

Mosaic Imagery In The Gospel Of Matthew

by

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I. Introduction

It was said by the ancient rabbis that as the first redeemer was so shall the latter redeemer be.¹ Similarly, Barnabas Lindars has remarked, "If the work of Jesus is redemption, then it is a new Exodus; and if he is the leader of a new Exodus, then he must appear (at least implicitly) in the character of a new Moses."² Although few would deny that Jesus came to redeem his people, the extent to which Jesus is characterized in the synoptics as a new Moses is hotly debated. The significance of this issue for NT studies is that it not only reveals the Jewish flavor of early Christianity—something ignored or de-emphasized in many church and academic circles³—but that it also bears striking implications for Matthew's Christology. The purpose of this paper is to investigate Mosaic imagery in Matthew's gospel. The study will begin by critically reviewing swathes of the gospel where Mosaic imagery seems most apparent.⁴ Some concluding reflections will then be offered which summarize the findings of the study and discuss the contributions of Mosaic imagery to Matthew's Christology.

p.70

II. The Birth and Infancy Narrative

A number of commentators have argued for a Moses typology in the opening narrative of Matthew's gospel.⁵ Certainly the events of Matthew's birth story bring to mind the opening of the Exodus narrative.⁶ When Herod learns that a child has been born king of the Jews, he secretly plots the child's destruction (Matt 2:13b). But an angel of God warns Joseph and tells him to flee with his son to Egypt (Matt 2:13a). When Herod discovers that he has been duped by the magi, he gives orders that all male children in the area under the age of two are to be killed. Matthew's plot sounds all too familiar: when Pharaoh suspects that the proliferate Hebrews may align with his enemies in a time of war and emigrate (thus greatly disturbing his own kingdom), he gives orders that all newborn male Hebrews be killed (Exod 1:10, 16). The baby Moses, however, is spared this fate because of the actions of his parents (Exod 2:1-10).

¹ Cf. *Eccl. Rab.* 1:18.

² "The Image of Moses in the Synoptic Gospels," *Theology* 58 (1955) 129.

³ Donald Verseput writes that the "conclusion that Matthew has expurgated the political profile of traditional Jewish expectation in favor of an individual and spiritual salvation has become a widely accepted axiom of Matthean scholarship" ("The Davidic Messiah and Matthews Jewish Christianity," *SBLSP* [1995] 102).

⁴ For a more comprehensive (but tenuous) review of "Mosaic" texts see Dale Allison Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). This paper seeks to interact with this important work.

⁵ See, for example, Howard Teeple, *The Mosaic Eschatological Prophet* (JBL Monograph Series 10; Philadelphia: SBL, 1957) 74-5; Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977) 107-19; Allison, *The New Moses*, 14065; and A. D. A. Moses, *Matthews Transfiguration Story and Jewish-Christian Controversy* (JSNTSup 122; ed. Stanley E. Porter; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996) 164-6.

⁶ J. Crossan notes the basic plot parallels as being the conspiracy against the child, the father's action, and the child's deliverance ("From Moses to Jesus: Parallel Themes," *Bible Review* 2 [1986] 18-27).

The echoes of Exodus 1–2 would resound for first-century readers, particularly if the Moses-traditions in Josephus and other Second-Temple authors were embedded in early Palestinian culture.⁷ Josephus writes:

One of the sacred scribes ... announced to the king that there would be born at that time to the Israelites one who will humble the leadership of the Egyptians and will increase Israel ... and will surpass everyone in glory.... Fearful, the king, according to counsel, ordered that every male child born to the Israelites be thrown into the river.⁸

Josephus also describes how God appeared to Moses' father in a dream to encourage him in his state of despair (prompted by Pharaoh's decree), revealing to him that all would be well and that his son would become great and deliver his people from their Egyptian bondage.⁹ Certainly, if such traditions were a part of early

p.71

Palestinian culture (as seems the case), then the outline of Moses would be readily discerned in Matthew's infancy narrative.¹⁰

This outline is heightened at the close of Matthew's narrative, where he implicitly cites from the Exodus narrative. Matthew writes that, after the death of Herod, an angel tells Joseph to take the child and his mother back to Israel, *teqnhkasin gar' oil zhtouhte" thh yuchh aujtou'* ("for those seeking his life are dead" [2:20]). This is nearly identical to Exod 4:19, where God tells Moses, *teqnhkasin gar' pante" oil zhtouhte" sou thh yuchh* ("for all those seeking his life are dead").¹¹ Thus, as at the end of the opening narrative of Exodus, Matthew's readers, at the end of the infancy narrative, are left anticipating a new exodus, i.e., they are left anticipating the rise of a new deliverer to lead Israel out of exile.

