

Jesus as the New Moses in the Gospel of Matthew

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<Student’s Full Name>

NBST 515: New Testament Orientation I

April 2022

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The thesis of this paper is that Matthew intentionally portrays Jesus as the New Moses.

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Elwell and Yarbrough liken the overall structure of Matthew to the Pentateuch because of the organization of Jesus' instruction into five discourses.¹ In this, his Gospel appears to be presented as a new Law from a new teacher, Jesus. Matthew echoes the connection between what God had done in the history of Israel, especially with and through Moses, with the new thing God is doing in Jesus.² Deuteronomy 18:18-19 says, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name," (Deut. 18:18-19, New International Version). It was because of this promise in Deuteronomy 18:15-19 that the Israelites anticipated the coming of a New Moses. Within the context of this anticipation, the Gospel of Matthew portrays Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel to raise up a new prophet like Moses.³

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Jesus as the New Moses in His Birth and Preparation Narrative (Matthew 1:1-4:16)

Matthew's Gospel begins with a genealogy of Jesus from Abraham to Joseph, introduced as Mary's husband. However, it is not until chapter 2 that one begins to see Matthew's connections between Jesus and Moses. Verse 15, "And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'out of Egypt I called my son,'" referencing Hosea 11:1. Hosea's prophecy is not messianic in nature, as the son mentioned refers to Israel of old. Some scholars contend

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Commented [SRW(oDI8)]: Research Methodology

- The paper works its way through the Gospel of Matthew, tracing and explaining the *biblical passages and texts* where Matthew employs, either explicitly or implicitly, the "New Moses" typology for Jesus, which is the student's thesis.
- Most importantly, the paper presents actual *evidence from the text of the Gospel of Matthew* to support the student's thesis, *not* the unsupported opinions of the student, on the one hand, or just a "collection of quotes" from the "experts," on the other hand.
- Finally, the paper reflects analytical and critical thinking appropriate to the graduate level of research and writing, rather than just a personal and/or devotional reflection on the subject.

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*, 3rd ed., in *Encountering Biblical Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 70.

² Robert Wayne Stacy, "The Four Gospels – Matthew and Mark," course video.

³ "Prophet" in this context carries its basic meaning: "one who speaks for God." Even though Moses was not a "prophet" in the sense of being numbered among the authors of the Old Testament prophetic books, he was indeed a prophet in that he "spoke for God."

that this statement is typological of Israel, not Moses. However, the Messiah was to be both like Moses and a king. Kings were commonly referred to as a symbol or representative for their people, so it is not too far of a stretch to hold closely the identity of Moses and the Israelites in Matthew's typology. Allison suggests, "the reader of Matthew 1-2 is to behold in Jesus' story the replay of another, that of the exodus from Egypt, a story whose hero is Moses."⁴ From the beginning, Matthew intentionally strikes a parallel between Moses' exodus with the Israelites out of Egypt and Jesus' "exodus" to Egypt in his infancy, to escape the wrath of Herod. In this, Matthew leads the reader to look for further similarities between the two biblical figures. As stated by Allison, "In ancient Jewish sources concerned with eschatological matters the redemption from Egypt often serves as a type for the messianic redemption, and the prospect of a new exodus is held forth: before the consummation, there will be another exodus followed by another return."⁵ The parallels between Jesus and Moses continue through the infancy narrative, with Matthew 2:19-20 aligning closely with Exodus 4:19-20.

Matthew's account of Jesus in the wilderness guides the reader to a parallel between Jesus and the Israelites. Allison points out the typological connection, "As Israel entered the desert to suffer a time of testing, so too Jesus, whose forty days was the typological equivalent of Israel's forty years of wandering."⁶ Both Jesus and the Israelites were tempted with hunger (Matt. 4:3-4 and Ex. 16:2-8), putting God to the test (Matt. 4:6-7 and Ex. 17:1-3), and idolatry (Matt. 4:8-10 and Ex. 32). Jesus' responses to these temptations find parallels in Deuteronomy: Matthew 4:4 with Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:7 with Deuteronomy 6:16, and Matthew 4:10

⁴ Dale C. Allison Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 141.

⁵ Allison, *The New Moses*, 141.

⁶ Allison, *The New Moses*, 165.

