

## MATTHEW'S INTENTION TO WRITE HISTORY

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IN "A Theological Postscript" to his redaction-critical study of Matthew's Gospel, Robert H. Gundry argues that Matthew wrote his work in the accepted "midrashic" manner, i.e. by deliberately embellishing historical narrative with nonhistorical elements.<sup>1</sup> The idea that there might be midrash in the Gospels is not new with Gundry, but in the past it has usually been argued that this midrash is midrash on OT texts (as are the Jewish midrashim).<sup>2</sup> According to Gundry, however, Matthew's Gospel is a midrashic treatment of the gospel tradition, principally as recorded in Mark and "Q."<sup>3</sup>

Gundry's thesis has been criticized by several scholars, who question his redaction-critical methods (including his source-critical assumptions and his use of statistics), his understanding of midrash and the first-century literary milieu, his handling of apparent Gospel discrepancies, and other aspects of

<sup>1</sup> *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 623-40, esp. pp. 627-29, 637. Cf. Moisés Silva, "Ned B. Stonehouse and Redaction Criticism," *WTJ* 40 (1977-78) 77-88, 281-303, at pp. 289-98 (exploring the feasibility of a semihistorical interpretation of Matthew's Gospel). For the purposes of this article we will use the term "midrash" and its derivatives as Gundry does, although we are not convinced that Jewish midrashists necessarily considered their "embellishments" to be nonhistorical. Gundry calls Matthew's Gospel "midrashic," which would imply that it belongs to the literary genre of "midrash." But he prefers to limit the term "midrash" to the nonhistorical elements in the Gospel, making it a mixture of history and midrash. It would be preferable, however, to use the term "midrash" to designate the otherwise unnamed literary genre.

<sup>2</sup> For criticism of this view see R. T. France, "Scripture, Tradition and History in the Infancy Narratives of Matthew," in *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 2: *Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels* (ed. R. T. France and David Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT, 1981) 239-66.

<sup>3</sup> M. D. Goulder, in *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London: S.P.C.K., 1974), previously advanced the thesis that "Matthew was writing a midrashic expansion of Mark" (p. 4), though not "an historical novel" (p. 8).

his argument.<sup>4</sup> Their criticisms are weighty, but Gundry has replied vigorously to them,<sup>5</sup> and much more remains to be said on the difficult issues involved. One of Gundry's critics, Douglas J. Moo, has indeed conceded that "to refute this argument conclusively . . . would require a commentary at least as long as Gundry's."<sup>6</sup>

But an exhaustive study of all these matters may not be necessary in order to determine whether Matthew wrote his Gospel as history or midrash. Largely overlooked in the Gundry debate are the formulas with which Matthew introduces his "fulfillment quotations," or "formula quotations," so called because these OT quotations are introduced with a formula referring to the fulfillment of Scripture.<sup>7</sup> We would

<sup>4</sup> See D. A. Carson, "Gundry on Matthew: A Critical Review," *TrinJNS* 3 (1982) 71-91; Royce Gordon Gruenler, *New Approaches to Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982) 245-51; Philip Barton Payne, "Midrash and History in the Gospels with Special Reference to R. H. Gundry's *Matthew*," in *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 3: *Studies in Midrash and Historiography* (ed. R. T. France and David Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT, 1983) 177-215; Douglas J. Moo, "Matthew and Midrash: An Evaluation of Robert H. Gundry's Approach," *JETS* 26 (1983) 31-39; Norman L. Geisler, "Methodological Unorthodoxy," *JETS* 26 (1983) 87-94; John Nolland, "Recent Studies in Matthew: A Review Article," *Crux* 19 (1983) 25-29, at pp. 26-28.

<sup>5</sup> Gundry replied to Carson, Gruenler, and Payne in "A Response to Some Criticisms of *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*" (an unpublished paper). He replied to Moo in "A Response to 'Matthew and Midrash,'" *JETS* 26 (1983) 41-56, which was followed by Moo's "Once Again, 'Matthew and Midrash': A Rejoinder to Robert H. Gundry," pp. 57-70, and then Gundry's "A Surrejoinder to Douglas J. Moo," pp. 71-86. Gundry replied to Geisler in "A Response to 'Methodological Unorthodoxy,'" *JETS* 26 (1983) 95-100, which was followed by Geisler's "Is There Madness in the Method? A Rejoinder to Robert H. Gundry," pp. 101-8, and then Gundry's "A Surrejoinder to Norman L. Geisler," pp. 109-15.

