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Intertextuality and Moses imagery in Matthew's infancy narrative

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The observation that certain biblical texts (receptor texts) appear to draw upon others (source texts) has long captivated the interest of biblical scholars. This fascination has given rise to various distinctions regarding textual interdependence. While some scholars emphasise the importance of authorial intent, others remain sceptical of such interpretations. A closer examination reveals that the ways in which authors of receptor texts engage with source texts differ considerably. A detailed reading of the Gospel of Matthew reveals extensive connections to the First Testament, particularly in the form of fulfilment citations explicitly mentioned by the evangelist. However, this article focuses on the subtler and more implicit use of Moses imagery within the text. It appears that Matthew uses Moses imagery to characterise Jesus, though the extent of this portrayal remains a matter of scholarly debate. Does the author intentionally reinterpret and reappropriate Moses imagery to present Jesus as a new Moses, or does this imagery simply reflect traditional Jewish expectations of redemption prevalent in the socio-historical context of the time?

Contribution: This study examined the presence of Moses imagery in Matthew's birth narrative. To accomplish this, it first explored the complexities of intertextuality within biblical texts, followed by an analysis of how Moses imagery is employed in Matthew 1–2. The aim of this article is to contribute to the ongoing scholarly discourse on the intertextual and hermeneutical strategies employed by the evangelist.

Keywords: intertextuality; infancy narrative; Moses; inner-biblical allusions; new Moses; allusion; exile; typology; divine guidance.

Introduction

This article examines biblical intertextuality with a specific focus on the allusions to Moses found in Matthew's infancy narrative (Mt 1–2). As a central figure in Judaism, Moses is mentioned more frequently than any other individual throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and appears around 80 times in the New Testament. His prominence within Jewish thought and tradition sets the stage for significant thematic resonances in the Gospel of Matthew.

Ancient Jewish rabbis often asserted that the latter redeemer would mirror the first, for example, in the rabbinical midrash on the Book of Ecclesiastes (Kohelet) (Eccl Rab 1:18). This perspective is reflected in Matthew's Gospel, written by a Jew deeply steeped in biblical texts and Jewish customs, leading a community that, while engaged in the Gentile mission, retained its fundamentally Jewish character. Such context naturally invites an exploration of Moses allusions in Matthew's writing, which not only highlight the Jewish essence of this Gospel but also inform its Christological framework. Though the name 'Moses' is explicitly mentioned only sparingly in Matthew, the influence of Moses can be traced across the Gospel through implicit allusions.

Scholarship provides further insights into this motif. Lindars (1955:129) 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'. Echoing this, Allison (1993) argues that Matthew deliberately infused his narrative of Jesus with Moses allusions, constructing a comprehensive Moses typology for historical and theological purposes. While debate persists regarding the extent to which Jesus is portrayed as a 'new Moses' in the Synoptic Gospels, the presence of Moses allusions in Matthew's Gospel remains unmistakable.

This article focuses specifically on the infancy narrative (Mt 1–2), where the Moses motif is explored in depth. It first addresses methodological concerns surrounding biblical intertextuality, encompassing inner-biblical allusions, inner-biblical exegesis and typological interpretations.

Given the complexity of intertextual phenomena within the biblical text, the investigation narrows its scope to Matthew's infancy narrative, aiming to discern how Moses allusions are embedded within this passage and to reflect on their theological significance.

Intertextuality within the biblical text

The Bible is a text marked by its extensive self-referential allusions, showcasing its profound literary depth (Eslinger 1992:47). This richness arises from the Bible's prolonged compositional history, which unfolded within a consistent literary and cultural framework. For the people of Israel, Scripture transcended the status of a static ancient artefact; it was regarded as a dynamic and living word, continually shaped by oral traditions and the interpretative practices of scribes (Moyise 2008:306). The layers of interpretation embedded in receptor texts are often influenced by subsequent interpretations of source texts. Thus, the concept of intertextuality pertains to the exploration of literary relationships between texts, as well as the interpretative traditions surrounding them.

Traditionally, the term 'allusion' has been understood to indicate an author's deliberate crafting of words or passages to evoke another fixed text known to readers. In this view, the connotations of the evoked text interact directly with those of the alluding text (Lester 2009:89). However, biblical scholarship has advanced to recognise more nuanced distinctions within intertextual relationships, taking into account the interpretative traditions tied to source texts.