III. Exodus and Exile

The exile motif is important for Matthew. The genealogy, which traces the royal line of Israel,¹² has as its turning point the Babylonian exile (Matt 1:11–12), which interrupts the Davidic dynasty. The gospel writer's third "fourteen"—referring to the period between the deportation to Babylon and the time of Christ—is actually thirteen generations. Hence, by Matthew's reckoning Israel is still in exile.¹³ The tears shed at the Babylonian exile climax in

⁷ This seems likely, given the large number of works that center on Moses: e.g., *Testament of Moses*, *The Key of Moses*, *De Vita Mosis*, *Apocryphon of Moses*, *Book of Mystical Words of Moses*, *The Chronicle of Moses*, *The Eighth Book of Moses*, *Apocalypse of Moses*, *2QapMoses (2Q21)*, *Midrash of Moses' Death*, et al., not to mention the large body of literature that either comments on Moses or involves definite Mosaic imagery: e.g., *Jewish Antiquities*, *Pseudo-Philo*, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, *Jubilees*, various targums, and midrash.

⁸ *Ant.* 2.205-6, cf. *Tg. Ps.-J.* Exod 1:15 and *Pseudo-Philo* 9.

⁹ *Ant.* 21016.

¹⁰ Like Mark and John, Matthew could have constructed a gospel devoid of this narrative, or like Luke, he could have chosen a different set of traditions to incorporate into his gospel. He did not.

¹¹ Brown comments, "The puzzling plural verb in Matthew (when only Herod has died) may be a direct quotation from the LXX of Exod 4:19" (*The Birth of the Messiah*, 113 n. 38; cf. Krister Stendahl, "Quis et Unde? An Analysis of Matthew 12," in *The Interpretation of Matthew* [ed. Graham Stanton; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983] 64 n. 22).

¹² Cf. D. A. Carson, "Matthew," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8 (ed. Frank E. Gaebelein; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 64-9; W. Barnes Tatum, "The Origin of Jesus Messiah' (Matt 1:1, 18a): Matthew's Use of the Infancy Traditions," *JBL* 96 (1977) 527; Versepunt, "The Davidic Messiah," 1078.

¹³ It is an exile into which Christ is born (Matt 1:17b18a) and out of which he is called by God (Matt 2:15; cf. Hos 11:1). Matthew's perception of Israel's sustained exile aligns closely with the prophets, who frequently use

the tears shed by the mothers of Bethlehem, whose sons have been slaughtered by Herod (2:17–18, cf. Jer 31:15). And yet, as Rachel was comforted with the promise of deliverance (Jer 31:16–25, cf. especially vv. 31–34, where

p.72

God promises the ultimate deliverance: a new covenant to deliver his people from their sin), so too, the escape of Jesus, the rightful heir to David's throne, produces a deep sense of hope and expectation of a new exodus for Israel, led by a new deliverer, the Christ (cf. Matt 1:21).¹⁴

This expectation of a new exodus is heightened in the narrative with the introduction of John the Baptist. The Baptist came preaching repentance¹⁵ "in those days" (3:1). While this phrase may be merely chronological,¹⁶ it is so closely tied to eschatology in the prophets¹⁷ that it is difficult not to hear such overtones here, especially because of what follows in the text: Matthew writes that the ministry of John the Baptist was prophesied by Isaiah (3:3). While Matthew quotes only one verse from Isaiah, the echo of the immediate Isaianic context would resound for a first-century reader:

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. ... And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of Lord has spoken." (Isa 40:1–5)

For Isaiah, the immediate reference was to the Babylonian exile. But for Matthew, Israel was still in exile and awaiting a final exodus. Hence, for the Evangelist, the time for this final exodus had come: "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (3:3; cf. 4:17; 10:7; 12:28).¹⁸ The final deliverer for this great exodus would be none other than the true Son of God, the Son par excellence, Jesus (3:17; cf. 2:15 and 1:23).

IV. The Temptation

The testing of the Son par excellence in the wilderness, which immediately follows the heavenly witness to Jesus' Sonship, builds on the new exodus motif.¹⁹ Soon after their departure from Egypt, Israel, God's "firstborn son" (Exod 4:22), was tested in the

exile/exodus imagery; e.g., Isa 10:24-26; 43:16-19; Jer 2:4-7; 11:35; Ezek 20:33-38; Hos 2:14-15; 13:4-6. Richard France comments, "The prophets frequently looked forward to a 'repetition of the acts of God'. The Exodus especially provided a model for prophetic predictions both of acts of deliverance within the national history of Israel, and of the more glorious eschatological work of God" (*Jesus and the Old Testament* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1971] 39). That even King David could pray for the Lord's salvation and the restoration of his people (Ps 14:7) suggests that the exile was primarily a spiritual problem requiring a spiritual solution: hence the new covenant (cf. Jer 31:31-34 and Ezek 36:25-27). Israel's need for deep, national repentance and subsequent heartfelt obedience to God is also perceived by Second-Temple writers; cf. *CD* 1.1-21, *Jub.* 23:23-31, and *Pss. Sol.* 5:6-7.

¹⁴ Certainly the application of Hos 11:1 to Christ in Matt 2:15 prods the reader in this direction, viz., that when the Christ, the true Son of God, emerges from Egypt, he will bring his people with him.

¹⁵ National repentance is what the righteous remnant of Second Temple times longed for (cf. n. 12 above).

¹⁶ So John Broadus, *Commentary on Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1990) 31.

¹⁷ E.g., Isa 4:2; Jer 30:8; Ezek 38:10; Hos 2:16; Joel 3:1; Amos 9:11; Obadiah 8; Mic 4:6; etc.