<sup>6</sup> "Matthew and Midrash," 38.

<sup>7</sup> Different scholars, employing different criteria, give different lists of these passages. Ten are always included: 1:22-23; 2:15b, 17-18, 23b; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 27:9-10. Usually one or more of these passages are also included: 2:5b-6; 13:14-15; 26:54, 56a; cf. 26:31b. We would look for a statement connecting the events related with the fulfillment of Scripture. We would thus not include 2:5b-6, 13:14-15, and 26:54, because these passages record words spoken by persons in the narrative. Also, they introduce OT texts with words that are significantly different from the formulas used in the accepted passages. But we would include 26:56a because of its standard formula, recognizing that its general reference to the prophetic Scriptures precludes the quotation of a specific text. It should be noted that

suggest that Matthew's literary intention can be determined from these (and two other) passages, because in them he characterizes the events that he has just related. The manner in which he comments upon the Gospel events, we will argue, shows that he understood his accounts to be, and thus intended them to be, strictly historical in character.

When we say that Matthew intended his narrative to be "strictly historical" in character, we are not suggesting that he undertook to relate everything in exhaustive detail. We simply mean that he intended his narrative to relate things that had actually taken place, and only such things. He intended it, down to the last detail, to convey historical fact to the reader. Historical narration is inevitably approximate in its language and selective in its content, but this does not in itself compromise its factuality. Thus, for example, it would be strictly historical to introduce the substance (or part of the substance) of a statement with the words "Jesus said," since the verb "said" refers only to the verbal expression of a message, without implying that the message will be quoted exactly or completely. Similarly, Matthew's undoubtedly deliberate skipping of certain generations in the genealogy of 1:1-17 is consistent with a strictly historical intention, because when *gennaō* means "become the father of," "father" includes the possibility of "forefather" (as is the case with *pater*).<sup>8</sup> A strictly historical account may be incomplete, so long as it is factual so far as it goes.

Let us now examine the remarks with which Matthew introduces his fulfillment quotations. In his account of the birth of Jesus (1:18-25) Matthew comments, after relating that Mary was found pregnant and that in a dream an angel dissuaded Joseph from divorcing her, "Now all this took place [*gegonen*]

2:23b probably does not actually quote an OT text, either. For literature on Matthew's fulfillment quotations, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Macmillan, 1977) 119-20.

<sup>8</sup> The expression "all the generations" in v 17 does not refer to all of Jesus' ancestors along the male line, but rather to all those actually listed in vv 2-16. The word *oun* in v 17 shows that Matthew is drawing a deduction from the previous verses, not making an independent statement concerning Jesus' racial history.

in order that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled” (1:22), whereupon the prophet Isaiah is quoted in v 23 and the narrative is resumed in v 24. On the face of it, the words “all this took place” in v 22 would seem to mean that everything related in vv 18-21 actually occurred in the course of history.<sup>9</sup> Gundry accepts that *gegonen* means “happened” and that Matthew is referring back to “all the items in the preceding context,”<sup>10</sup> but without offering any explanation for the statement as a whole, he denies that the account to which it refers was meant to be historical.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, in 21:4 Matthew inserts into the synoptic account of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem this comment on what he has just related (i.e. in 21:1-3): “Now [all] this took place [*gegonen*] in order that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled.”<sup>12</sup> Gundry again recognizes that *gegonen* means “happened” and that Matthew is referring back to the events just related,<sup>13</sup> but he does not explain how Matthew could say “this happened” when he knew that “this” was not strictly historical.