Commented [SRW(oDI9)]: Quotes from scholarly sources properly introduced and judiciously used in the paper as "conversation partners" with the student, rather than the paper merely being a collection of "quotes from the experts" or a "book report" on the views of the scholars.

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with Deuteronomy 6:13. Brown observes that “Matthew displays Jesus as representative Israel who is faithful and true to God’s covenant.”⁷

Matthew’s account differs from Mark’s (and Luke’s) in that Matthew says that Jesus was in the wilderness forty days *and forty nights*, which distinguishes Jesus from typological connections to Israel alone. Matthew also diverges from Mark’s account in stating that the tempter came to Jesus *after* the forty days and nights, in contrast to the Israelites who suffered temptation throughout their forty years in the wilderness. Because the Israelites’ forty years in the wilderness is not a measure of time that can be divided in two parts, days and nights, Matthew’s account of Jesus’ fasting in the wilderness “forty days and forty nights” appears to allude to the documented fasts of Moses in Exodus 24:18 and Elijah in 1 Kings 19:8. These are the only two figures from the Old Testament to have fasted for forty days and forty nights. Moreover, Allison suggests that Elijah’s fast, in 1 Kings 19, appears to be an imitation of Moses’ fast in Exodus 24.⁸ Some traditions claim that Moses while on the mountain did not eat food for men and ate the bread of angels.⁹ Drawing the conclusion that the angels ministering to Jesus in Matthew 4:11 most likely refers to his being fed by them, Allison suggests, “If such a tradition had been known to Matthew, he could well have thought that just as Moses declined bread and water but was then fed by angels, in like manner the Messiah’s great fast was broken by the gift of angelic bread.”¹⁰

⁷ Jeannine K. Brown, *Matthew in The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 34.

⁸ Allison, *The New Moses*, 168.

⁹ Allison, *The New Moses*, 168.

¹⁰ Allison, *The New Moses*, 168. The interpretive principle here is called “intertextuality;” that is, Elijah’s fast “echoes” Moses’ fast, and Jesus’ fast in the wilderness “echoes” both. In this way, there is an interpretive interplay between Old Testament stories and traditions of God’s work with Israel and the “new thing” God is doing in Jesus.

Commented [SRW(oDI11): Critical Thinking.

Paper reflects awareness of the places where the student’s Gospel (Matthew) *differs* from the other Synoptic Gospels (with whom Matthew shares information and stories), recognizing that it is precisely in those places that Matthew’s intention and purpose are most likely revealed. Just because Matthew includes a story in his Gospel does not necessarily mean that it was *important* to his purpose: he may have included it merely because it was in his source, and, consequently, did not feel he could omit it. But if Matthew *differs* from his sources, that is significant and may indicate that those differences tip off the reader to Matthew’s intention and purpose.

Jesus final temptation in Matthew 4:8 is reminiscent of several passages regarding Moses (Num. 27:12-14; Deut. 3:27, 32:48-52, 34:1-4).¹¹ Allison quotes Philo as stating, “For, since God judged him [Moses] worthy to appear as a partner of His own possessions, He gave into his hands the whole world as a portion well fitted for His heir. Therefore each element obeyed him as its master, changed its natural properties and submitted to his command, and this perhaps is no wonder.”¹² Hebrews’ recounting of Moses’ faith in 11:24-26 further clarifies the typology that is implicit in Matthew’s account, “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.” Matthew’s account shows the reader both Matthew 4:8, in which the tempter offers Jesus all kingdoms of the world in exchange of his worship, as well as Matthew 28:16-20, in which Jesus states the authority over all heaven and earth had been given to him. Jesus, of course, refuses the kingdoms from Satan so as later to have even greater authority granted him by the Father, just as Moses is shown to forsake his royalty only later to have his authority established by God. Allison notes numerous verbal parallels between the Greek text of Mathew 4:8-9 and Deuteronomy 34:1-4 in the Septuagint that continue to affirm the portrait of Jesus as the New Moses that Matthew appears to convey in his Gospel.¹³

¹¹ Allison, *The New Moses*, 170.

¹² Allison, *The New Moses*, 172. According to Allison, parallels with Philo (early to mid-first century AD) are important because one of his written works, an allegorical apology for Judaism to the Hellenistic world called *On the Life of Moses*, was a model for later Christian reinterpretation of Jesus as the New Moses.

¹³ Allison, *The New Moses*, 172.