¹⁸ Interestingly, while Isaiah commonly uses "in that day" terminology (over forty times), only once does it occur after chap. 40. Obviously for Matthew, "that day" of chap. 40 is now.

¹⁹ Matthew begins the pericope with *tote*, suggesting a syntactical connection to the previous pericope, particularly to the final statement in v. 17 regarding Jesus' Sonship.

p.73

wilderness over the course of forty years. They were tempted by hunger (Exod 16:2–8) and by idolatry (Exod 32:1–9), as well as being tempted to test God (Exod 17:1–7). In the end Israel failed miserably and an entire generation was cut down in the wilderness (Num 25:1–9).

But whereas God's firstborn son failed in the wilderness, Jesus, the Son par excellence, emerges from his wilderness period in victorious obedience to God. The Evangelist is careful to parallel Jesus' wilderness experience with Israel's.²⁰ First, like Israel, Jesus is in the desert for a period of time marked by the number forty ("forty days and forty nights").²¹ Jesus is tempted with hunger, but unlike Israel, he resolutely clings to God's Word for his sustenance. He is tempted to test God, but unlike the first son, he chooses to trust and obey. He is tempted to commit idolatry but instead chooses to serve and worship God. Hence, Jesus proves to be the true Son of God by his perfect obedience to the Father (which is again tested near the end of his earthly ministry; cf. 27:40).

The temptation pericope demonstrates that Jesus' Sonship is not merely ontological but functional.²² Jesus is the true Son of God because he obeys God perfectly.²³ It is precisely at this point that the Son of God and Servant themes intersect. These themes first converged in 3:17, where the heavenly voice doubly alluded to Ps 2:7 and Isa 42:1.²⁴ Ps 2:7 refers to Jesus' Sonship while Isa 42:1 refers to his servanthood. Jesus' Sonship, then, is superior to Israel's both ontologically (Israel was God's son by adoption but Jesus by nature) and functionally (Israel was disobedient but Jesus perfectly obedient). Clearly for Matthew, then, the first son merely pointed to the last Son. The first exodus, led by Moses and ending in failure, anticipated the final exodus accomplished by Jesus, who never fails.

p.74

V. The Sermon on the Mount

The setting of Jesus' first detailed proclamation in Matthew's gospel seems reminiscent of Moses on Sinai for several reasons.²⁵ First, the Evangelist begins the pericope by stating that Jesus *ajebh eij' tolofo*" (5:1). Ulrich Luz believes that this phrase has a probable "association with the ascent of Moses on Mount Sinai."²⁶ Allison notes that the phrase *ajebainw eij' tolofo*" appears twenty-four times in the LXX, eighteen of which are in the

²⁰ That Jesus responds to the temptations by quoting from Deuteronomy 6-8 reveals his own awareness of a typological relationship to Israel.

²¹ Allison strongly argues that "fasting forty days and forty nights" is a definite Mosaic allusion, contending that "and forty nights" is a uniquely Mosaic phrase and that only Moses, not Israel, fasted in the wilderness. Consequently, he sees definite Mosaic typology here (*The New Moses*, 165-72). Fasting, however, is associated with humbling oneself (cf. Lev 16:29, 31; Num 29:7; Ps 35:13; Isa 58:3, 5), which is the very thing the Lord intended for Israel in the wilderness (Deut 8:23, 16).

²² Two concepts which are intricately bound in the fourth gospel (cf. John 5:18-22, 30; 10:18; 14:31; passim).

²³ As David Hill writes, "[Jesus] is 'Son of God' precisely in that he is humble, obedient and serving" ("In Quest of Matthean Christology," *Irish Biblical Studies* 9 [1986] 140).

²⁴ This double allusion is well recognized (Robert Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel* [NovTSup 18; Leiden: Brill, 1967] 29-32; Carson, *Matthew*, 109).

²⁵ Robert Banks is convinced otherwise, stating, "the association of an 'anonymous' mountain with the main aspects of Jesus' ministry in Matthew - temptation, calling of disciples, transfiguration, last commission - indicates rather its function as the place of 'revelation'" (*Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* [SMTSMS 28; ed. Matthew Black; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975] 231). Even if Banks were correct, however, the concept of revelation is entirely consonant with the Sinai event where God first *revealed* himself to his people, through the mediation of Moses (cf. 2 Cor 3:7-18).

²⁶ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 17: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 224.

Pentateuch.²⁷ Fourteen of these refer to Sinai, with eleven applying directly to Moses.²⁸ Thus, the phrase, while not exclusively Mosaic, would seem to be a predominantly Sinaitic motif.²⁹

Second, Matthew describes how Jesus "opened his mouth" to teach. This Semitism (cf. Job 3:1; 33:2; Ps 78:2; Dan 10:16; Acts 8:35; 10:34; 18:14)³⁰ has a particular function here. It signifies the revelatory nature of Jesus' teaching.³¹ Jesus is not simply another scribe interpreting Scripture. He has the authoritative understanding of Scripture (cf. the crowd's response to his sermon in 7:29). This revelatory nature of Jesus' teaching is further highlighted by the echo of Jesus' own words in 4:4: "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God'" (cf. Deut 8:3).³²

Third, the essence of Christ's teaching is Torah.³³ By insisting that he did not come to abolish but to fulfill the Law, Jesus asserts

p.75

that Moses actually anticipated him. In other words, Moses prophetically foreshadowed Jesus (cf. John 5:46-47).³⁴ The inference, then, is plain: Jesus, although like Moses, is far greater than he. Hence, Christ is the sole authoritative interpreter of Torah, for he is the one through whom Torah has its ultimate significance and fulfillment.