Once more, in 26:56 Matthew comments on the events just related (in vv 47-55, probably): “Now all this took place [*gegonen*] in order that the Scriptures of the prophets might

<sup>9</sup> So Wilhelm Rothfuchs, *Die Erfüllungszitate des Matthäus-Evangeliums* (BWANT 88; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1969) 35-36: “Gewiss drückt sich hier—recht verstanden—das mit Interesse an der ‘historisch-biographischen Faktizität’ der evangelischen Überlieferung aus” (quoting G. Strecker’s expression). (By “recht verstanden” Rothfuchs means, “Dieser Aspekt darf aber nicht isoliert und absolut gesetzt werden” [p. 36n.]. See below, n. 32.) Josef Schmid, in *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (RNT 1; 5th ed.; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1965) 44, similarly comments: “Mit aller Bestimmtheit erklärt Matthäus hier ausserdem, dass er das von ihm Erzählte als wirkliche Geschichte verstanden wissen will.” Most commentators simply take this for granted, rather than belabor the obvious.

<sup>10</sup> *Matthew*, 24. By “all this” (*touto holon*) we should understand (with Gundry) “this in its entirety,” not “this on the whole.” That is, *holon* strengthens *touto*.

<sup>11</sup> *Matthew*, 20-24.

<sup>12</sup> The reading “all this” is supported by MS B and the Byzantine tradition, but most of the non-Byzantine manuscripts read “this.” The same events would be covered by either expression.

<sup>13</sup> *Matthew*, 408.

be fulfilled.”<sup>14</sup> According to Matthew, then, everything related in 26:47-55 “took place.” He evidently understands his narrative to be strictly historical, down to the last detail. Gundry recognizes that *gegonen* here means “happened,”<sup>15</sup> but once again he does not explain how this fits in with his notion of a midrashic Matthew.

On two occasions Matthew attaches to his narrative the remark that “then” Scripture “was fulfilled,” followed by a quotation from Jeremiah. After relating how Herod slew the infants of Bethlehem, he comments: “Then [*tote*] was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet” (2:17). And after, relating how the chief priests purchased the potter’s field, he again adds: “Then [*tote*] was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet” (27:9). In both passages the word “then” refers to the past time of the events just related, thus, it would seem, indicating that they took place in the course of history as related. The words “then was fulfilled” in 2:17 and 27:9 are therefore equivalent to “now all this took place in order that ... might be fulfilled” in 1:22; 21:4; 26:56. They would seem to indicate that the accounts’ in view are historical.<sup>16</sup>

Gundry does offer a comment on *tote* in 2:17, saying that it “carries on the story line,”<sup>17</sup> but the narrative does not, in fact, continue at that point. Vv 17-18 constitute a comment

<sup>14</sup> Matthew’s comment corresponds with Jesus’ elliptical statement in Mark 14:49, “but [you have seized me] in order that the Scriptures may be fulfilled.” Probably because of this passage, some commentators have supposed that Matthew’s comment in 26:56 is spoken by Jesus. But since it closely follows the pattern of Matthew’s comments in 1:22 and 21:4, it should likewise be understood as Matthew’s comment on the events narrated (though evidently reflecting the tradition represented by Mark 14:49). Matthew puts Jesus’ statement concerning the fulfillment of Scripture a little earlier in the narrative (at v 54), “and here substitutes his own comment,” according to Alan Hugh McNeile, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1915) 396. Matt 1:22-23 must also be understood as Matthew’s comment, rather than as the words of the angel speaking in vv 20-21, both because of the formula used to introduce the OT quotation and because of the discontinuity in subject matter.

<sup>15</sup> *Matthew*, 540.

<sup>16</sup> So Rothfuchs, *Erfüllungszitate*, 39: “Offenbar sollen auch in Mt 2, 17 and 27, 9 einzelne Fakten des Lebens Jesu fixiert werden.”

<sup>17</sup> *Matthew*, 35.

inserted into the narrative, not a continuation of it. The story line continues in v 19, after the OT quotation in v 18.