Matthew also appears to present Jesus as the New Moses through his juxtaposition with the prophetic role of John the Baptist. Like the prophets of the Old Testament, John was used by God to speak a message to God’s people and sought to bring them to repentance. In this way, he prepared the way for Jesus in the hearts of people, fulfilling the prophecy from Isaiah 40:3. In Matthew 3:11 John is quoted as saying, “But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” When John is thrown in prison it signals the end of his ministry as a prophet and the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as the next Moses-like prophet. Matthew 4:12 states, “When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee.” Verse 17 begins, “From then on Jesus began to preach.” The juxtaposition of these events suggests to the reader a passing of the baton as Jesus steps into his role as prophet. Thus, Matthew establishes a parallel between Jesus and Moses, both being prophets to the people of God.

Jesus as the New Moses in Jesus’ Public Galilean Ministry (4:17-16:20)

Chapter five begins the structure of alternating teachings and narratives that make Matthew stand out from the other Gospels, described by Bartlett as “an interweaving of *haggadah* [narrative] and *halakah* [teaching].”¹⁴ This structure is similar to what one finds in the Jewish Talmud, which Jews look to for a greater understanding of the Torah and how it should be lived out in practice. Jesus’ teachings being organized in this way implicitly present him as a New Moses bringing a new Law to the new people of God. Bartlett states, “The five sermons in Matthew 5– 7, 10, 13, 18, and 23– 25 are preceded and followed by stories that help ground them

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¹⁴ David L. Bartlett, *Christology in the New Testament*, (Abingdon Press, 2017), 96.

in Jesus's ministry and suggest their implications for those who follow him."¹⁵ In Matthew's telling of Jesus' first sermon, the scene he describes in 5:1-2 echoes Exodus 19:20, "The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up." This leads to reader to imagine the setting where the Law was first given to Moses, and place Jesus' lawgiving within a Mosaic context.

However, Jesus very clearly says in Matthew that he did not come to abolish the Law that had been given to the Israelites by Moses.¹⁶ Consequently, throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus brings renewed insight and interpretation to the Torah. Many of these clarifications begin with the phrase, "You have heard it said," which would have been understood by the listeners that it has been said by Moses.¹⁷ Lierman explains it this way, "Jesus' standing as a 'new Moses' helps explain the paradoxical way that he defends the Law, endorsing the most detailed observance of it while at the same time freely employing (Mosaic) authority both to make and to amend it."¹⁸ Matthew believed Jesus to be like Moses because of his teaching and the authority with which he taught. Jesus' role as teacher and Lawgiver exceeded that of the example set by Moses.

Jesus as the New Moses in Jesus' Private Galilean Ministry (16:21-18:35)

In Matthew's Gospel, the account of the transfiguration is arranged in a way that centers around the typology of Jesus as the New Moses. Jesus is up on a high mountain with his

¹⁵ Bartlett, *Christology*, 96.

¹⁶ Matthew 5:17

¹⁷ Bartlett, *Christology*, 97.

¹⁸ John Lierman, *The New Testament Moses: Christian Perceptions of Moses and Israel in the Setting of Jewish Religion*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 276.

disciples when he is transfigured, and Moses and Elijah appear along with him. Because Moses and Elijah are the only two figures who spoke with God on Mount Sinai, their presence leads readers to think of that mountain. Matthew and Mark's account of the transfiguration both parallel the events in Exodus 24 and 34 with the occurrence after a time of six days (Exod. 24:16; Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2), reference to a high mountain (Exod. 24:12, 15-18; 34:3; Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2), a voice that came from a descended cloud (Exod. 24:15-18; 34:5; Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7), radiance of either Moses or Jesus (Exod. 34:29-30, 35; Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2-3), the fear of those seeing the radiance (Exod. 34:29-30; Matt. 17:6; Mark 9:6), and the presence of three special people (Exod. 24:1; Matt. 17:3; Mark 9:2).¹⁹

However, the distinctions of Matthew's account emphasize Moses beyond that of Mark's. Matthew names Moses *before* Elijah and inserts the phrase, "and his face shone like the sun" in verse 2 and 3, recalling the language of Exodus 34:29, 34-35 as well as the tradition that Moses' face shone like the sun after being in the presence of God.²⁰ The consistencies of the events present Jesus to the reader as the New Moses, but with preeminence. Allison points out, "Whereas Moses' glory on Sinai was reflected, Christ's glory was unborrowed."²¹ In addition, after Elijah and Moses both disappear, the command is given in verse 7 to "Listen to him," referring to Jesus. As stated by Brown, "The words spoken from the cloud are identical to those spoken by the voice from heaven in 3:17, with the addition here of 'Listen to him!' (cf. Deut.

