



“Out of Egypt I Called My Son” (Matt 2:15) Mosaic Aspect of Jesus’ Divine Sonship

Hermas Asumbi^{a,1}

^a Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Seminari Pineleng

¹ hinode0907@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

“Out of Egypt I called My Son” is a quotation from Hosea. Matthew’s use of it as a ‘direct prophecy’ is considered problematic by some scholars for Hosea wrote it as a merely historical reflection. How should we resolve this problem? Typological approach might be the best way to understand it by which consideration of the events around Jesus’ birth as the fullest expression of divinely intended fulfillments of Old Testament “prophecies” is possible. The evangelist presents double typologies: on one hand, he retrospectively refers to the exodus of Israel and applies it to “new exodus” through Jesus, but on the other hand, he refers to Moses and presents discontinuity and continuity of the divine work of salvation in the person of Jesus. He highlights the Mosaic aspect of Jesus’ divine sonship which underlines further his presentation of Jesus as David’s son (1:1) and his messianic and royal role in the coming of the Kingdom of God (4:17).

ABSTRAK

“Dari Mesir Kupanggil Anak-Ku” adalah kutipan dari kitab Nabi Hosea. Penggunaan teks ini sebagai suatu ‘nubuat langsung’ oleh Matius dianggap bermasalah mengingat Hosea menuliskannya sebagai sebuah refleksi historis saja. Bagaimana sebaiknya kita memahami kutipan ini? Pendekatan tipologis mungkin adalah cara terbaik untuk memahaminya di mana peristiwa-peristiwa seputar kelahiran Yesus bisa dimengerti sebagai ekspresi penuh dari pemenuhan “nubuat-nubuat” Perjanjian Lama sesuai kehendak Allah. Penginjil Matius menghadirkan tipologi ganda: di satu pihak, dia merujuk pada ‘eksodus’ bangsa Israel dari Mesir dan mengaplikasikannya pada “eksodus baru” lewat Yesus; sementara itu, di pihak lain, ia merujuk pada Musa untuk menggarisbawahi diskontinuitas sekaligus kontinuitas karya keselamatan Allah dalam diri Yesus. Lewat tipologi ini, Penginjil Matius menggarisbawahi dimensi Mosaik dari designasi Yesus sebagai Putera Allah sekaligus melengkapi penegasan sebelumnya tentang Yesus sebagai Putera Daud (1:1) dan peranan mesianik-Nya dalam kedatangan Kerajaan Allah (4:17).

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Submitted: 24 January 2021

Revised: 1 February 2021

Accepted: 2 Februari 2021

Keywords: Out of Egypt, exodus, Moses, Jesus, divine sonship, Typology, Israel, Firstborn.

Sejarah Artikel

Diserahkan: 24 January 2021

Direvisi: 1 February 2021

Diterima: 2 Februari 2021

Kata-kata Kunci: Keluar dari Mesir, Keluaran, Musa, Yesus, Putra Ilahi, Tipologi, Israel, Anak Sulung.

Introduction

In the birth narrative of Jesus, we read the story of the flight of the infant Jesus to Egypt and his return to the land of Israel (Matt 2:13-23). Matthew presents these events as fulfillment of Old Testament ‘prophecy’ found

in Hos 11:1, “Out of Egypt I called My Son” (Matt 2:15). As the text of Hosea is merely a historical reflection, Matthew’s understanding as a direct prophecy fulfilled later appears to be problematic. Accordingly, the evangelist is, among others, judged as to have erroneously read Hosea’s text as a direct prophecy fulfilled in Jesus. How should we understand this Matthew’s use of Hosea? What approach should we use to read this quotation to understand Matthew’s theological ideas presented through this story?

Method

This study will try to understand Matthew’s use of Hos 11:1 using a typological approach by which we can understand “fulfillment” in a broader sense. A brief explanation of this approach will be presented below. Before doing so, we will see briefly how grammatical-historical approach cannot give us satisfactory reading of this Matthew’s quotation.