On six other occasions Matthew simply appends this purpose clause to his narrative: "in order that what was spoken ... might be fulfilled," followed by the appropriate OT quotation. He relates that Joseph took his family into Egypt and remained there "in order that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled" (2:15). And upon returning to Israel, Joseph made his home in Nazareth "in order that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled" (2:23). Jesus moved to Capernaum "in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled" (4:14). He cast out demons and healed the sick "in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled" (8:17). He ministered as he did "in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled" (12:17). He spoke in parables "in order that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled" (13:35). Not one of these statements has a counterpart in the parallel account of either Mark or Luke (where there is one). Each one is Matthew's own comment on that portion of the Gospel history which he has just recorded. The formula used in these passages is the same as that used in 1:22; 21:4; 26:56, except that "now all this took place" is omitted and the remaining purpose clause is added directly to the narrative. Thus, it is taken for granted in this elliptical construction that the events narrated took place. Therefore, we have good reason to understand from these passages, as from the others discussed above, that Matthew has undertaken in the previous narrative to relate events that actually took place in the course of history.

Gundry at one point in his commentary addresses the problem that the fulfillment quotations present to his theory of Matthean midrash. "It may be asked," he says, "how Matthew can put forward his embellishments of tradition as fulfillments of the OT." His answer is, "We will have to broaden our understanding of 'happened' as well as of 'fulfilled' when reading that such-and-such happened in order that so-and-so's prophecy might be fulfilled."<sup>18</sup> He insists that the mean-

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 37.

ing of *gegonen* and *tote* “must be judged in accordance with the most natural understanding of the contextual and comparative data.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, since his research ostensibly indicates that Matthew did not intend to record only what had “happened” in history (i.e. “then”), seemingly straightforward statements to that effect must be reinterpreted to mean something else, even though this requires that words be given meanings otherwise unknown to biblical and other Greek literature. One wonders what Matthew could have written that would not be subject to such dogmatic interpretation. If Matthew had said, “This is all history,” would Gundry be telling us that we must “broaden” our understanding of the word “history” so as to yield “midrash”? He answers this question in the affirmative.<sup>20</sup> But surely such arbitrary redefinition of words has no place in serious exegesis. The meaning of the words “took place” (*gegonen*) and “then” (*tote*) in these passages is quite clear (whatever the obscurity of “fulfilled” may sometimes be).<sup>21</sup> We have no warrant to “broaden” their meaning merely to accommodate a literary theory otherwise contradicted by them.<sup>22</sup>

Gundry’s argument presupposes that the meaning of a word may depend upon the literary genre in which that word occurs. But we see no basis for such an assumption. The literary genre of Jonah is disputed; some say it is historical narrative, while others say it is pious fiction. But the meaning of not one word in that book depends upon the resolution of this dispute. A determination of a narrative’s genre will indicate whether its writer is relating real or imaginary events, but what he says about them would be the same in either case. Thus, Matthew’s statement that certain events “took place” would mean precisely the same thing in history, midrash, fiction, or whatever. He is saying that they happened, or occurred, in the time and place presupposed by the narrative. Rather than dispute the

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Gundry to the present writer, August 8, 1984 (quoted with permission).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.: “The answer is yes, at least to the extent that midrashic technique has entered Matthew’s gospel.” Gundry qualifies his answer because he prefers to describe Matthew as a mixture of history and midrash. Cf. n. 1, above.

<sup>21</sup> See BAG, s.vv. *ginomai*, 3.a, and *tote*, l.a.

<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, as D. A. Carson points out (in “Gundry on Matthew,” 910), “it may be sufficient to enlarge our understanding of what ‘fulfill’ means *with the result that it is not necessary to expand the meaning of ‘happens.’*”

meaning of *gegonen* and *tote*, Gundry should be arguing that Matthew is referring to the occurrence of midrashic events, not of historical events. This line of argument will be considered shortly.

Gundry goes on to assure us that “two features of Matthew’s practice save him from fantasy.” First, “his embellishments rest on historical data, which he hardly means to deny by embellishing them.”<sup>23</sup> But when Matthew says “all this took place,” he surely means more than “all this rests on historical data.” Gundry also claims that “the embellishments foreshadow genuinely historical events such as the vindications of Jesus as God’s Son in the resurrection and in the calamities befalling the Jewish nation after Jesus’ lifetime.”<sup>24</sup> But the question is whether they refer back to historical events, not whether they look forward to future events.