And fourth, it is possible that Matthew, by placing the Sermon on the Mount on the heels of the pronounced exodus imagery of chaps. 1-4, is reflecting the tendency of Second Temple literature to link the exodus with Sinai.³⁵ If this is true, then the first four chapters would seem to want some sort of Sinai climax.

VI. The Servant of the Lord

In the long Scripture citation of Isa 42:1-4 in Matt 12:15-21, Matthew makes plain that Jesus is Yahweh's Suffering Servant (pai" qeou).³⁶ Is there Mosaic imagery in this

²⁷ Allison, *The New Moses*, 174-5.

²⁸ For example Exod 19:3 reads: Mwush" ahebh eij' to'lo'ro" tou qeou'.

²⁹ Jack Kingsbury argues that the mountain motif points to Jesus as the Son of God ("The Title 'Son of God' in Matthew's Gospel," *CBQ* 37 [1975] 193-202). Kingsbury dismisses any allusion to Moses "in view of the fact that Matthew does not, on the whole, develop in his Gospel the typology of the New Moses" (p. 16 n. 48). However, Kingsbury's argument, when closely inspected, is unconvincing. Moreover, to assume (as Kingsbury does) the necessity of a full-blown new Moses typology in order to observe simple shades of Moses on Sinai in Matthew's gospel is unwarranted.

³⁰ Cf. Carson, "Matthew," 129 and Broadus, *Matthew*, 87.

³¹ Cf. Carson, "Matthew," 129.

³² Matthew's portrait of Christ as the Revealer is consonant with early messianic expectation. For example, the Samaritan woman told Jesus, "I know that Messiah is coming ... when he comes he will explain everything to us" (John 4:25, cf. *CD* 7.18; 4Q175; *1 Enoch* 51:3).

³³ Some consider Jesus' proclamation as "messianic Torah." Allison, for one, agrees with this sentiment, writing, "Jesus is the Moses-like Messiah who proclaims the eschatological will of God on a mountain typologically equated with Sinai" (*The New Moses*, 185).

³⁴ Carson, "Matthew," 1414.

³⁵ For example, 2 Esdr 14:4: "Then I sent him to lead my people out of Egypt and brought them to Mount Sinai"; cf. 9:29-30; *As. Mos.* 3:11ff; *passim*.

³⁶ Previously, the heavenly voice in 3:17 alluded to Isa 42:1. This is now made explicit in 12:18 (cf. 17:5, where it is reiterated). Jesus' healing ministry is in direct fulfillment of the Servant Song of Isa 53:4, quoted by the Evangelist in 8:17. There is also a probable allusion of this same song in 26:28 (cf. Isa 53:12). This theme is also buoyed by Jesus' own statement of purpose, which is couched in servant phraseology: "the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve" (20:28).

identification? Certainly the title "servant of the Lord" is closely linked with Moses in the OT.³⁷ Some, like Aage Bentzen, have argued that the Servant of the Lord (i.e., the prophet) is actually "the 'new Moses'—'Moses redivivus.'"³⁸

While Bentzen pushes too far, something can yet be said about the dominant exodus motif in the Servant Songs. Clearly, the Servant will bring about a great deliverance:

This is what the Lord says, he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick: "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a

p.76

way in the desert and streams in the wasteland." (Isa 43:16–19, cf. 45:13; 49:8–12; passim)

As previously argued, Matthew (like the prophets who spoke about a righteous remnant) understood Israel still to be in exile and desperately in need of a great exodus. God sent John the Baptist to announce to his people that the time for this final exodus had come (3:1–13, cf. Isa 40:1–5). He then sent his Son Jesus to accomplish it (3:17, cf. Isa 42:1).³⁹ Thus, as the Servant theme intersects with the exodus motif, it would seem to bear some Mosaic imagery.

VII. The Feeding of the Multitudes

Jesus' multiplication of the loaves of bread is reminiscent of Moses' giving the Israelites manna (Exodus 16). The strength of Mosaic imagery here lies not in any specific linguistic parallels⁴⁰ but solely in the nature of the miracle itself, viz., the supernatural appearance of bread. The miracle of manna (which God called "bread from heaven" [Exod 16:4]), was forever etched in the hearts of Jews (cf. Ps 78:23–25; 105:40; Neh 9:15; John 6:14, 31). It is clear from John's account of the feeding that when the multitudes saw the miraculous multiplication of loaves they immediately connected it with Moses' manna miracle: "Therefore, when the people saw the sign he did, they said, 'Truly this is the prophet who is to come into the world'" (John 6:14).⁴¹ While Matthew's account is not as starkly Mosaic in its presentation, the miracle itself is enough to elicit thoughts of the former redeemer.⁴²

³⁷ E.g., Exod 14:13; Num 12:7, 8; Deut 34:5; Josh 1:1, 2, 7, 13, 15; 8:31, 33; passim; 1 Kgs 8:56; 2 Kgs 18:12; 1 Chron 6:49; 2 Chron 1:3; Neh 1:8; Ps 105:26; Dan 9:11; Mal 4:4. While other figures are called God's servant (e.g., Abraham, Joshua, and David), it is preeminently Moses who is called this throughout the entire Hebrew canon, suggesting a uniqueness to his designation as "servant."