The Flight to Egypt

Matt 2:13-23 is a text (one unity) that describes the flight of infant Jesus (and his family) to Egypt and his return to the land of Israel. The author relates this story dividing it very well in three subsections using three fulfillments of Old Testament “prophecies”. Matt 2:13-15 is the story of the departure to and sojourn in Egypt preceded by the appearance of the angel of the Lord to Joseph who commands him to take the child Jesus and his mother to Egypt, for Herod was willing to search and destroy him. This subsection ends with the Old Testament fulfillment of Hos 11:1, “Out of Egypt I called my son”. The return of child Jesus (and his family) is described in the same way of how the story of departure is told: the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream and commands him to leave for the land of Israel. But due to fear of Archelaus, Herod’s successor, Joseph goes to the region of Galilee, to a town called Nazareth. This subsection ends with Old Testament fulfillment, “He shall be

called a Nazarene” (2:19-23).¹ The departure and return subsections flank the second one concerning the killing of children in Bethlehem by Herod. Herod commands the killing of children out of his anger to the Magi, and also out of his anxiety about the “child king” Jesus (cf. 2:2). This subsection ends with a quotation from Jer 31:15, “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted because they are no more.” The text (2:13-23) is also connected with one another by the presentation of Herod: Herod was willing to destroy the child (subsection 1); Herod killed all children in Bethlehem (subsection 2); Herod died (subsection 3).

This brief study will focus on the first subsection in which we find the quotation from Hos 11:1. It is evident that Matthew quotes it from the Masoretic Text, “and out of Egypt I called My Son” (וממצרים קראתי לבני), and not from LXX which alters “my son” into plural (τέκνα), a translation *ad sensum* indicating all Israelites.²

Quotation problems

This quotation is not free from problems. G. K. Beale mentions three problems related to it:³ (1) in Hosea this verse is a merely historical reflection, but Matthew clearly understands it as a direct prophecy that is fulfilled in Christ; (2) Hosea attributes to all the nations, but Matthew attributes to the individual Jesus; (3) Hos 11:1 reference to Israel coming out of Egypt first introduces the holy family with Jesus entering into Egypt, and it is only later

¹ This ‘quotation’ is completely confusing, for it apparently cannot be found in Old Testament; even nothing seems to resemble it. Many proposals have been suggested to solve this problem. An observation by Menken might give a picture of this problem and possible solutions. He himself draws a conclusion that this ‘quotation’ is composed with the help of analogous verses: Judge 13:5, 7 and Isa 14:14; See Maarten J. J. Menken, “The Source of Old Testament Quotation in Matthew 2:23,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120, no. 3 (2001): 451–68.

² Steve Moyise, “Matthew’s Bible in the Infancy Narrative,” in *Scripture of Israel in Jewish and Christian Tradition. Essays in Honor of Maarten J. J. Menken*, ed. B. J. Koet, Steve Moyise, and J. Berheyden (Leiden; Boston, 2013), 12.

³ G. K. Beale, “The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15: One More Time,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55, no. 4 (2012): 697.

in Matt 2:21 that Jesus and his parents come out Egypt. Logically, this quotation should be part of the third subsection.

Approaches

In response to these problems, there are various opinions of scholars. There are essentially two approaches⁴ to Matthew's use of Hos 11:1. (1) The approach that attributes error to Matthew. Matthew is considered to have mistakenly read Hos 11:1 as a prophecy that will be fulfilled later. The fulfillment was manifested in Jesus (with his family) who flew to Egypt and then returned to Israel in Galilee. Matthew's reading is erroneous, for Hos 11:1 is, in fact, a historical reflection on the original exodus, thus it is not a prediction of the future but rather a reference to God's work of saving the people of Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land in the past.⁵ (2) The approach that supports Matthew's hermeneutic by attributing to Matthew a revelatory insight into the *sensus plenior* of Hosea. In this point of view, inscrutable hermeneutics is attributed to the Holy Spirit,⁶ by which God inspires the prophets to deliver his own message and not of the prophets themselves. These approaches and conclusions are usually made because Matthew is being judged using a "grammatical-historical" interpretative method.⁷

Typological approach

⁴ See David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 90–91.