As we have indicated, Gundry ought to argue that Matthew is referring to the occurrence of midrashic events when he says “all this took place” (or the like) in introducing his fulfillment quotations. Within a midrashic narrative events would be understood to have occurred in the imaginary (though historically based) world presupposed for the purpose of the literary form. Now it is certainly true that within a midrashic narrative references to events would naturally pertain to midrashic events. Thus, we could argue nothing about the historical character of Matthew’s Gospel on the basis, of Jesus’ words in 13:14, “And the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled in them,” since this statement is part of the narrative and therefore must be understood within the context of its perhaps midrashic world. But we have drawn attention only to passages that are not, properly speaking, part of the Gospel narrative (though, of course, they are closely connected with it). They are interpretative comments inserted parenthetically by Matthew between sections of narrative.<sup>25</sup> Gundry himself recog-

<sup>23</sup> Matthew, 37.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> So Rothfuchs, *Erfüllungszitate*, 30-31, noting that “jene Zitate eine Art ‘Kommentar’ zu den jeweils berichteten Geschehen darstellen and damit eine Beurteilung der erzählten Begebenheit bieten.” This perception of the “Erfüllungszitate” lies behind the older (i.e. pre-Rothfuchs) German term for them, *Reflexionszitate* (in contrast to *Kontextzitate*; see p. 20).

nizes this fact,<sup>26</sup> which can hardly be disputed. After each comment is finished (usually with an OT quotation), the narrative resumes at the point at which Matthew left it. Since these comments are not made within the narrative, they do not presuppose its frame of reference. Instead, they presuppose Matthew's personal frame of reference in the real world.

In these passages, then, Matthew adopts an objective standpoint outside his narrative, not a subjective one within it. But a narrator so speaking would still refer to the events of his narrative as they are predicated in that narrative. When Jesus, speaking in the real world of Luke 10:36, asks for an evaluation of certain people in the parable that he has just told, he naturally refers to them as imaginary characters. Similarly, when Matthew says that "all this took place," he may mean that the events in view took place in the imaginary world of his midrash, quite apart from what may or may not have taken place in the real world of history.<sup>27</sup>

In such a circumstance the reality of that to which a narrator refers can be determined from his statement only by examining what he says about it. If he related the events of his narrative to other events, we would infer that the former events belonged to the same world as the latter. Thus, if he related the events of his narrative to, say, earlier historical events, it would follow that the events of his narrative belonged to history, too.

And this is precisely what we find Matthew doing in the statements introducing his fulfillment quotations. He says that the events of his narrative have taken place in order that prophetic Scripture might be fulfilled, or that when they did take place, Scripture was fulfilled. In other words, he asserts a temporal and logical connection between the historical prophecies of the OT and the events of his narrative. Those

<sup>26</sup> Gundry to Scott, August 8, 1984: "It is true, of course, that the introductory formulas, along with the fulfillment quotations that follow them, lie outside the narratives proper."

<sup>27</sup> Gundry would prefer to say that the events to which Matthew refers "took place partly in the world of his midrash as well as in the world of what we moderns call 'history'" (Gundry to Scott, August 8, 1984). But how can an event take place partly in the real world and partly in an imaginary one? A narrative of events can be partly historical and partly unhistorical, but events themselves can only be one or the other.

events, therefore, must have taken place in the real world in which and of which the prophets spoke from God.

Surely no one would claim that events merely predicated in the imaginary world of midrash have taken place in that world in fulfillment of the OT Scriptures. As R. T. France has asked, "What would be the point of proclaiming 'then was fulfilled . . .', if nothing in fact happened 'then', nor at all outside the author's own mind?"<sup>28</sup> What interest could the prophets have had (or could Matthew have imagined them to have had) in the tales (and especially the embellishments) of a future midrashist? Within the world created by a midrashist it could be said, as part of the story, that something has happened in fulfillment of a prophecy that is made part of that world. But in our passages, where Matthew is speaking independently of his narrative, he certainly has in view the real prophets of biblical history. And they certainly looked forward to historical fulfillments of their words. Their God was the God whose powerful word would determine the course of human history, not a god whose word would find artistic "fulfillment" in the imagination of a future midrashist. The prophets spoke concerning the historical Christ (Luke 24:25–27; 1 Pet 1:10–12), not in any respect concerning an imaginary one.<sup>29</sup>

The implications of Matthew's appeal to OT prophecy need not be denied because one has, like Gundry, embraced redaction-critical methods of interpretation. These implications are evident to one of the pioneers of modern redaction criticism, Willi Marxsen. He declares that "Matthew writes as a historian, as his Old Testament quotations in particular show."<sup>30</sup> According to Marxsen, Matthew brings prophetic passages "to bear upon the fragment of tradition itself," some-

<sup>28</sup> "Scripture, Tradition and History," 252.