One of the challenges in studying biblical intertextuality lies in the inconsistency of terminology. The term 'intertextuality' itself is now employed with varying meanings depending on the hermeneutical perspectives of different scholars (Lester 2009:89; Meek 2014:280). Terms such as inner-biblical allusion, typology, exegesis and echoes, inter alia, are used to describe specific facets of textual interdependence.

Intertextuality can therefore be regarded as an overarching term encompassing different types of textual interdependence (Lester 2009:89). In this article, the following terms related to textual relationships are considered: intertextuality, inner-biblical allusions, inner-biblical exegesis and typology. The choice of terminology often reflects the scholarly presuppositions and methodological approaches underlying the analysis.

Intertextuality

Intertextuality serves as a comprehensive theory that explores the ways in which texts interact and communicate with one another (Meek 2014:282).[1] Rather than being confined to the

1. Julia Kristeva (1980) introduced geno-text and pheno-text as concepts for intertextual analysis – the geno-text represents a text's deep, generative structure, while the pheno-text reflects its surface-level, structured manifestation. However, her approach seems to be overly theoretical. A more practical alternative focuses on tangible connections between texts, such as quotations, adaptations, and shared motifs, which offer clearer insights into intertextual relationships.

relationship between a select few and specific texts, this concept investigates an expansive network of intertextual connections, highlighting the recontextualisation of ideas from source texts within receptor texts.

The presence of intertextuality is often signalled by literary devices such as the use of key words or phrases, parallels in narrative structure, and patterns in word arrangement, syllabic sequence or poetic resonance. However, pinpointing specific intertextual instances remains challenging.

Intertextuality extends even beyond written texts encompassing oral and interpretative traditions, and the cultural and religious contexts surrounding receptor writings. Consequently, the focus shifts towards examining networks of textual traces rather than determining the origin or direction of influence. Therefore, intertextuality does not necessarily assume authorial intent or a specific direction of textual influence.

A further challenge in intertextual studies lies in distinguishing whether textual similarities arise from intentional allusions or from shared traditions that predate diverse narratives. This complexity underscores the importance of understanding the broader cultural and historical context in which texts are both produced and interpreted.

Inner-biblical allusion

Inner-biblical allusion represents a distinct type of intertextuality that frequently assumes authorial intent and the clear precedence of a source text or tradition within the receptor text. These allusions are often identified by rare or unique vocabulary or grammatical constructions that deviate from typical patterns, suggesting their origins in an earlier source text. Rather than altering or modifying the source text, inner-biblical allusion seeks to evoke references that recall the earlier text, serving theological purposes and reinforcing its significance (Meek 2014:289).

Inner-biblical exegesis

The study of inner-biblical exegesis extends beyond the scope of inner-biblical allusions, focusing on how receptor texts actively revise source texts. These revisions are often aimed at making unfamiliar terms or phrases more comprehensible or applicable to later readers.

Michael Fishbane (1985) was pivotal in advancing the field of inner-biblical exegesis. Preferring this term over the broader 'intertextuality', Fishbane defined inner-biblical exegesis as an effort to clarify ambiguous texts, enhance their relevance, and adapt sacred traditions to new contexts. Drawing on midrashic interpretative practices characteristic of rabbinical authors from the Mishnah and Talmud, Fishbane identified four methodological principles underpinning inner-biblical exegesis: scribal, legal, *haggadic* and mantological exegesis (Meek 2014:284–286):

- Scribal exegesis involves receptor texts offering commentary on or corrections to the source text.
- Legal exegesis focuses on reinterpreting, extending or reapplying pre-existing legal material to address new circumstances.
- *Haggadic* exegesis is characterised by the reappropriation of legal texts and oral traditions, drawing on theological concepts and ideas from ancient Israel. This method spans a range of ideas, genres and texts of ancient Israel, enabling transformations, reapplications and reinterpretations. It forms new meanings by utilising implicit markers such as specific lexemes and themes.
- Mantological exegesis relates to interpretations involving omens or oracles, often involving the repetition and reappropriation of linguistic and thematic elements from the source text in differing contexts or scenarios.

However, Fishbane's framework has faced criticism for forcing intertextual biblical exegesis into a rabbinic mould (Eslinger 1992:149). Critics argue that textual echoes may be either intentional or unintentional, with intentional references in receptor texts potentially serving purposes beyond exegesis – such as evoking allusions or reminding readers of earlier texts.

Despite these critiques, evidence for inner-biblical exegesis remains compelling in cases where receptor text authors explicitly reference source texts. This highlights the intentional and methodical nature of inner-biblical textual interaction.