⁵ Barclay, for example, argues that Matthew typically used to quote as prophecy about Jesus any text which can be made verbally fit, even though originally it had nothing to do with the question in hand, as a way to convince the Jews that Jesus was the Anointed One of God. Concerning this quotation he writes, "It can be seen at once that in its original form this saying of Hosea had nothing to do Jesus, and nothing to do with the flight to Egypt. It was nothing more than a simple statement of how God had delivered the nation of Israel from slavery and from bondage in the land of Egypt." William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Rev. and updated, vol. 1, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 41.; See also S. Vernon McCasland, "Matthew Twists the Scriptures," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80, no. 2 (1961): 144–46.

⁶ See Turner, *Matthew*, 91.; Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 184–87.

⁷ Beale, "Use of Hosea 11:1," 198.

Some scholars are not satisfied with these two approaches. They then approach Matthew’s use of Hosea typologically. What is typology? Beale defines it as “a study of analogical correspondences between persons, events, institutions and other things within the historical framework of God’s special revelation, which, from retrospective view, are of a prophetic nature.”⁸ This approach correlates with a broader meaning of “fulfillment”, for “to fulfill” does not merely refer to one-to-one prediction. That Jesus is said to fulfill the Jewish Scripture can be understood in at least two ways: predictive fulfillment and typological fulfillment. The first is applied if the prophet was speaking particularly of the coming of the Messiah in the future; while the latter refers to an event in Jesus’ life as the fullest expression of a divinely intended significant pattern of events.⁹ Matthew’s quotations from Old Testament are probably to be understood typologically. His way of quoting has laid the basis for Christian typological reading of Old Testament’s history: “What has happened/is happening in Christian history is a replaying of sacred history on another level: that of fulfillment.”¹⁰

Exodus Typology

This typological approach seems not to distort Hosea and connects it well with Matthew’s very important theme, i.e., Jesus’ divine sonship. Hosea 11:1 is not a prediction of Jesus, but a reminiscence of Exodus, in which God called Israel as his firstborn son (Exod 22-24). Hosea proclaims the love of God to the people of Israel, for which he brought them out of Egypt, the land of slavery. He writes, “When Israel was a child, I love him, and out of Egypt I called

⁸ Beale, 198–99. G.

⁹ J. M. Jr. Hamilton, “The Virgin Will Conceive. Typological Fulfillment in Matthew 1:18-23,” in *Built upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. D. M. Gurtner and J. Nolland (Grand Rapids, 2008), 232–33.; Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 35.

¹⁰ John Kenneth Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies: Identity Formation in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew*, Studies of the New Testament and Its World (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 234.

my son” (11:1). Thus, Hosea alludes to a theological motif that is greatly important to Matthew: divine sonship. The divine sonship of Israel was true theologically and metaphorically, but now is more profoundly true and manifested in Jesus the Messiah. After showing Jesus’ unique sonship from the perspective of his David genealogy (1:1-17) and miraculous conception (1:18-25), Matthew goes on to show Jesus as the beloved son of God here in the perspective of the love-based filial relationship of Israel to God. In the baptismal tradition, this relationship will be confirmed by God himself, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (3:17).¹¹

U. Luz argues that Jesus’ birth narrative shows clear Matthew’s interest: the plan and hand of God over Jesus’ destiny. God’s guidance alone saves the child. The verb “fulfill” (*πληρῶω*) expresses the idea of the divine plan which closely connected with the theme “son” (*υἱός*). God himself speaks to call his son. The word “son” can only be understood by readers then only on the basis of traditional Jewish knowledge. Either they understand it in the sense of Israel as God’ son (Exod 4:22) whom God has called out of Egypt (Hos 11:1), and connect it with Israel typology in which exodus is repeated and fulfilled in Jesus; or they remember that the son of David, the Messiah, will be God’s son as a king of David’s throne (Jewish-messianic hope).¹²