¹⁹ Allison, *The New Moses*, 243.

²⁰ Allison, *The New Moses*, 244.

²¹ Allison, *The New Moses*, 243.

18:15). This echo signifies Jesus as the prophet like Moses who would come to teach Israel.”²²
 This suggests that Jesus’ has the final word, beyond Moses, as consummate teacher and prophet.

Jesus as the New Moses in Jesus’s Judean Ministry (19:1-25:46)

In Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem, found in Matthew 21:1-11, he is presented as both king and prophet. Jesus is referred to as king when Matthew suggests that Jesus has fulfilled the prophecy from Zechariah 9:9, and by the crowds in the passage that address Jesus as the Son of David. The crowds also identify Jesus as “the prophet” in verse 11. It is possible that the use of the definite article here is significant, emphasizing the Jewish people’s anticipation of the coming prophet like Moses and their identification of Jesus as that prophet. Allison points out, “The prophetic and kingly offices are here present at once, which matters because Wayne Meeks has documented the rich tradition—found in Philonic, rabbinic, and Samaritan sources—that depicts Moses as the prophet-king.”²³ However, he also comments that the early circulation date of this tradition is uncertain, calling into question whether this would have been a tradition that influenced Matthew’s perspective. Matthew’s quote of Zechariah 9:9 in verse 5 could reflect Exodus 4:20, “So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt.” It is this same passage in Exodus that is paralleled so closely in the previously discussed infancy narrative of Jesus, further emphasizing the typological connection between Moses and Jesus as the New Moses.

In the beginning of chapter 23, Jesus gives a warning against hypocrisy. In the second verse, Jesus acknowledges the Pharisee’s as sitting in Moses’ seat, the seat of instruction and

²² Brown, *Matthew*, 197.

²³ Allison, *The New Moses*, 249.

interpretation of the Law to the people. As summarized by Brown, “Matthew has made it clear that some of their teachings are not accurate representations of the Torah (e.g., 16:5– 12; also 5:21– 48; 12:1– 12; 23:23). It is Jesus himself who exemplifies right teaching of the Law.”²⁴ In rabbinic sources, Moses was often referred to as “our teacher” as a sufficient means of identification.²⁵ In the conclusion of his warning, Jesus asserts that he is the *one* rabbi, teacher, and instructor.²⁶ It is most likely that Jesus was asserting his priority as teacher over other contemporaries and not necessarily revoking Moses’ title as teacher. However, it still leads the reader to draw a parallel between Moses’ role as teacher to God’s people, and Jesus’ role as teacher that is emphasized in the interaction.

Chapter 24 begins the sermon on judgment and last things, the final of five discourses arranged by Matthew through his Gospel. In this final discourse, Jesus again is found on a mountain, teaching while sitting, just as was seen in 5:1-2 and 15:29. Both passages carried the theme of Moses typology, so it is reasonable that the reader would look for similar connections here. In 28:19-20, discussed later, Jesus is found on a mountain again, with more links to Moses typology. However, Matthew 24:3 is grammatically different from its counterpart in Mark 13:3, which distances itself from some possible similarities found in 5:1-2 and 15:29.²⁷ Matthew does not appear to do anything definitively through this discourse to lead his readers to conclusions about Jesus as the New Moses.

²⁴ Brown, *Matthew*, 263.

²⁵ Allison, *The New Moses*, 253.

²⁶ Matthew 23:8-10.

²⁷ Allison, *The New Moses*, 255.

Commented [SRW(oDI13)]: Critical Thinking.

Student is honest about the evidence, rather than trying to force the evidence to say what it does not just to support the student’s point. In graduate research writing, we tell the truth and *state the facts* and let the facts speak for themselves.