Typology

Typology represents a distinctive facet of intertextuality, marked by the recurrence of events, persons or institutions that recall and resonate with their counterparts in earlier texts. Within typological interpretation, elements from a source text are seen as foreshadowing or prefiguring those in receptor texts, establishing a relationship where earlier texts anticipate or symbolise later developments. This interpretation relies on analysing both the similarities and differences between source and receptor texts, allowing for the identification and evolution of typological elements over time (Eslinger 1992:58).

In Christian writings, typology underscores the belief in divine guidance shaping the course of history as recorded in the Bible. This approach assumes that literary connections between texts serve as evidence of God's marvellous orchestration, culminating in the fulfilment of earlier types through their antitypes.

Allison (1993:16) highlights the deliberate interactivity and rich allusive discourse embedded within biblical writings. He categorises seven forms of textual allusions: explicit statements, inexplicit citations, similar circumstances, key words or phrases, comparable narrative structures, word order and poetic resonance (Allison 1993:1920). Nevertheless, Allison acknowledges that textual similarities – whether in vocabulary, narrative structure or syllabic patterns – do not always signify deliberate dependence or intentional allusion.

In conclusion, intertextuality within the biblical text reflects the intricate web of textual relationships and cultural traditions that shape its composition. Textural relationships vary from intentional allusions to broader intertextual networks. Terms such as inner-biblical allusion, inner-biblical exegesis and typology offer frameworks for exploring the nuanced interplay between source and receptor texts. While challenges persist in identifying textual dependencies and authorial intent, these studies offer tools to investigate Moses imagery in the Gospel of Matthew.

The Old Testament in the New Testament

Inner-biblical allusion raises historical-critical questions, particularly concerning the dating of texts and the directionality of their interdependence. This involves determining the vector of the allusion – that is, identifying which text serves as the source (source text) and which as the receptor (alluding text). This issue becomes especially significant within the framework of inner-biblical exegesis.

Dating Old-Testament texts remains a complex and often inconclusive endeavour, as many biblical books lack explicit references to the dates of either the events they recount or their composition. Consequently, scholars must exercise caution to avoid circular reasoning when proposing dependence between texts. Determining which text is the source and which the receptor often adds complexity, particularly when dealing with inner-biblical exegesis.

By contrast, the chronological relationship between the Old and New Testaments provides a clearer framework for analysing how allusions to Hebrew Scriptures operate within New-Testament contexts. Two influential studies shed light on the role of Old-Testament allusions in the New Testament. Juel (1988) investigates Christological allusions and exegesis of Old-Testament texts within early Christian literature, including the New Testament. He explores how early Christian communities re-read and reinterpreted the Scriptures of Israel, not merely as historical or legal documents but as texts that find their ultimate fulfilment in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Similarly, Hays (1989) examines Paul's creative engagement with the Old Testament. He contends that Paul engages the Old Testament with creativity, employing intertextual echoes to address theological concerns. Paul reinterprets Israel's narrative through Christ's life, death and resurrection, presenting Jesus as the fulfilment of scriptural promises within a broader biblical framework.

These studies highlight how Old-Testament texts are frequently reimagined and recontextualised within the New Testament. For Jews, intertextuality emphasises the centrality of the Torah, as captured in the phrase 'Torah interpreting the

Torah' (Eslinger 1992:27). For Christians, it affirms God's providential guidance in orchestrating history, culminating in the ultimate redemptive event. This perspective recognises a trajectory of foreshadowing historical events that bridge the old covenant with the new (Eslinger 1992:47).

In this way, inner-biblical allusion illuminates diverse interpretative traditions, enriching both Jewish and Christian theological traditions. Recognising Old-Testament motifs within the New Testament not only deepens understanding of the latter's literary and theological dimensions but also underscores the continuity between the two.

Building on this theoretical foundation, attention will now turn to exploring the allusions to Moses within Matthew's Gospel.

Intertextual parallels between the Moses and Jesus narratives

The First Gospel was authored by a 1st-century Jew whose theological outlook was shaped by his Jewish heritage, his engagement with the Jesus narrative and the surrounding geo-political context (Viljoen 2018:36–64). Drawing both consciously and unconsciously from source texts and traditions, the author wove these influences into his writing. Central to the Jewish cultural and theological framework was the Moses motif, which deeply informed this heritage. Consequently, the Gospel emerges as a new creation composed incorporating much of these motifs (Allison 1993:5). The words and concepts employed carry significant meanings and connotations, reflecting the richness of their intertextual connections (Allison 1993:6).