R. T. France is in the same position of supporting typology, but he emphasizes the “exodus out of Egypt” as the “model” of God’s great work of deliverance. He argues that, by quoting Hos 11:1, Matthew has taken up the prophetic typology and applied it to a “new exodus” which has now come about through Jesus. God established the people of Israel through covenant. Later the language of “new covenant” appears at the end of Matthew’s gospel (26:28) through the mouth of Jesus by which the “new people” are connected to God.¹³

¹¹ See Turner, *Matthew*, 90–91.

¹² Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary on Matthew 1-7*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2007), 120–21.

¹³ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2007), 80–81.

Beale also supports this typological approach, arguing that Matthew’s typological interpretation of Hos 11:1 is stimulated by Hosea’s own typological understanding of that verse implied in his whole book. Hosea himself, after alluding to Israel’s exodus out of Egypt (11:1), relates briefly the history of his nation, who did not respond faithfully to God’s deliverance of them out of Egypt (11:2-5). Accordingly, God will judge them (11:6-7). But out of compassion, God will restore his people (11:8-11). Thus the main focus of Hosea is Israel’s future eschatological “return from Egypt”, in which the people and the king are compared to “lion” (Hos 11:10-11/Num 23 & 24). Identification of this “lion” is difficult. It is possibly the king coming “out of Egypt” in Num 24:7-9 but eventually refers to God himself. In this perspective of end-time return from Egypt (i.e., latter-day restoration of Israel), Matthew might use Hos 11:1 in his Gospel. The king coming “out of Egypt” is a latter-day Davidic king who will lead Israel’s return to God in the latter days (Hos 3:5). Hosea’s “son” (11:1) appears to be the people of Israel who did not respond faithfully to God’s deliverance in the first exodus but shall be restored. Matthew seems to present Jesus as the “son” (2:15) in contrast with Hosea’s “son”, i.e., unfaithful Israel (11:1). For in his Gospel Matthew later presents Jesus as the son who is obedient to God, suffers to restore the guilty Israel and the world to God. He sums up (the history of) Israel in himself. Based on Hosea’s eschatological return from Egypt, Beale shows the possibility of Matthew’s quotation (2:15b) as a fulfillment of the flight and sojourn of Jesus (and his family) in Egypt (2:14-15a).¹⁴

Moses Typology?

I agree with and follow this typological approach of interpreting Matthew’s use of Hos 11:1, and argue that this evangelist presents double typologies in this quotation. On one hand, Matthew retrospectively refers to the

¹⁴ See Beale, “Use of Hosea 11:1,” 699–711.

exodus of Israel and applies it to “new exodus” through Jesus, as observed, among others, by France and developed by Beale; but on the other hand, the author refers to Moses and presents continuity and discontinuity (intertextuality)¹⁵ in the person of Jesus. The function of this typology of Moses is developed and presented by Matthew in his titular Christology “Son of God” which he already indicates in this section, “and out of Egypt I called my son” (2:15b).

The ‘exodus history’ is God’s work of deliverance through the role of Moses. As Jesus is the main person presented in this narrative of flight to Egypt and his whole Gospel, I consider that Moses typology has great emphasis in this section. Matthew shows this emphasis by the structure of this narrative (2:13-23). Obviously, he divides this section into three subsections. And he structures them concentrically, by which he puts the killing of the children in Bethlehem as the central event to portray Jesus’ identity as the Son of God, a Christology that he will develop throughout his Gospel.