³⁸ Aage Bentzen, *King and Messiah* (London: Lutterworth, 1955) 66. This position, however, over-interprets the new exodus motif of the Servant Songs. The passages which Bentzen believes compares the Servant with Moses (49:56, 812) are rather, pictures of what the Servant will accomplish, viz., a new exodus. As Israel was delivered in the past, so they will be delivered in the future. Thus, Bentzen overplays his hand.

³⁹ As J. Jeremias comments, the notion of sonship and servanthood meet in the "servant of the Lord" in post-LXX Judaism ("pai" qeou", *TDNT* 5. 678).

⁴⁰ Contra Allison, *The New Moses*, 2402.

⁴¹ Cf. *Eccles. Rab.* 1:28: "As the former redeemer caused manna to descend ... so will the latter redeemer cause manna to descend."

⁴² Surely if Jesus miraculously provided quail instead of bread, thoughts of Moses would not be far behind.

VIII. The Transfiguration

Mosaic imagery seems densest at the Mount of Transfiguration. Much of Matthew's detail recalls images of Moses in the Exodus 24 and 34 narratives. The transfiguration, to begin with, takes place on a "high mountain" (17:1, cf. Exod 24:15–16). While the mention of a mountain does not necessarily indicate a new Moses theme,⁴³ when placed in the right context (cf. the Sermon on the Mount) it can contribute to Mosaic-Sinaitic imagery. The mention of "six days" (v. 1) is reminiscent of Exod 24:16, where "the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai for six days." That Jesus took Peter, James, and John up to the mountain would seem to be reminiscent of Moses taking Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu up Mount Sinai (cf. Exod 24:1, 9).

p.77

Matthew says that Jesus' face "shone like the sun" (v. 2). This wording is strongly dissimilar from the parallels: Mark does not mention anything about Jesus' face, and Luke states only that his face was changed (cf. Mark 9:3 and Luke 9:29, respectively). Hence, Matthew's account is more suggestive of Moses, whose face was said to be radiant.⁴⁴

The overshadowing cloud (v. 5) evokes images of the cloud that covered Sinai (Exod 24:15–18).⁴⁵ The voice out of the cloud echoes the voice of the Lord calling to Moses from within the cloud (Exod 24:16). The Lord's words from out of the cloud—"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased"—evoke two prior pericopes in the gospel. The first is 12:15–21, with its similar sentiment in v. 18: "my beloved, in whom my soul is well-pleased." The second is 3:13–17, where "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased," first appears. As previously shown, these pericopes relate to the new exodus motif and consequently bear Mosaic imagery.

Finally, the additional words, ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ,⁴⁶ would seem to allude to Deut 18:15 (αὐτοῦ ἀκούσασθε).⁴⁷ The voice of the Father, then, declares that Jesus is not just another prophet in Israel's line of prophets. He is the Prophet like Moses (cf. Acts 3:22; 7:37),⁴⁸ and hence, is to be preeminently heard above the likes of even Moses and Elijah.⁴⁹ Yet, the role of Moses and Elijah should not be narrowed to

⁴³ Contra Allison, *The New Moses*, 170.

⁴⁴ Exod 34:30 reads: "When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant." Philo draws a connection between Moses' face and the sun, when he writes that after Moses descended from the mountain the people were filled with awe and could not stand to "look at the radiance of the sun flashing from him" (*Life of Moses* 2.70; cf. 2 Cor 3:7-13).

⁴⁵ Matthew alone describes the cloud as "bright," strengthening correspondence with the Shekinah glory (cf. Carson, Matthew, 386).

⁴⁶ This is perhaps an echo of Jesus' own exhortation in 7:24: πα" οὐν οἶσι" ἀκούει μου τοῦ" λόγου" τούτου" καὶ ποιεί" αὐτοῦ" ... ("therefore everyone who hears these my words and does them...").

⁴⁷ If the reading αὐτοῦ ἀκούετε captured in Alexandrinus, Ephraemi, Washington, as well as a few later manuscripts, is the correct one, then the allusion is strengthened.

⁴⁸ John's gospel remains the clearest witness to Second Temple Judaism's expectation of the Prophet like Moses. He records the crowd's interrogation of John the Baptist: "Who are you?" ... and he confessed, 'I am not the Christ.' And they asked him, 'Who then?' Are you Elijah?' And he said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' And he answered, 'No'" (1:19-21, cf. 6:14). While unable to put all the pieces of the puzzle together (although interestingly, the connection between Christ and the prophet is made in 7:40-42, 52), the crowds nevertheless expected a singular and not merely collective fulfillment of Moses' words in Deut 18:15-18 (as did the Qumran community, cf. CD 6.10-11; 7.18-20; 1QS 9:11).