Allison (1993:11–132) examines Moses as a typological figure within both Jewish and Christian traditions. By identifying numerous parallels and contrasts between Moses and other Jewish figures, Allison establishes a variety of Moses typologies. These typologies predominantly rely on implicit references and subtle allusions rather than explicit statements, showcasing the nuanced intertextual dynamics within biblical texts.

Matthew's Gospel has been described as a 'catena of allusions', crafted to invite readers to encounter Jesus (Stendahl 1954). To achieve this, the evangelist inter alia draws upon the significant figure of Moses, whose typology permeates the text. Stendahl highlights the Gospel of Matthew's portrayal of Moses as a central figure who prefigures and parallels Jesus. Stendahl explores how Matthew intentionally connects Jesus to Moses through narrative and thematic elements. The prominence of Moses is deeply rooted in the Jewish Scriptures, where his role is extensively emphasised. The Moses-typology was already well-established within the traditions that Matthew inherited, providing a foundational framework for his theological and narrative presentation.

However, Kingsbury (1975) denied the so-called 'new Moses' typology of Matthew. Though he acknowledges that the evangelist does incorporate Moses-related imagery in his narrative, he argues that these references are not intended to define Jesus primarily as a new Moses. This imagery rather serves to highlight Jesus' unique authority and fulfilment of God's plan. It should be acknowledged that Matthew is relatively subtle in presenting Moses typologies. Throughout the Gospel, there is no explicit connection drawn between Jesus and Moses. In fact, Matthew mentions Moses explicitly only seven times (Mt 8:4; 17:3–4; 19:7–8; 22:24; 23:2), without directly comparing or contrasting him with Jesus. Nevertheless, this does not negate the presence of Moses-typology within the Gospel. Instead, it underscores the importance of exercising caution when interpreting and assessing these potential typologies, as they often rely on nuanced and implicit references rather than overt statements.

Parallels in Moses' and Jesus' birth and infancy narratives

Matthew's infancy narrative bears striking similarities to the opening of the Exodus narrative and the *haggadah* of Moses' infancy as described in various Jewish texts, such as Josephus' Antiquities, Targum Exodus and Exodus Rabbah. Scholars such as Allison (1993:140–143), Culpepper (2021:49–52), France (2007:63), Hagner (1995:34), Luz (2007:76, 104) and Osborne (2010:97) note that both accounts share significant elements, including instances of divine intervention, the tragic slaughter of Hebrew children, and the subsequent flight and return of key figures, guided by divine revelation. These parallels suggest a deliberate literary connection, portraying Jesus as both a fulfilment of previous events and a new Moses figure, continuing Israel's salvation history.

Parallels in the circumstances of the narratives

The narratives of Moses and Jesus reveal striking parallels in circumstances, emphasising themes of divine intervention and deliverance.

In both accounts, revelation plays a significant role. According to the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Exodus 1:15, Pharaoh had a dream that troubled him deeply so that he summoned his magicians and wise men to interpret it. They predicted that a Hebrew child would be born that would bring about the downfall of Egypt. The Midrash Shemot Rabbah (Ex Rab 1:22) recounts that Miriam, as a young girl, prophesied that her mother would give birth to a son who would deliver the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt. According to Josephus Antiquities (Ant 2.210–216), Amram feared for his pregnant wife because of Pharaoh's decree to kill all male infants, but God assured him of protection in a dream. Striking similarities of divine revelations are also prominent in Matthew's infancy narratives. Joseph receives a divine revelation in a dream from an angel, instructing him to take Mary as his wife despite her unexpected pregnancy (Mt 1:20–21). The magi are warned in a dream not to return to Herod, thus protecting the child from Herod's schemes (Mt 2:12). Joseph is warned in a dream to flee to Egypt to escape Herod's attempt to kill

Jesus (Mt 2:13). Through another dream Joseph is informed that it is safe to return to Israel, as Herod has died (Mt 2:19–20), and he receives further guidance in a dream to settle in Galilee rather than Judea (Mt 2:22).

Both birth accounts feature miraculous circumstances: According to Bava Batra, one of the tractates of the Talmud, Jochebed, Moses' mother, was said to have been beyond childbearing age but restored to youth (B B Batra 120a), while Mary conceived Jesus as a virgin (Mt 1:18). The significance of their names and roles also aligns. Moses, meaning 'saved out of the water', became Israel's saviour (Ex 2:10), while Jesus was named for his role as the Saviour (Mt 1:21).