<sup>29</sup> It is no answer that, say, Hosea could not possibly have had in mind the Messianic interpretation of Hos 11:1 put forward in Matt 2:15. Matthew introduces this prophecy with the explanation that it was "spoken by the Lord through the prophet." That is, the Lord had Jesus Christ in mind when he spoke the words of Hos 11:1. We do not know whether Hosea understood the Messianic reference of this prophecy, yet we are told that the prophets knew in general that their prophecies had a Messianic orientation (see 1 Pet 1:10-12).

<sup>30</sup> *Introduction to the New Testament* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968) 157.

times altering it. “This makes Matthew’s ‘historicizing’ of the tradition very plain: what originally served the purpose of direct proclamation is now considered from the standpoint of what actually happened. What happened must correspond with ‘prophecy’, as otherwise the proof from Scripture would not be convincing.”<sup>31</sup> Without endorsing Marxsen’s entire argument, we would concur with him that Matthew’s appeal to prophetic Scripture manifests his concern to write “from the standpoint of what actually happened.”<sup>32</sup> As France puts it, “At least for the person who makes the claim, the ‘fulfilling’ events must be factual, otherwise the argument is meaningless.”<sup>33</sup>

Finally, it should not be overlooked that the word *gegonen*, used in 1:22; 21:4; 26:56 and implied in 2:15, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35, is in the perfect tense. Burton asserts that Matthew regularly (i.e. also in 19:8; 24:21; 25:6) uses the perfect of *ginomai* aoristically, even though the other writers of the NT (possibly excluding Mark) do not,<sup>34</sup> but Blass/Debrunner are noncommittal (except on 26:56, where *gegonen* is “quite correct”),<sup>35</sup> and Moulton, Robertson, and Moule argue that Matthew uses *gegonen* as a true perfect.<sup>36</sup> It would be wrong

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 148. Marxsen’s remarks would seem to be influenced by Georg Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), esp. pp. 49-122.

<sup>32</sup> Georg Strecker, in “The Concept of History in Matthew,” *JAAR* 35 (1967) 219-30, similarly observes that there was “a ‘historicizing’ of the traditional material by the redactor Matthew” (p. 219). This may be seen from his handling of OT quotations, which exhibits “the historical-biographical tendency of the redactor” (p. 222). Rothfuchs (in *Erfüllungszitate*, 89) agrees that the fulfillment quotations “an äussere Gegebenheiten des Lebens Jesu anknüpfen,” though he questions Strecker’s “Heranziehung der Erfüllungszitate zur Begründung einer ‘historisierenden’ Tendenz des ersten Evangelisten.” Strecker adds that what Matthew really produces is “an expression” of his “theological self-understanding,” not (as he thought) “an authentic presentation of the life of Jesus” (p. 228).

<sup>33</sup> “Scripture, Tradition and History,” 252.

<sup>34</sup> See Ernest De Witt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek* (3rd ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898) § 88, at p. 43.

<sup>35</sup> See BDF § 343(3); cf. Gundry, *Matthew*, 24.

<sup>36</sup> See James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 1: *Prolegomena* (3rd ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908) 145—46; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (4th ed.; Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 900; C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of*

to deny that the preterite force is predominant in 1:22; 21:4; 26:56, as the use of the aorist *eplerothe* in the equivalent formula of 2:17; 27:9 suggests. Nonetheless, the consistently perfective force of *gegonen* in the other NT writings, and, indeed, elsewhere in Matthew,<sup>37</sup> indicates that such a force is probably present here.

