventions of God.* Certainly, I give future inspired authors permission to employ the very hermeneutic I myself follow.”

Plummer: “Thanks for talking with us, Hosea.”

Hosea: “Shalom.”

So, in what specific ways, then, does Hosea demonstrate that he knows the provisional nature of his work and give *permission* for later inspired writers to point to divinely-commissioned historical anticipations in earlier times. We now overview three hermeneutical methods that Hosea himself employs—methods, we assume he would permit if found in the later revelatory writings of others.

HERMENEUTICAL METHOD #1

Hosea draws lines of correspondence between God’s prior interventions and God’s interventions in his own day. Repeatedly, God’s prior acts of judgment and salvation are seen as mirror images or anticipations of God’s acts of judgment and salvation in Hosea’s day. In 6:7, for example, Hosea

refers to the fall of the first man, Adam, as a type of the future rebellion of Israel.⁹ The wickedness of the Benjamites reported in Judges 19-21 is taken up as a graphic depiction of the nation's current iniquity (Hos 9:9).¹⁰ Israel's unfaithfulness at Baal Peor is determinative of their condition hundreds of years later (Hos 9:10).¹¹ Just as God raised up David to deliver and establish his people Israel, so again he will raise up a Davidic savior (Hos 3:5).¹²

This pattern of correspondence is seen most strikingly, I believe in Hos 2:13-15. In this text, language from the initial entry of the ancient Israelites into the Promised Land is picked up to describe their prophesied return from Assyrian exile.¹³ Just as Matthew in his Gospel is dependent on the geographical parallel of both ancient Israel and Jesus being brought back from Egypt, so Hosea's parallel is dependent on a geographic specificity. It is through the valley of Achor that both the ancient Israelites and future returnees from Assyria will make their way into Israel. Is this parallel due simply to happenstances of historical geography? Not according to Hosea. The prophet sees not only divinely-ordained parallels, but a heightening of the God's saving work in the second instance.

HERMENEUTICAL METHOD #2

Hosea points to a succession of future saving events, climaxing in the coming Messianic king and eschatological age. In Hos 2:13-15, we see that God's saving guidance of the exiles through the valley of Achor will far surpass their initial entry into the land. Hosea delivers this word of the Lord:

"I will punish her [i.e., Israel] for the days she burned incense to the Baals; she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot," declares the LORD. "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. [*Nota Bene:* much better than 40 years of wandering in the desert!] There I will give her back her vine-

yards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt."

The Valley of Achor (meaning valley of trouble) is a valley near Jericho that was of some significance during Israel's first entry into the Promised Land. It was here, Joshua 7 tells us, that Achan and his family and his livestock were stoned and burned after he kept for himself a robe from Babylon, 200 shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold—items from Jericho that had been devoted to destruction (Josh 7:21). Only after the community's stoning of Achan, do we read, "Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger" (Josh 7:26).

Hosea tells us that when Israel streams back into the Promised Land from their coming Assyrian exile, she will again pass through the valley of Achor, but it will not be a valley of trouble, but, "a door of hope" (Hos 2:15). The Israelites had sung songs of joy when they came out of Egypt, but by the time they got to the valley of Achor, we find Joshua tearing his clothes, falling facedown on the ground before the ark of God, and the elders of Israel sprinkling dust on their heads" (Josh 7:6). Joshua cries out, "Ah, Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us?" (Josh 7:7) There will be no weeping and rending of clothing this next time, says Hosea. There will be re-entry into the land with singing. So, Hosea points out for us *heightened* historical correspondences of God's saving interventions—correspondences based on a geographic location near Jericho—a location common to both the initial conquest of the land and Israel's coming return from Assyrian exile. Arguably, Matthew employs the same hermeneutic as Hosea—citing Egypt as a common geographic marker in God's heightened saving interventions. Does not Hosea give implicit permission for Matthew to employ his same interpretive method?

Even more striking in Hosea is the intersection of interpretive method and the eschatological tra-

jectory that the Old Testament prophet lays out for his hearers. We read in Hosea 3:4-5,

For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. Afterward the Israelites will return and *seek the LORD their God and David their king*. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings *in the last days* (my emphasis).

It is difficult to be more escatologically explicit than a promise of a Davidic king, though elsewhere Hosea even speaks of the final destruction of death itself—language that Paul picks up to describe the Christian’s resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. Indeed, we read in Hos 13:14 (the Lord speaking in the first person): “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?” To draw upon our earlier analogy, Hosea clearly knows the top of the staircase is coming—the final, end-times, saving intervention of God through his coming Messiah. Surely Hosea implies that when that day dawns, the purveyors of divine revelation are authorized to look back and cite God’s earlier saving works—whatever they be—as leading to this final, decisive work.

HERMENEUTICAL METHOD #3

Hosea vacillates between individual and corporate entities in the lines of correspondence that he draws out in both the past and the future. That is, the individual is often representative of the community and vice versa.¹⁴ Of course, it is widely recognized that Matthew traffics within these categories—so that he is able to think of both the nation and the historical person Jesus as the Son of God.¹⁵ Jesus as the *final* and unique Son both serves and represents the broader nation. What is significant for this study, however, is that Hosea embraces the same concept of corporate solidarity. At numerous places he vacillates between a key historical person who represents or stands

in for the nation and the broader mass of Israelites. These comparisons include: Adam, Jacob, Ephraim, David, etc. (And, though we won’t pursue the topic now, Hosea also recognizes realities of corporate solidarity outside Israel as well, such as the king of Assyria and the nation of Assyria). Hosea 12:2-6 is a representative text:

The LORD has a charge to bring against Judah [the nation]; he will punish Jacob [the nation] according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he [the historical individual] grasped his brother’s heel; as a man he struggled with God. He [again, the historical individual] struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there—the LORD God Almighty, the LORD is his name of renown! But you [back to the nation, now addressed in the second person] must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always.