Both the narratives of Moses and Jesus highlight fear as a central theme, with Pharaoh fearing the rise of a deliverer (Josephus Ant 2.206) and Herod fearing the birth of the 'King of the Jews' (Mt 2:2). These fears led both rulers to tragic and drastic measures – the slaughter of infants – in an attempt to eliminate the perceived threat. Their reactions were shaped by consultations with figures of authority and wisdom: Pharaoh sought advice from scribes, magicians such as Jannes and Jambres (Ex 7:11–12; Targum Exodus; Josephus Ant 2.205, 234) and astrologers (Exodus Rabbah 1.22), while Herod consulted chief priests and scribes (Mt 2:4–6). This pattern underscores a shared narrative of alarm, with Pharaoh responding to the increasing number of Israelites (Ex 1:8–10) and Herod reacting to the announcement of a new king (Mt 2:3–8).

Rescue is another crucial element: Moses is hidden in a basket and saved by Pharaoh's daughter (Ex 2:1–10), while Jesus is taken to Egypt to evade Herod's massacre (Mt 2:13–18). Both narratives also involve the concept of substitute killing, where other children die while the main figure is saved.

Moses fled for his life (Ex 2:15), just as Joseph fled to protect Jesus (Mt 2:11–14). In both cases, divine guidance led to their return after the danger subsided: Moses returned to Egypt as an adult (Ex 2:23; 4:19–20), while Joseph brought Mary and the child Jesus back from Egypt (Mt 2:21).

Additionally, both Moses and Jesus' families experience exile, followed by supernatural communication that directs their return after the death of the oppressor. For instance, Moses' return to Egypt mirrors Joseph's return from Egypt with Jesus after Herod's death, with strikingly similar language: 'All those seeking your life are dead' (Ex 4:19; Mt 2:20).

Despite these parallels, notable differences remain. Moses returned to Egypt as an adult with his wife and children, whereas Joseph returned with his wife and the infant Jesus. Furthermore, Egypt is portrayed as a place of refuge in Matthew's account, while it represents a place of threat in the Moses narrative.

Parallels in the structure and themes of the narratives

Parallels in the structure and themes of the narratives of Moses and Jesus are evident, with the infancy narrative of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew reflecting the overarching themes and key events in Moses' life.

The structure of Jesus' infancy narrative reveals three key sections that closely parallel events in Moses' story. Firstly, the dream of the coming deliverer (Mt 1:20–21) mirrors the divine intervention in Moses narrative, where God orchestrates events to safeguard Moses as his chosen deliverer (Ex 1–2). Secondly, the appearance of a guiding star, Herod's scheme to get rid of the new king, and the magi's worship of Jesus (Mt 2:1–12) echo the Pharaoh's threat to the infant Moses and God's providential intervention (Ex 1:15–2:10). Finally, Jesus' exile to Egypt and subsequent return to Israel (Mt 2:13–23) reflect Moses' own fled from Egypt and his subsequent return (Ex 2:11–4:31).

Within this broader structure, Matthew 2 can be divided into two complementary and antithetical sections: Matthew 2:1–12 and 2:13–23, which mirror each other through contrasting elements (Luz 2007:102). In the first section, the star's appearance (Mt 2:2) corresponds to its guidance (Mt 2:9) in the second section. The dismay of Herod and his people in verse 3 contrasts with the great joy of the magi in verse 10. Similarly, Herod's evil plans in verses 7–9a are countered by God's prevention of those plans in verse 12. Additionally, there is a parallel between the direct discourses in verses 2 and 8, both of which begin with a question about the new king and a stated desire to worship him. The two sections present opposing agendas, reflecting the conflict between evil human schemes and divine protection. On the one hand, Herod's strategy in Jerusalem is driven by fear, deceit and a desperate effort to maintain power. On the other hand, God counters Herod's actions by intervening with divine guidance, ensuring that his plan unfolds despite human opposition.

A similar structure emerges in Josephus' account of the Moses infancy narrative (Ant 2:205–209). According to Josephus, a sacred scribe of Egypt predicts that a Hebrew child will be born, who would grow up to free the Israelites from Egypt. This prophecy deeply unsettles Pharaoh, prompting him to issue a decree to kill all male Hebrew infants by casting them into the river. Egyptian midwives were instructed to execute this killing. Despite Pharaoh's efforts, Moses was saved, fulfilling the prophecy and ultimately liberating the Israelites from Egypt.