⁴⁹ This point is amplified in the text when the disciples, after they are admonished by the voice of God, look up and see no one except αὐτοῦ ἰησοῦ μονον. Whereas the point could have been made without the extra pronoun (cf. Luke 9:36), its presence heightens the contrast between Jesus on the one hand and Moses and Elijah

p.78

mere foils.⁵⁰ Given the context, Elijah would seem to represent a suffering figure who anticipates Jesus' passion.⁵¹ Moses, on the other hand, seems to function typologically in the narrative. Moses was a prototype of the final Prophet, viz., Messiah (Deut 18:15, 18). Just as Moses commanded obedience to this future Prophet, so God himself now commands similar allegiance to Jesus (v. 5). The respective ministries of Moses and Elijah, then, anticipate and find their ultimate fulfillment in the ministry of Jesus.

IX. The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

There seems to be a hint of Mosaic imagery in this pericope. When people from the city asked the question, "Who is this?", the multitudes responded, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee" (v. 11). Kingsbury belittles this "confession,"⁵² but he fails seriously to consider its setting. Jesus is exuberantly acknowledged by the crowds as the "Son of David," a starkly Messianic address.⁵³ If "hosanna" retains any of its original force,⁵⁴ then it would represent not only a declaration of praise but a cry for deliverance (often made to kings, cf. 2 Sam 14:4; 2 Kgs 6:26). Such overtones of deliverance recall the angel's message to Joseph to name his son "Jesus" (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ) because he will save (יִשְׁעוּ) his people from their sins (1:21). This type of deliverance language naturally bears a new exodus motif and hence involves Mosaic imagery (cf. "Exodus and Exile" above).⁵⁵

p.79

The ascription "from Nazareth in Galilee" is suggestive of 2:23, where Matthew states that "[Jesus] lived in a town called Nazareth, so that what was spoken the prophets might be

on the other. The voice not only admonishes but corrects. Peter, in vain ignorance, rejected Christ's passion prediction (16:21-23). Just as Jesus rebuked this earthly attitude, so the Father corrects it once again (in other words, "Listen to what My Son is telling you!"). Cf. Walter L. Liefeld, "Luke," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8 (ed. Frank E. Gaebelin; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 928.

⁵⁰ As David Hay comments, "No figures stood higher in the Jewish scriptural tradition than Moses and Elijah" ("Moses Through New Testament Spectacles," *Int* 44 (1990) 241. For a brief but useful scan of their possible functions in the narrative see Moses, *Matthew's Transfiguration Story*, 3642.

⁵¹ Cf. Jesus' passion prediction (16:21-23), his brief discourse on the costliness of discipleship (16:24-27), and especially his teaching on his relationship to the coming of Elijah (cf. 17:913): "But I tell you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they wanted. So too, the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands (17:12)."

⁵² Kingsbury writes, "How little [this] 'confession' counts in Matthew's perspective can be seen from the passages 16:13-20 and 11:9" ("The Title Son of David in Matthews Gospel," *JBL* 95 [1976] 600).

⁵³ Consonant with Matthew's quote of Zech 9:9, the address emphasizes the kingliness of the Messiah ("Verseput, The Davidic Messiah and Matthews Jewish Christianity," 113-4).

⁵⁴ The Hebrew root behind hosanna is יִשְׁעוּ which means deliver and has salvific overtones. See BDB 446-8. Broadus understands "hosanna" as a cry for deliverance rather than a declaration of praise (*Commentary on Matthew*, 427).

⁵⁵ Kingsbury is correct when he asserts that "to look upon Jesus as a 'prophet' is to have a totally inadequate understanding of his person" ("The Title Son of David in Matthew's Gospel," 600). And yet, while this "confession" is inadequate, it is certainly accurate, and perhaps even appropriate, for this royal setting. The crowd's actions are somewhat parallel to those recorded in John 6:14-15, where the people, after witnessing Jesus' miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, confess, "Truly, this is the prophet who is to come into the world." Consequently, they want to make him king. Here in Matthew, Jesus is acknowledged by the multitudes as "the prophet" only after riding into Jerusalem as king. For a detailed investigation of this prophet-king theme see Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (NovTSup 14; Leiden: Brill, 1967).

fulfilled, 'He will be called a Nazarene.'" While the meaning of 2:23 is debated, it seems best to understand Matthew to be referring to the OT prophets teaching about Messiah's lowliness.⁵⁶ Hence, 2:23 may be a somewhat cryptic way of imaging the servanthood of Messiah, a theme which, as previously observed, has new exodus and hence, Mosaic allusions (cf. "The Servant of the Lord" above).