Matthew's point in using the perfect instead of the aorist would thus be that the events in view have a present aspect to them. The present aspect of past events must consist at least in their factuality and historicity.<sup>38</sup> A. T. Robertson brings this out when he interprets *gegonen* in 1:22 as "stands on record as historical fact."<sup>39</sup> It is of course true that all past events have a present historical character, but this is not ordinarily worth pointing out. Matthew apparently wants to draw attention to the present significance of certain events, and that significance is no doubt to be found in their connection with prophetic Scripture.<sup>40</sup>

*New Testament Greek* (2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1959) 15; cf. H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1927) § 184(4)ii; Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek* (E.T. of the 4th ed.; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1963) § 289.

<sup>37</sup>The perfective force seems clear enough in 19:8, "but from the beginning it has not been [*gegonen*] so," and in 24:21, "great tribulation, such as has not been [*gegonen*] from the beginning of the world until now." But it is open to dispute in 25:6, "But at midnight a cry went out [*gegonen*]." The verb here could be understood aoristically (so Burton, *Moods and Tenses* § 80; BDF § 343), but it could just as easily be, understood as a dramatic perfect, not unlike the historic present (so Moulton, *Prolegomena*, 146; Robertson, *Grammar*, 897; cf. Dana and Mantey, *Manual Grammar*, § 184(4)ii; J. B. Lightfoot, *On a Fresh Revision of the English New Testament* [London: Macmillan, 1871] 90).

<sup>38</sup>The verb *ginomai*, in the perfect tense, is often used of an event of the immediate past which is still vivid (see, e.g., Mark 5:14, 33; 14:4; Luke 2:15; Acts 4:16, 21, 22). However, we must reject Lightfoot's rather fanciful suggestion (in *Fresh Revision*, 91; cf. Moule, *Idiom Book*, 15) that the perfect tenses in 1:22; 21:4; 26:56 "preserve the freshness of the earliest catechetical narrative of the Gospel history, when the narrator was not so far removed from the fact," if only because the event to which 1:22 refers occurred over thirty years before the earliest catechesis could have been formulated.

<sup>39</sup>*Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1930—33) 1.11. Similarly, McNeile (with the approval of Moule, *Idiom Book*, 15) comments (in *Matthew*, 9) that *gegonen* here "denotes that the event stands recorded in the abiding Christian tradition."

<sup>40</sup>Zerwick (in *Biblical Greek*, § 288) aptly observes "that the choice between aorist and perfect is not determined by the objective facts, but by the writer's

Matthew's use of the perfect tense form *gegonen* does not in itself prove that he is writing history. One could, by entering into the imaginary world of one's story for the purpose of interpreting it, speak of an event in it as having a present reality.<sup>41</sup> But Matthew's use of the perfect tense in connection with the fulfillment of prophetic Scripture shows that he is operating in the real world of history, from prophecy to fulfillment to the present. Historical events that have fulfilled Scripture have a present significance that is well worth underlining with a perfect tense.

In addition to the formulas introducing Matthew's fulfillment quotations, two other passages merit our attention. In the first one Matthew introduces his first account of the Gospel history (after the genealogy of 1:1-17), that of the birth of Jesus (1:18-25), with these words: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was [*en*] as follows" (v 18a). According to this statement, the event of Jesus' birth, already mentioned in v 16, "was," i.e. "took place,"<sup>42</sup> in the manner about to be related. Matthew would seem to be saying, in a straightforward way, that his account will be historical. Gundry, however, without explaining this introductory statement, informs us that Matthew has taken "a historical report" relating both the birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus (as later recorded by Luke), fused the two accounts together, and drastically transformed them into "a theological tale" having only minimal connections with history.<sup>43</sup> A narrator could not honestly claim that such a story relates how the birth of Jesus took place, unless by "the birth of Jesus Christ" he meant not the actual birth of the historical Jesus, but rather the birth of a similar character posited in the imaginary world of a midrashic narrative about to unfold. Nothing in v 18a disproves such a subtle interpretation, but what simple (or not so simple) reader or

wish to connote the special nuance of the perfect; if this be not required, the aorist will be used." The use of the aorist *egeneto* in John 19:36 in a statement quite similar to the formula employing the perfect *gegonen* in Matt 1:22; 21:4; 26:56 is in this way to be explained, not by John's greater distance from the gospel history (contrary to Lightfoot, *Fresh Revision*, 91) or by an aoristic force of *gegonen* in Matthew.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Luke 10:36.