Josephus furthermore recounts how Amram, the father of Moses, was deeply troubled by Pharaoh's decree to kill all male Hebrew infants (Ant 2:210–216). Amram prayed fervently to God for deliverance and God appeared to Amram in a dream, reassuring him of his divine plan. God revealed that the child Amram's wife was carrying would be the one to deliver the Hebrews from their suffering in Egypt.

He promised that this child, Moses, would be protected from Pharaoh's schemes and would grow up to lead the Israelites to freedom.

At the conclusion of Jesus' infancy narrative, Matthew recounts the angel's command: 'Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead' (Mt 2:20). This statement subtly echoes the Exodus narrative: 'Go back to Egypt, for all those who wanted to kill you are dead' (Ex 4:19).

For 1st-century readers of Matthew 1–2, these echoes of Exodus 1–2 would have been unmistakable, evoking themes of deliverance and divine intervention central to both narratives.

Parallels in the wording and phrases of the narratives

Key words and phrases within the receptor text (the Gospel of Matthew) reveal a most probable allusion to the source text (the Moses narrative in the Septuagint) (Allison 1993:155–156). Though these allusions are subtle, they would have been recognisable to the first readers, suggesting some intertextual connection.

For instance, in Exodus 1:19, the phrase πρὶν ἢ εἰσελθεῖν πρὸς αὐτάς, which describes how the midwives could not reach the Hebrew women in time, finds a parallel in Matthew 1:18, where the phrase πρὶν ἢ συνελθεῖν αὐτοὺς describes how Mary and Joseph had not yet come together.

Another clear parallel is evident in the narratives of Pharaoh's and Herod's attempts to kill Moses and Jesus, respectively. In Exodus 2:15, Pharaoh's intent to kill Moses (ἐζήτει ἀνελεῖν Μωυσῆν) leads to Moses fleeing (ἀνεχώρησεν). This is echoed in Matthew 2:13–16, where Herod seeks to destroy the child (ζητεῖν τὸ παιδίον τοῦ ἀπολέσαι), prompting Joseph to flee to Egypt with his family (ἀνεχώρησεν) and culminating in Herod's decree to kill all the boys in Bethlehem (ἀνεῖλεν πάντας τοὺς παῖδας).

The death of the rulers also provides a connecting thread. In Exodus 2:23 and 4:19, the death of the Egyptian king (ἐτελεύτησεν ὁ βασιλεὺς) marks a turning point that enables Moses' return to Egypt. Similarly, in Matthew 2:15, the phrase τῆς τελευτῆς Ἡρῴδου signifies the death of Herod, allowing Joseph and his family to return from Egypt.

Furthermore, the act of returning is a significant motif. In Exodus 4:20, Moses takes his wife and sons to return to Egypt (ἀναλαβὼν […] τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ τὰ παιδία). This is mirrored in Matthew 2:13, where Joseph is instructed to take the child and his mother (παράλαβε τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ) as they return from Egypt.

Even the names within the narratives evoke connections to the Exodus story. Joseph, the name of Jesus' earthly father, recalls the patriarch in Exodus 1:18. Miriam, Moses' sister,

shares the same name as Mary, the mother of Jesus. Additionally, the name Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, the successor of Moses. These name connections act as triggers for readers familiar with the Exodus narrative, reinforcing the identification of Jesus with Israel's history of salvation.

Finally, the journey to and from Egypt undertaken by Joseph, Jesus and Mary mirrors the central role of Egypt in the Exodus narrative. Just as Moses, his family, and the Israelites were linked to Egypt in their story of deliverance, so too are Jesus and his family.

Although Jesus' infancy narrative draws parallels with Moses' story, it does not align in every detail. Unlike Jesus, whose parents fled with him as a child, Moses' parents did not flee; instead, it was Moses himself who fled as an adult. For Moses, Egypt represents a land of threat, whereas for Jesus, it serves as a refuge. Both narratives involve a return with their families – yet Moses as adult with his family and Joseph with his family with Jesus as infant. While Jesus' story echoes Moses' in several respects, the parallels are not complete.

Nevertheless, it appears that the Moses *haggadah* has significantly influenced the Jesus *haggadah*.