A Departure to Egypt

B *Reason of departure* (the killing of Children by Herod)

A’ Return to Israel in Galilee

In the light of “out of Egypt” and exodus’ context, the killing of the children in Bethlehem by Herod recalls the killing of Hebrew sons by Pharaoh in Exod 1:15-22.¹⁶ When the king of Egypt saw that the Israelites had been too many he ordered the midwives (Shiphrah and Puah) to kill all Hebrew sons when they help Hebrew women on the birthstool (1:15-16). But these midwives feared God and did otherwise: they let the male Hebrew children live (1:17). The king of Egypt then called the midwives and questioned them, he got angry and

¹⁵ See Steve Moyise, “Intertextuality and Biblical Studies: A Review,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 23, no. 2 (2002): 421–22.

¹⁶ Again Matthew’s use of Jer 31:15 as the ‘prophecy’ fulfilled by the killing of Bethlehem seems to be problematic. It has nothing to do with exodus out of Egypt, but Matthew connects with it as fulfillment of lamentation. Jer 31:15 occurs in an oracle of joy and hope to those who are about to be exiled, probably to Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah in 587 BCE. See Turner, *Matthew*, 94–95.

commanded (issued an edict of) the killing of all male Hebrew children (1:18-19, 22). Under this deadly danger Moses had been born, but he was saved by God through the hand of Pharaoh’s daughter (2:1-10). Moses then grew up and was sent by God to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt (Exod 3-4). By the emphasis of the killing of children in his redaction of this story of flight to Egypt, Matthew puts Jesus parallel to Moses, or precisely he starts to present Jesus as the counterpart of the Old Testament Moses.

Moses-typology appears more evidently if we observe further the parallels between Jesus and Moses in their birth narrative (1:1-2:23):¹⁷

<p>A genealogy locates Moses within the line that runs from the patriarchs (Exod 1:1-5; 6:14-20).</p>	<p>A genealogy places Jesus within the lineage coming from Abraham (Matt 1:2-16).</p>
<p>In a dream, an angel prophesied of Moses that he would save the people (<i>L.A.B.</i> 9.10: a dream of Miriam; Josephus, <i>Ant.</i> 2.210-16: a dream of Moses’s father).</p>	<p>In a dream, an angel told Joseph that Jesus would save his people (Matt. 1:21).</p>
<p>At the time of Moses’s birth, Pharaoh gave orders to kill every male Hebrew child (Exod 1:15-22)</p>	<p>The birth of Jesus was accompanied by Herod’s slaughter of the infants (Matt 2:16-18).</p>
<p>Pharaoh decided to kill the male Hebrew babies because he learned about the birth of the future liberator of Israel (Josephus, <i>Ant.</i> 2.205-9).</p>	<p>Herod killed the infants because he learned about the birth of the king of the Jews (Matt 2:2-18).</p>
<p>Pharaoh learned of the future deliverer from the sacred scribes (Josephus, <i>Ant.</i> 2.205, 234).</p>	<p>Herod learned of the coming savior from the chief priests and scribes (Matt 2:4-6)</p>
<p>When Moses was a young man, he was forced to leave his homeland because Pharaoh wanted to kill him (Exod 2:15)</p>	<p>As a child, Jesus was providentially taken from the land of his birth because Herod wanted to kill him (Matt 2:13-14).</p>

¹⁷ Talbert, *Matthew*, 37-38.

After the death of Pharaoh, Moses was commanded by God to return to Egypt (Exod 4:19).	After the death of Herod, Joseph was commanded by an angel to return to Israel (Matt 2:19-20).
Moses took his wife and sons and returned to Egypt (Exod 4:20).	Joseph took his wife and son and returned to Israel (Matt 2:21).