<sup>42</sup> The *RSV* reads, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way."

<sup>43</sup> *Matthew*, 20.

hearer of Matthew's Gospel could possibly have been expected to discern it? In the absence of a contrary indication, anyone would naturally assume that Matthew had something to tell about the real person Jesus Christ; that he actually had a story to tell about a similar imaginary character would have been guessed by no one. It is useless to argue, as Gundry does, that Matthew's first readers knew Mark and Q (and Jewish midrashic practice) well, and would quickly have realized by his divergences from these accounts that he was writing midrash,<sup>44</sup> for their alleged knowledge of these works, one of which may not yet have been written, and the other of which may never have been written, is simply a gratuitous assumption on Gundry's part. Furthermore, it is incredible to think that Matthew would have introduced his first account with a statement that would be so misleading to everyone who did not have that knowledge.

This argument is not weakened by the fact that *en* is found in the opening sentence of a few parables (i.e. in Matt 21:33; Luke 16:1, 19; 18:2), because in those instances the verb is part of the parabolic narrative, and thus functions within the imaginary world of the parable. But in Matt 1:18a *en* is part of a statement introducing a narrative, and thus stands independently of it.

The narrative parables are significant, however, in another respect. Matthew (and, for that matter, Mark and Luke) presents each one with a clear indication of its nonhistorical character. That is, each one is described as a parable and/or begins with a parabolic formula.<sup>45</sup> In contrast to this, Matthew does not indicate in 1:18a, or in any other of his comments, that his accounts are anything other than historical reports. This contrast does not prove that Matthew presents his Gospel as an historical narrative, but it is suggestive.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 634-35.

<sup>45</sup> See Matt 7:24; 13:3, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 53; 18:23; 20:1; 21:28, 33; 22:1, 2; 25:1, 14. Gundry (in *Matthew*, 629) quotes the initial words of three parables outside Matthew's Gospel (i.e. Mark 4:3-4; Luke 10:30; 16:19-20) as evidence that "even language that seems historical at first . . . may, on close inspection, look unhistorical." But the parable in Mark is explicitly introduced as a parable (in v 2), and the two in Luke begin with the fairly common parabolic formula, "a certain man" (see also Matt 18:12; Luke 12:16; 14:16; 15:11; 16:1; 19:12; 20:9 [perhaps]).

Our final passage is 28:15b, where Matthew, after relating in vv 11-15a how the chief priests bribed the soldiers who had been at Jesus' tomb to say that his body had been stolen, comments: "And this story has been disseminated among Jews down to this day." Matthew here indicates that the story of the stolen body presented in v 13 is factually related, since he is referring to historical Jews, who could hardly be said to have perpetuated a piece of Matthean midrash. We should infer from the declared historicity of v 13 that the account in which it is given is also intended to be historical, for if the account as a whole were midrashic, so that its events were predicated only in an imaginary world, Matthew would not have treated part of it as historical.<sup>46</sup> And if 28:11-15a is historical, we can hardly limit the extent of Matthew's historical report to these verses.

We are now ready to consider Matthew's Gospel as a whole. We have every reason to think that Matthew, like any other writer, would have dealt with his subject matter in a consistent manner throughout his narrative. It would be absurd to suppose that he switched back and forth between strictly historical and freely midrashic accounts. He comments that certain events are historical not to distinguish them from the events related in his other accounts, but (ordinarily) simply to designate them as events that fulfilled (or led to the fulfillment of) OT prophecy. Since Matthew characterizes many portions of his Gospel as strictly historical, and none in any other way, we must infer that he would have characterized his entire Gospel in this way.

On the basis of Matthew's own characterization of his narrative in 1:18, 22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9; 28:15, then, we conclude that he intended his Gospel to be strictly historical in character. Gundry's theory of Matthean midrash is contradicted by Matthew himself and must therefore be rejected.

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<sup>46</sup> Gundry (in "A Response to Some Criticisms," 17) concedes that v 15b "favors an historical substratum" underlying the "embellished" account, but it clearly favors more than that, namely a fully historical account.

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