Without a doubt, in Hosea’s interpretive grid there is a fluctuation between key historical figures and the broader Israelite nation. Does Hosea not imply, then, that later divine spokesmen may employ that same concept of corporate solidarity while interacting with the individual and corporate references in Hosea’s prophetic text?

CONCLUSION

In Psalm 85, the psalmist celebrates God’s saving love towards his people. In verse 9 and 10 we read, “Surely his salvation is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. Love and faithfulness meet together; *righteousness and peace kiss each other*” (my emphasis). Righteousness and peace kiss each other—a beautiful metaphorical picture of how God’s distinct blessings upon his people complement rather than compete with each other. I have argued that in analogous fashion, we should re-think the relationship of biblical typology and author-oriented

hermeneutics. These are not two systems that are in competition with each other—with one winning and one losing in the game of hermeneutics. Rather, given the Old Testament authors' implicit authorial permission to interpret their texts typologically in light of later revelation, we should view biblical typology and author-oriented hermeneutics as essential and complementary elements of interpretation. They are like love and faithfulness meeting together, like righteousness and peace kissing each other.

ENDNOTES

¹This paper was originally given as an oral address at the November 2009 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Though I revised the essay slightly, I chose to maintain the informal tone. For more detailed discussion on interpreting prophetic texts, the reader is referred to my book, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 197-212.

²Robert H. Stein comments, "The more traditional approach to the study of the Bible has been to see the meaning as being controlled by the author. According to this view, the meaning of a text is what the author consciously intended to say by the text" (*A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994], 20-21).

³E.g., Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. writes, "[T]he whole revelation of God as revelation hangs in jeopardy if we, an apostle, or an angel from heaven try to add to, delete, rearrange, or reassign the sense or meaning that a prophet himself received" ("Legitimate Hermeneutics," in *Inerrancy* [ed. Norman L. Geisler; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979], 135).

⁴English Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (NIV).

⁵Broadus seems to suggest this possibility: "It is not necessary to suppose that this [interpretation expounded by Matthew] was present to the prophet's consciousness. Exalted by inspiration, a prophet may well have said things having deeper meanings than he was distinctly aware of, and which only a later inspiration, coming when the occasion arose, could

fully unfold" (John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* [Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886], 23).

⁶Douglas J. Moo explains, "Basic to typology, it is generally agreed, is the belief that God acts in similar ways in both Testaments; hence, there can be a real correspondence between the Old Testament and the New. That typology works from the narratives of God's activity in history is also a matter of general consensus—although whether the type must always be a *historical* figure, event, or institution is debated" ("The Problem of Sensus Plenior," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* [ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986], 195).

⁷Craig L. Blomberg notes, "The exodus event was regularly seen in the rabbinic literature as a type of the salvation of the messianic age to come (see Str-B 1:85-88). However, there are no extant Jewish uses, before or after the first century, that explicitly link Hos. 11:1 with this typology or suggest that it was ever understood as explicitly messianic" ("Matthew," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* [ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 7).

⁸Blomberg writes, "That Israel had been delivered from Egypt, that Israel would again be exiled there but again restored, and that the child believed to be the Messiah also had to return to Israel from Egypt formed too striking a set of parallels for Matthew to attribute them to chance. God clearly was at work orchestrating the entire series of events" (*ibid.*, 8).

⁹See Duane A. Garrett's helpful discussion of the debated referent for "Adam." He concludes, "It appears that Hosea singled out the shrine at Adam not because of some peculiarity about the town, but because of its namesake. The prophet has made a pun on the name of the town and the name of the original transgressor. His meaning is, 'Like Adam (the man) they break covenants; they are faithless to me there (in the town of Adam)'" (*Hosea, Joel* [New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997], 162-63).

¹⁰See James Luther Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary* (The Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster,

1969), 131; Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, 196.

¹¹Mays, *Hosea*, 132-33.

¹²Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, 104.

¹³*Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁴Klyne Snodgrass writes, “[The expression ‘corporate solidarity’] refers to the oscillation or reciprocal relation between the individual and the community that existed in the Semitic mind. The act of the individual is not merely an individual act, for it affects the community and vice versa. The individual is often representative of the community and vice versa. Achan sinned and the whole nation suffered [Josh 7]” (“The Use of the Old Testament in the New,” in *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation* [ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991], 416).

¹⁵William Hendriksen writes, “When Matthew quotes Hos. 11:1 and applies it to Christ, it is evident that he regards Israel as a type of the Messiah. Jesus Christ, too, is God’s Son. This is true in the deepest, trinitarian sense of the term (cf. John 1:14). Just as Pharaoh, that cruel king, had tried to destroy Israel, so another king, namely Herod, at least equally cruel, was attempting to destroy Christ. But just as on the way to Egypt, during their stay in that house of bondage, and in their exodus, Jehovah had protected his people, so God had protected his Son, not only on the way to Egypt and during his temporary residence there but also on the way back. The Messiah was, as it were, recapitulating the history of his people Israel” (*The Gospel of Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973], 178-79).