



#### THE HISTORICAL JESUS XIV:

## The Gospel of Matthew: Jesus as the New Moses

“THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW begins by identifying Jesus as ‘the son of David, the son of Abraham’ (Matthew 1:1), thus indicating his Davidic/royal and Abrahamic/Jewish heritage, respectively. Throughout this Gospel,

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*“Matthew . . . presents Jesus as ‘the New Moses’ for the people of Israel.”*

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Matthew also presents Jesus as ‘the New Moses’ for the people of Israel.”<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, recent research has discovered that the name “Moses” is actually an Egyptian name that means “Child of God.”<sup>2</sup>

“Admittedly, the name ‘Moses’ is not directly used in a Christological Title, nor can Jesus be called the ‘Son of Moses,’ since Jesus belongs to the Tribe of Judah, while Moses belongs to the Tribe of Levi. . . . However, Jesus is portrayed as being very similar to Moses in several interesting and significant ways:

“[1.] Just as Pharaoh (the King of Egypt ca. 1300 BC) *killed all the baby boys* of the Hebrews, and only *Moses is saved* (Exod 1:22 – 2:10), so also Herod (the King of Israel at the birth of Jesus) *kills all the male babies* in Bethlehem, and only *Jesus is saved* (Matt 2:13-18).

“[2.] When Moses’ life is in danger, he flees from *Egypt to Israel*, but returns to *Egypt* after many years (Exod 2:15; 7:6-7); when Jesus’ life is in danger, he takes the reverse itinerary: from *Israel to Egypt* and later back to *Israel* (Matt 2:13-21).

“[3.] Just as Moses goes up to a *mountain* to receive the *Law* (incl. the Ten Commandments) from God (Exod 19:3), so also Jesus goes up to a *mountain* to give a *new Law* (incl. the Nine Beatitudes) to the people (Matt 5:1).”<sup>3</sup>

“[4.] Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, ‘See the blood of the covenant . . . that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words’ [Exodus 24:8]. . . . Through blood Moses was the mediator of the old covenant. Through blood Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant.”<sup>4</sup>

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“[5.] Just as Moses *does not eat or drink for forty days and forty nights* while on the mountain, recording God's Law (Exod 34:28), so also Jesus *fasts for forty days and forty nights* in the desert, being tempted by Satan (Matt 4:2).”<sup>5</sup>

“[6.] Just as the lawgiver, at the close of his life, commissioned Joshua both to go into the land peopled by foreign nations and to observe all the commandments in the law, and then further promised his successor God's abiding presence, so similarly Jesus: at the end of his earthly ministry he told his disciples to go into all the world and teach observance of all the commandments uttered by the new Moses; and then he promised his abiding presence.”<sup>6</sup>

“[7.] ‘Tradition tells that [at Moses' death] the angels mourned, the heavens were shaken, lightnings flashed, and a heavenly voice spoke. . . . [So] several strange things happened . . . when Jesus died. The sun went dark ([Matthew] 27:45). Then the temple veil was rent (27:51). Then the earth quaked (27:51). And then the dead rose up (27:52-53).’”<sup>7</sup>

“[8.] Just as Moses was thought to have written the first *five books* of the Hebrew Bible (Gen, Exod, Lev, Num, Deut), so also the teaching of Jesus is contained in *five speeches* or extended ‘discourses’ in Matthew (ch. 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 22-25).

“[9.] Overall, Moses was considered the greatest *teacher, prophet and lawgiver* in the Hebrew Bible (and throughout the NT); so also Jesus is portrayed in Matthew's Gospel as a great *teacher, prophet and lawgiver*, equal to or even greater than Moses.”<sup>8</sup>

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## Summary

Matthew uses Mosaic typology (type/antitype) to maintain the historical harmony between (1) the old exodus and the old covenant, represented by the

“old Moses,” and (2) the new exodus and the new covenant, represented by Jesus Christ as the “new Moses.”

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## Endnotes

1. Felix Just, “The Discourses of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel,” at [catholic-resources.org/Bible/Matthew\\_Discourses.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Matthew_Discourses.htm).
2. Ogden Goelet, “Moses’ Egyptian Name,” *Bible Review* 19, no. 3 (June 2003): 12-17, 50-51.
3. Just, “Discourses of Jesus.”
4. Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 258. This book is out of print but can be secured through interlibrary loan.
5. Just, “Discourses of Jesus.”
6. Allison, *The New Moses*, p. 266.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
8. Just, “Discourses of Jesus.”

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