By allusions to Moses' birth narrative, Matthew puts Jesus as the counterpart of Moses, who had been sent by God to save his people out of Egypt. In doing so, this evangelist presents Jesus as a "new Moses", in whom God's work of salvation which he has accomplished through Moses is repeated and manifested in a more fundamental sense, as the fulfillment of the Jewish eschatological hope.¹⁸ Moses is a liberator who led the people of Israel out of Egypt (Exod 1-18), but also a law-giver, through whom the LORD gave his laws to the people of Israel (Exod 19-30)¹⁹. The role of Moses as liberator or savior is manifested and given a new meaning in Jesus from the very beginning of his life: "and you shall call his name Jesus, for *he will save his people from their sins*" (1:21). Obviously, we can see a continuity and discontinuity in Matthew's presentation of Jesus through Moses-typology.

The theme of "Son of God" has essential significance throughout the Gospel of Matthew. In this narrative of flight to and return from Egypt he introduces this important theme by quoting Hosea, "out of Egypt I called my son". Matthew seems to present Moses-typology as the setting of his presentation of Jesus as "the Son of God" throughout his Gospel. In other words, the Matthean "Son of God" has a Mosaic aspect. The author seems to present this Mosaic aspect to underline further his presentation of Jesus as David's son (1:1), his messianic and royal role in God's work of salvation, i.e., the coming of the Kingdom of God (4:17). However, being different from Moses, Jesus accomplished his messianic mission as the "Son of God" who suffers for the redemption of his people (27:54).

¹⁸ France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 81.

¹⁹ Jesus as a law-giver is presented by Matthew particularly in the narrative of Sermon of the Mount (Matt 5-7).

Conclusion

Using the typological approach we have seen so far that Matthew the Evangelist presents double typologies through this quotation: exodus typology and that of Moses. The typological approach shows the possibility to see Hosea’s text not merely as a historical reflection of Israel’s exodus from Egypt and return to the Promised Land, but also as an eschatological hope which shall be fulfilled in the future. Matthew applies this future eschatological ‘return from Egypt’ to the ‘return to the land of Israel’ of the infant Jesus who is the faithful and obedient Son of God in contrast to the unfaithful ‘son of God’—Israel.

On the other hand, through this quotation, the evangelist presents Jesus as the counterpart of Moses by which the messianic role of Jesus in the “new exodus” is highlighted. By doing so, he presents Jesus as the ‘new Moses’ in whom the work of salvation that was accomplished through Moses is repeated and manifested in a more fundamental sense as the fulfillment of Jewish eschatological hope: Jesus is the liberator and law-giver who will save his people from their sins.

Bibliography

- Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Rev. and Updated. Vol. 1. 2 vols. The New Daily Study Bible. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- Beale, G. K. “The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15: One More Time.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55, no. 4 (2012): 697–715.
- Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas K. Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
- France, R. T. *The Gospel of Matthew*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2007.

- Hamilton, J. M. Jr. "The Virgin Will Conceive. Typological Fulfillment in Matthew 1:18-23." In *Built upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew*, edited by D. M. Gurtner and J. Nolland, 228–47. Grand Rapids, 2008.
- Luz, Ulrich. *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary on Matthew 1-7*. Edited by Helmut Koester. Translated by James E. Crouch. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2007.
- McCasland, S. Vernon. "Matthew Twists the Scriptures." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80, no. 2 (1961): 143–48.
- Menken, Maarten J. J. "The Source of Old Testament Quotation in Matthew 2:23." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120, no. 3 (2001): 451–68.
- Moyise, Steve. "Intertextuality and Biblical Studies: A Review." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 23, no. 2 (2002): 418–31.
- . "Matthew's Bible in the Infancy Narrative." In *Scripture of Israel in Jewish and Christian Tradition. Essays in Honor of Maarten J. J. Menken*, edited by B. J. Koet, Steve Moyise, and J. Berheyden, 11–24. Leiden; Boston, 2013.
- Riches, John Kenneth. *Conflicting Mythologies: Identity Formation in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew*. Studies of the New Testament and Its World. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000.
- Talbert, Charles H. *Matthew*. Paideia. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.
- Turner, David L. *Matthew*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.