Jesus as the embodiment of a new exodus as fulfilment of Hosea 11:1

Matthew 2:15 explicitly references Egypt in Hosea 11:1: 'Out of Egypt I called my son' (Ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐκάλεσα τὸν υἱόν μου). Jesus' return from Egypt is marked as a fulfilment of prophecy.[2] At first glance, Matthew's use of Hosea 11:1 may appear to disregard its original context, as Hosea seems to make no direct Messianic reference. However, when read in conjunction with the first part of Hosea 11:1, 'When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son' (Mt), a deeper typological meaning emerges. The term 'Egypt' serves as a thematic link between the two texts, while 'Son of God' resonates with Jewish Messianic expectations.

These terms establish a typological connection of Jesus and the exile of Israel (Osborne 2010:99). Ancient Jewish tradition often viewed the redemption from Egypt as symbolic of Messianic redemption, a 'new Exodus' (Floor 1969). In this light, the evangelist depicts Jesus as the embodiment of a repeated and fulfilled Exodus (Luz 2007:146). He positions Jesus as the true Israel, the beloved Son of God, in whom the Exodus finds its ultimate completion. Just as Israel, God's 'son', experienced deliverance from Egypt, so too does Jesus embody this redemptive journey in a more profound sense. France (1985:86) underscores this by emphasising that as Israel is God's son whom He loves, Jesus is also revealed as God's beloved son.

2. This is the third of the 10 explicit fulfilment citations in Matthew. Virgin birth (Mt 1:22–23) – fulfilment of Isaiah 7:14; birth in Bethlehem (Mt 2:5–6) – fulfilment of Micah 5:2; return from Egypt (Mt 2:15) – fulfilment of Hosea 11:1; infanticide (Mt 2:17–18) – fulfilment of Jeremiah 31:15; Jesus called a Nazarene (Mt 2:23) – fulfilment, possibly linked to several prophetic themes; John the Baptist's call (Mt 3:3) – fulfilment of Isaiah 40:3; healing of the sick (Mt 8:17) – fulfilment of Isaiah 53:4; speaking in parables (Mt 13:35) – fulfilment of Psalm 78:2; triumphal entry (Mt 21:4–5) – fulfilment of Zechariah 9:9; betrayal for 30 pieces of silver (Mt 27:9–10) – fulfilment of Zechariah 11:12–13.

The parallel deepens when considering the roles of Moses and Jesus. Moses is the central figure of the first Exodus, leading Israel's deliverance from bondage. According to Josephus (Ant 2.15–16) God told Moses' father in a dream 'This child […] shall deliver the Hebrew race form their bondage in Egypt'. In the new Exodus, Jesus takes on this role, bringing ultimate redemption from spiritual exile. Through this typological framework, Matthew connects Jesus' life to the historical and theological themes of the Hebrew Scriptures, demonstrating that Jesus is the fulfilment of God's redemptive plan (Culpepper 2021:37, 49).

The exile motif holds significant importance in Matthew's Gospel (Baxter 1999:71). This is evident from the genealogy in Matthew 1:11–12, where the Babylonian exile serves as a turning point. Interestingly, in Matthew's third group of 'fourteen' generations, which spans from the deportation to Babylon to the time of Christ, only 13 generations are listed. This omission implies that, according to Matthew's reckoning, Israel remains in exile. In this context, Christ is portrayed as being born in exile (Mt 1:17b–18a), and his calling by God from exile (Mt 2:15, referring to Hs11:1) reflects a profound theological parallel with the historical experience of Israel.

Matthew's portrayal aligns with the prophetic use of exile and exodus imagery, such as in Isaiah 10:24–26; 43:16–19, Jeremiah 2:4–7; 11:35, Ezekiel 20:33–38 and Hosea 2:14–15; 13:4–6. This imagery serves as a foundation for understanding the continuity of God's redemptive plan. The tears shed during the Babylonian exile climax in the anguish of the mothers of Bethlehem, mourning the slaughter of their sons by Herod (Mt 2:17–18, cf. Jr 31:15). Yet, Rachel's sorrow in Jeremiah 31:15 is countered by the promise of ultimate deliverance in Jeremiah 31:16–25, especially in verses 31–34, where God pledges a new covenant.

Through Jesus, the rightful heir to David's throne, Matthew presents new hope and the expectation of a new exodus for Israel. As the promised deliverer (Mt 1:21), Christ fulfils this typological pattern, leading a spiritual exodus that mirrors and surpasses Israel's historical redemption (Baxter 1999:72). In this way, Matthew masterfully intertwines the exile motif with the Messianic hope embodied in Jesus, inviting readers to see him as the culmination of Israel's deliverance and the fulfilment of God's promises.