X. The Last Supper

The Passover was a commemoration of the Exodus, a retelling of Israel's dramatic redemption by God during the days of Moses (cf. Exod 12:24–27). In the gospels, it is not the remembrance of the Passover per se that is significant but Jesus' own relationship to it. Jesus brings a measure of innovation to the ancient ritual, viz., the notion of his body being broken for his disciples (26:26). That Matthew records the command to drink from the cup and not the mere act (v. 27, cf. Mark 14:23) suggests the importance of the edict. Carson thus comments,

As the bread has just been broken, so will Jesus' body be broken; and just as the people of Israel associated their deliverance from Egypt with eating the paschal meal prescribed as divine ordinance, so also Messiah's people are to associate Jesus' redemptive death with eating this bread by Jesus' authority.⁵⁷

Matt 26:28 is rich in OT allusions. Gundry detects three: Exod 24:8, Isa 53:11–12, and Jer 31:31–34.⁵⁸ Allison rightly points out that, while thoughts of the latter two are present in 26:28, only Exod 24:8 has both conceptual and obvious linguistic connections.⁵⁹ Typological correspondence, then, would seem inevitable.⁶⁰ Just as Moses instituted the first covenant and ratified it by blood, so Jesus inaugurates the new covenant (which replaces the old one), and he ratifies it by shedding his own blood.

XI. CONCLUSION

Matthew's gospel is speckled with images of Moses. The Evangelist's infancy narrative, with its plot against the child, certainly recalls the circumstances surrounding the birth of Moses. It

p.80

would seem, because of the wealth of Moses traditions in Second Temple Judaism, that the image of Moses would be all the more distinct to Matthew's original readers, especially since Matthew's account resembles some of that tradition. That image is illuminated at the close of the narrative by the Evangelist's implicit citation of Exod 4:19. The infancy narrative, much like the Moses narrative in Exodus, concludes with a sense of expectation, viz., the coming of a new deliverer to lead Israel out of exile.

Matthew's exile motif, first hinted at in the genealogy (his third "fourteen") and developed elsewhere in his gospel, possesses Mosaic imagery (or derivative Mosaic imagery),

⁵⁶ See Carson, "Matthew," 97.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 536.

⁵⁸ Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel*, 579.

⁵⁹ Exod 24:8 reads: "Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant [toʋ aiḡna diaqhkh]" while Jesus says, "This is my blood of the covenant [toʋ aiḡnav mou diaqhkh]." Cf. Allison, *The New Moses*, 257-8.

⁶⁰ Certainly, this is the route taken by the author of Hebrews (9:18-25).

because of its association with the exodus: exile envisions an exodus and exodus presupposes an exile. Since the OT prophets considered the Moses-led exodus from Egypt to be the prototype of all future exoduses for God's people, Israel's continued exile (according to Matthew) awaits a new exodus to be led by a new Moses-like deliverer: Jesus.

The image of Moses is conjured up in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Just as God gave Moses Torah on Sinai and Moses, in turn, presented it to Israel, likewise Jesus, sitting on the mountain, gives the authoritative interpretation of Torah to his disciples, declaring that Torah finds its ultimate significance and fulfillment only in him.

As the exile motif reflects a derivative Mosaic imagery, so also does the Evangelist's servant theme. Isaiah prophesied that the Servant of the Lord would bring about a great exodus for God's people, using the language of the first exodus. Matthew unambiguously states that Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah's Servant Songs and hence is the leader of the final exodus.

Moses' reflection (along with his person) shines brightly in Matthew's account of Jesus' transfiguration. The mountain, the brilliance of Jesus' face, the bright overshadowing cloud—all recall Moses' experience on Sinai. Further, God's admonition, "Listen to him!" almost certainly alludes to Moses' own words regarding the eschatological prophet like himself (Deut 18:15). This final prophet also seems to be hinted at in Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Finally, there is the recollection of Moses during the Last Supper. Previously, Israel associated their deliverance from Egypt with the paschal meal; now, however, Messiah's people are to associate their deliverance from sin with eating the bread and drinking the cup. For even as Moses instituted the first covenant, ratifying it by blood, so Jesus has instituted the new covenant which he ratified by the shedding of his own blood.

Mosaic imagery in the first gospel is obvious. Moses is a type of Christ.⁶¹ The key question is, Did Matthew intend to structure his gospel so as specifically to reflect a Moses typology? To prove that Matthew arranged his work to demonstrate a Moses typology would demand more than the presence of mere Mosaic imagery. Typology

p.81

is primary in nature, i.e., the author specifically intends it, and it is a main point of his text, a point that is delineated in the narrative and perhaps enhanced through allusions. Imagery, on the other hand, is secondary in nature: it may not be specifically intended by the author but is only present by association. Imagery is not a principal point of the author but only a secondary device used to enrich and color his work. Thus, a Moses typology, in view of its primary nature, would demand explicit citation, not unlike the more accepted Christological themes in Matthew.⁶² Nowhere does Matthew explicitly cite the OT to express a "new Moses" Christology.⁶³ If Matthew intended a new Moses Christology, he would have included, consonant with the other Christologies of his gospel, explicit citation of a new Moses theme

⁶¹ John's gospel, for example, explicitly affirms this.

⁶² For example, Jesus is explicitly referred to as "the Son of David" (1:1), "the Son of God" (3:17), "the Son of Man" (9:6), and "the Servant of the Lord" (12:18).

⁶³ An explicit citation of Deut 18:15 or 18:18, for example, would have sufficed.