Jesus as the New Moses in the Passion and Resurrection (26:1-28:20)

All three of the Synoptic Gospels appear to point to the Last Supper as an antitype of the Passover of Jewish tradition. Allison quotes Hobbes as saying, “The Breaking of the Bread, and the pouring out of the Wine, do keep in memory our deliverance from the Misery of Sin, by Christ’s Passion, as the eating of the Paschall Lambe, kept in memory the deliverance of the Jews out of Bondage of Egypt.”²⁸ It is not a far step to connect the author of the Lord’s Supper with the author of the Passover. Although it is unclear in the Gospel of John whether the Lord’s Supper was a Passover meal, Matthew, following Mark, clearly identifies it as such in Matthew 26:17-19. Allison makes a crucial connection “...by informing us that Jesus observed the Passover, implies that he too suffered exile, endured slavery, and celebrated freedom. In other words, he ritually made present events from the life of Moses.”²⁹

It appears as if Matthew leaned further into this typology in Matthew 26:26-29 through scriptural parallels. The 26:20-29 passage of the Last Supper shares linguistic similarities with the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand, both of which seemingly present Jesus as the New Moses. This is significant in discovering Matthew’s Christology because the parallels found in Matthew’s account are more extensive than that of his source, Mark. Because of these similarities, one can consider the feeding accounts as foreshadowing the Last Supper and, therefore, useful for enriching the passage at hand as being Mosaic as well. Although the parallels are not as strong, Jeremiah 31:31-34 speaks similarly of a new covenant and the prophecy of Isaiah 53:11-12 speaks of one whose life is poured out and bears the sin of many.

²⁸ Allison, *The New Moses*, 256.

²⁹ Allison, *The New Moses*, 257.

The strongest parallel is found with the language of Exodus 24:8, “which Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.’” Matthew’s sentence in Matthew 26:19 contains linguistic consistencies with Exodus 12:28, with both passages regarding preparations for Passover, both the remembrance and the original respectively. As stated by Allison, “Through blood Moses was the mediator of the old covenant. Through blood Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant.”³⁰ Through the use of these parallels, Jesus’ sacrifice for the sins of others is being implicitly connected to Moses and the ritual sprinkling of blood for the forgiveness of sins during the Exodus.

Although some wish to connect the dramatic events surrounding Jesus’ death to the tradition surrounding Moses’ death, this does not appear to have much unique correlation. As stated by Allison, “Extraordinary phenomena were, in antiquity, eagerly added to the narratives of great men and the tales of their deaths.”³¹ It is far more likely that the events in Matthew 27 are eschatological and not Mosaic. Duguid, Hamilton, and Sklar point out another possible correlation, “The earthquake echoes the shaking of the earth at Sinai when the Lord delivered the Law to Israel... But if the Law came with an earthquake, so does grace.”³² Jesus being the fulfillment of Old Testament Law potentially renders a similar supernatural response from creation when his sacrifice has been accomplished.

Matthew concludes with a final reference to “the mountain,” a location that has been linked to Mosaic typology throughout his Gospel account. Allison points out that “of all the

³⁰ Allison, *The New Moses*, 258.

³¹ Allison, *The New Moses*, 261.

³² Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton, and Jay Sklar. *ESV Expository Commentary (Volume 8) : Matthew-Luke*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 489.

figures in the Christian Bible, Moses and Jesus are the two whose narratives, from beginning to end, are most punctuated by significant mountain scenes.”³³ There are also only five narratives of commissioning found in the Old Testament that mention doing all that God has commanded. All five either mention Moses or are Moses typology (Exod. 7:2, Josh. 1:7, 1 Chron. 22:13, Jer. 1:7, Jer. 1:1-10).³⁴ The commission to the disciples found in Matthew 28 follows very closely the commission of Joshua as Moses’ successor in Joshua 1. This creates a parallel between Moses and his successor to Jesus and his disciples, his successors on earth.

Conclusion

Just as Moses was a prophet, king, teacher, and savior figure to the Israelites, so too was Jesus to the people of God in his coming. Through Matthew’s arrangement of his Gospel account, his additions that stand unique from the other Synoptics, and the parallels presented between Moses and Jesus both narratively and linguistically throughout his Gospel, one can conclude that Matthew believed Jesus to be the fulfillment of the New Moses as foretold by the prophets and anticipated by the Israelites.

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³³ Allison, *The New Moses*, 263.

³⁴ Allison, *The New Moses*, 263.

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Commented [SRW(oDI17)]: The paper properly consulted course materials (both textbooks and presentations) and documented them correctly.