Matthew proclaims that the time for this final exodus has arrived with the announcement of the coming kingdom: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Mt 3:3; cf. 4:17; 10:7; 12:28). In this eschatological framework, Jesus emerges as the final deliverer, the one who would lead this great exodus. As the true Son of God and the fulfilment of Messianic expectations, Jesus embodies the ultimate redemption. Matthew underscores this in moments such as the declaration of Jesus' divine sonship at his baptism (Mt 3:17), which echoes earlier references to his identity as God's Son called out of Egypt (Mt 2:15, cf. Hs 11:1) and his role as 'Immanuel', God with us (Mt 1:23).

The expectation of a new exodus intensifies with the introduction of John the Baptist immediately after the infancy narrative (Baxter 1999:72). Matthew underscores the significance of John's ministry by connecting it to Isaiah's prophecy: 'A voice of one calling in the wilderness, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him"' (Mt 3:3). While Matthew explicitly cites this verse, the broader context of Isaiah 40:1–5 holds considerable importance. Originally, Isaiah's prophecy addressed the Babylonian exile, offering hope and comfort for Israel's restoration. This theme resonates with Matthew's perspective, as he portrays Israel as still spiritually exiled and awaiting the ultimate deliverance.

By concluding the infancy narrative with a heightened sense of anticipation for a new exodus and the emergence of a deliverer (Baxter 1999:71), Matthew seamlessly transitions to John the Baptist's proclamation in the next chapter. Through John's ministry, Matthew bridges the expectation of a new exodus, the prophetic tradition of Isaiah, and the role of Jesus as the promised deliverer. This deliberate connection reflects Matthew's portrayal of Jesus as the fulfilment of Israel's longing for redemption and restoration.

Conclusion

The Bible's intertextuality represents a dynamic and evolving tapestry of literary relationships that reflect its prolonged history and rich interpretative traditions. Inner-biblical allusions, whether intentional or unintentional, establish profound connections between source and receptor texts. These allusions enrich both Jewish and Christian theological traditions by reimagining and re-appropriating motifs from earlier texts into new contexts. Through these intertextual relationships, deeper theological insights into scriptural messages emerge, particularly in the New Testament's exploration of continuity between Old- and New-Testament themes. For instance, Matthew's engagement with the Moses tradition sheds light on the interpretative practices shaping early Christian theology.

By analysing the intricate intertextual connections between Moses' (Ex 1–2) and Jesus' (Mt 1–2) infancy narratives, this article demonstrates how the Gospel of Matthew deeply integrates Mosaic imagery. This integration does not only underscore the Jewish roots of Matthew's message but also reveals significant Christological implications, positioning Jesus within the broader context of biblical redemption history.

The narratives of Moses and Jesus exhibit striking thematic and structural parallels that emphasise divine intervention and deliverance. Both figures, marked by miraculous births, are rescued from the threat of infanticide by fearful rulers. Providential guidance through dreams and other divine interventions ensures their survival, underscoring God's protective hand. These shared themes – revelation, exile, rescue and deliverance – highlight their roles as divinely appointed saviours. Moreover, Matthew's mirroring of the Exodus

narrative illustrates a thematic journey of exile and return, emphasising the triumph of divine plans over human schemes.

The linguistic and thematic echoes between the narratives deepen the connection between Jesus and Moses, reinforcing the central motif of divine deliverance. For example, Matthew 2:15 ties Jesus' return from Egypt to Hosea 11:1, portraying Jesus as the true Israel and ultimate deliverer. This 'new Exodus' imagery, enriched with references to Egypt and the designation 'Son of God', aligns Jesus with Israel's historical deliverance while symbolising Messianic redemption. In doing so, Matthew weaves Jesus' story into the narrative framework of Israel's salvation, highlighting his role as the culmination of God's redemptive plan.

Although Matthew's Gospel does not explicitly construct a 'new Moses' Christology, it is suffused with Mosaic imagery. This approach reflects the profound significance of Moses in Jewish tradition and enables Matthew to present Jesus as the fulfilment of prophecies embedded in the Hebrew Scriptures. By employing typology, Matthew connects Jesus' ministry to its roots in ancient Jewish history, portraying him as the divinely appointed deliverer. In this way, Jesus does not only fulfil but also transforms the imagery of Moses, bridging the Old and New Testaments.

Through the exploration of these intertextual connections, this article underscores the theological continuity between the Testaments, emphasising the protective hand of God in salvation history.

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Data availability

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