(as John does in his gospel), thereby enhancing his allusions.⁶⁴ At the very least, the Evangelist would have strengthened his specific allusions to Moses.⁶⁵

The problem of building a formal Christology on mere allusions is twofold. First, detecting allusions can be slippery. Allison observes seven types of intertextuality: explicit statement, inexplicit citation, similar circumstances, key words or phrases, similar narrative structure, word order, and poetic resonance.⁶⁶ He also recognizes the potential problem: "Similarity in vocabulary does not always betray dependence or imply deliberate allusion. So too with similar circumstances, narrative structures, and syllabic sequences."⁶⁷ Allison's solution to the problem—to employ informed, "delicate and mature judgment"⁶⁸—while being a useful tool for discerning intertextuality, remains far too subjective to permit any type of Christology-building.

This leads to the second dilemma: How can one say something definite from what has not been definitely said? To try and do so is to outrun the author. The demand for explicit citation at this point is salient. A Christology based on allusion would seem more like an illusion.

While the first Evangelist does not intend a specific Moses typology, he does purposefully color his gospel with Mosaic imagery. This should not surprise us, given the striking significance of Moses in Judaism. His name, more than any other, crops up again and again over the course of the entire Hebrew canon (cf. n. 35

p 82

above). During intertestamental times, traditions concerning his life and death burgeon (cf. n. 6 above). Even in the NT, Moses is referred to some eighty times. Allison remarks,

The author of the First Gospel belonged to the Jewish world, not to the later world of Gentile Christians. Matthew was a Jew, steeped in the Bible and Jewish custom, and his church, although it participated in the Gentile mission, remained fundamentally Jewish.⁶⁹

Shades of a Moses-coloring, then, would naturally be expected to occur in his gospel, even as the early traditions preserved in Mark and Luke likewise sprinkle their gospels with allusions of Moses.

And yet, this Mosaic imagery, because it does color Matthew's gospel, contributes to his Christology.⁷⁰ A recurring theme of Christological importance in Matthew's gospel is authority.⁷¹ While the exact *Sitz im Leben* of the first gospel is uncertain, at least two things

⁶⁴ Any allusion to the doctrine of the "Trinity" in the Scriptures, for example, receives its strength and validation through explicit citation of the doctrine's content elsewhere.

⁶⁵ It is pointless to argue, as Allison does, that any allusion could be strengthened and that this therefore proves nothing. If this line of reasoning were true then no allusion could be reckoned too weak to be genuinely intended by the author (as Allison does, in fact, regard some, e.g., Matt 24:3): anything is fair game.

⁶⁶ *The New Moses*, 1920.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁷⁰ O. Cullmann examines the concept Prophet as a solution to the "Christological Problem in the New Testament," in *The Christology of the New Testament* (rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963) 43-50. He correctly observes that the disadvantages far outweigh the advantages.

⁷¹ The term ἐξουσία/ occurs ten times in the gospel. Its first occurrence is in 7:29, where Matthew notes how the crowds were amazed at Jesus' teaching - for unlike the scribes he taught with authority (an authority which the religious leaders tried to challenge, cf. 21:23-27).

are clear from Matthew's account. The Pharisees possessed weighty religious authority,⁷² and Jesus attacked that authority.⁷³ Authority is a significant element in Second Temple Judaism, particularly as symbolized in Torah, and hence in Moses.⁷⁴

When Jesus, therefore, attacks the religious authorities, he is perceived as undermining Moses and the Law. Jesus, however, explicitly denies such a charge in the Sermon on the Mount (5:17-19). He did not come to abolish Moses but to fulfill all that the OT taught. Hence, Jesus' ministry is prophetically foreshadowed by Moses, and Moses' ministry is fulfilled in Jesus. In like fashion, the authority of Moses and the law points to and is actually absorbed by the

p.83

authority of Jesus.⁷⁵ Jesus, then, is not to be perceived as being opposed to Moses but as able to win the day because he has greater authority. Rather, he is to be perceived as aligning closely with Moses so as majestically to fill out the old prophet's authority; an authority which Moses himself could never have filled out. Thus, Matthew, by painting a picture of Jesus with the colors of Moses, seems to highlight this alignment of this authority.

⁷² This authority swells after the destruction of the temple in AD 70 because one of the two pillars of Judaism (the other being Torah) is leveled. Consequently, the role of Torah and Torah interpretation becomes centralized in Judaism. Cf. Jacob Neusner, "Religious Authority in Judaism," *Int* 39 (1985) 373-87, and J. A. Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 23-30.

⁷³ Cf. Matt 5:21-23; 12:18; 15:11-12; 16:11-12; 21:12-17, 23-27, 33-46; 23:1-36. It is, of course, Jesus own authority that is showcased in the gospel.

⁷⁴ While the writings of this period don't specifically mention *ἐξουσία*, their exclusive claims to Torah and Torah interpretation presuppose a claim to divine authority; cf. *1 Enoch* 104:1013; *Pss. Sol.* 14:12. In fact, the Qumran community believed that the OT prophesied of them and consequently, they modernized various biblical texts, e.g., 1QHab 7:1-5.

⁷⁵ M. Hengel paints an accurate picture when he asserts, "Jesus did not stand under the authority of the Torah received at Sinai by Moses - as all his Jewish contemporaries did - but stood above it" (*The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* [New York: Crossroad, 1981] 70). The authority of Torah always pointed to a higher authority, viz., Christ.