

# Revisiting Mosaic Motifs in Matthew's Nativity Story

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## Abstrak

Mayoritas sarjana melihat bahwa Matius sebenarnya menggemakan kisah awal kehidupan Musa di dalam dua pasal pertama Injilnya. Gema ini menunjukkan bahwa Yesus adalah Musa yang baru. Tulisan ini akan menggugat pandangan tersebut dengan menunjukkan tiga alasan yang melandasinya (1) adanya perbedaan signifikan di antara dua kisah tersebut, (2) adanya bagian-bagian yang tidak parallel, dan (3) tidak adanya korespondensi verbal yang kuat di antara kedua kisah tadi.

Kata-Kata Kunci: evaluasi, Injil Matius, intertekstualitas, kelahiran Yesus, motif Musa

## Abstract

Most scholars see that Matthew echoes the early life story of Moses in the first two chapters of his Gospel. This echo shows that Jesus is the New Moses. This paper will defy this view based on three underlying reasons: (1) there are significant differences between the two accounts, (2) there are some unparalleled parts, and (3) there is no strong verbal correspondence between the two stories.

Keywords: evaluation, Gospel of Matthew, intertextuality, Jesus' nativity, Mosaic motif

When gospel writers wrote their gospels, they certainly did not include all materials that they had into their works (see Jn. 21:24-25). Instead, they selected their materials and arranged it to serve their theological purposes; i.e. they had purposes why they included/excluded certain materials. It follows, therefore, that Matthew had purposes in including the nativity story of Jesus in his writing.

Among many possibilities, many scholars propose that Matthew likely wanted to demonstrate Jesus as the New Moses by including the nativity story. They refer to the fact that there are some 'parallels' between Jesus' nativity story and Moses' early life story. It is interesting to note that majority scholars are now persuaded by this

notion. Allison even states, "The existence of a Moses typology in Matt. 1-2 has been affirmed by many modern commentators, and rightly so."<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, however, I aim to demonstrate that the correspondences between these two accounts are very weak. Contrary to most scholars, I do not think that the parallels are striking and I will provide three following arguments to prove my judgment.

## Plausability

Is it plausible that Matthew intended his readers to recall Moses' nativity story when

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<sup>1</sup> Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 140. Emphasis mine.

they read Jesus' nativity story? First of all, to talk about availability,<sup>2</sup> it must be admitted that it is not implausible for Matthew's readers to develop a connection between these two stories since both Matthew and his primary audiences were Jewish.<sup>3</sup> Also, because they were Jews, they certainly knew the nativity story of Moses as recorded in the Old Testament (Exodus) and in some other Mosaic traditions.

This plausibility increases when we consider historical (plausibility) factors.<sup>4</sup> First, Moses is the greatest leader in Israel's history. He led Israel out from Egypt and he was God's instrument in giving Torah to the nation. There is no doubt that first century Jews would know this story very well. Second, Brown writes that, "In post-exilic Judaism (after 500 B.C.) there was an exaltation of the Mosaic Law as the center of religious life and, correlatively, a popular interest in the origins of Moses who gave Israel this celestial teaching."<sup>5</sup> If so, it is not implausible that Matthew might have been interested in Moses' origin and wanted to relate it with Jesus' origin.

Moreover, if Matthew really wanted to demonstrate that Jesus was the promised

Messiah,<sup>6</sup> then showing that Jesus fulfilled some Mosaic element would have been necessary.<sup>7</sup> Allison writes that, in rabbinic sources, the Messiah is said to be like Moses.<sup>8</sup> However, we can find this idea even in Jesus' time. In Deuteronomy 18:15-19, it says,

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die." The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account."

The first century Jews seemed to relate this passage to the messianic prophecy. In John 1:45, for example, Phillip says to Nathanael, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." From the context (especially 1:41), it is clear that what Phillip means that he sees the Messiah. Although Phillip does not specifically mention the part of the Law to which he refers, some commentators are convinced that Deuteronomy 18:15-19 must be in Phillip's mind.<sup>9</sup> The same phenomenon can also be found with Jesus himself, who interprets that

<sup>2</sup> "Was the proposed source of the echo available to the author and/or original readers?" Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989), 29.

<sup>3</sup> Bauckham contends that the Gospels were actually intended to be read by all Christians. See Richard Bauckham, "For Whom Were Gospels Written?," in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospels Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), 9-48. However, it does not negate the fact that Matthew primary audiences were Jews. It is clear from the fact that he frequently mentions Jewish Tradition without explaining it further. It surely indicates that both Matthew and his readers share the same cultural assumption.

<sup>4</sup> "Could the author have intended the alleged meaning effect? Could his readers have understood it?" Hays, *Echoes*, 30.

<sup>5</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 114n39.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004), 158.

<sup>7</sup> It is related to thematic coherence, "How well does the alleged echo fit into the line of argument that the writer is developing? Do the images and ideas of the proposed precursor text illuminate author's argument?" Hays, *Echoes*, 30.

<sup>8</sup> Allison, *New Moses*, 142.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Leicester: Eerdmans/IVP, 1991), 159; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, Anchor Bible Commentary (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale, 2008), 86.

passage as referring to him (cf. John 5:46). All these then lead to the conclusion that Jews in Jesus' time understood the Messiah as the second Moses. If this is the case, that is, if the first century Jews understood that the Messiah is the second Moses, and if Matthew really wanted to demonstrate Jesus as the promised Messiah, then demonstrating Jesus as the second Moses would have been necessary for Matthew.

However, the fact that it is very plausible does not automatically mean that Matthew actually did it. To know whether Matthew really did it, we have to examine how loud the volume of the correspondence is. Hays explains that "[t]he volume of an echo is determined primarily by the degree of explicit repetition of words or syntactical patterns, but other factors may also be relevant . . ."<sup>10</sup> In examining the volume, I will focus on two aspects, that is, the parallel of structure and motifs as well as verbal correspondence (words repetition, syntactical pattern) between the two accounts. In doing so, I will first describe the structural and motifs parallel. Afterwards, I will explain verbal parallels that scholars proposed, and finally, I will offer some critiques to those arguments.

### Structural and Motifs Parallels

Greg Beale contends that sometimes NT writers do use an outline of an OT book as their blueprint.<sup>11</sup> If so, what kind of parallels do those scholars propose? There are at least six parallels they propose. First, they think that the story of Joseph's dream (Matt. 1:18-25) is paralleled with an extra-biblical Mosaic tradition. In a Mosaic tradition, recorded by Josephus, it is written that Amram is afraid because Pharaoh commands all male children to be killed.

Amram then prays to God and God graciously comes in Amram's dream, telling that the child whom his wife is bearing will be the deliverer of the Hebrew nation (*Antiq.* II. 210-216.).<sup>12</sup> This scene reminds readers of the story in Matthew when an angel of the Lord comes in Joseph's dream, stating that the child whom Mary is bearing will save his people from their sin (Matt. 1:21).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The text reads: "A man, whose name was Amram, one of the nobler sort of the Hebrews, was afraid for his whole nation, lest it should fail, by the want of young men to be brought up hereafter, and was very uneasy at it, his wife being then with child, and he knew not what to do. Hereupon he betook himself to prayer to God; and entreated him to have compassion on those men who had nowise transgressed the laws of his worship, and to afford them deliverance from the miseries they at that time endured, and to render abortive their enemies' hopes of the destruction of their nation. Accordingly God had mercy on him, and was moved by his supplication. He stood by him in his sleep, and exhorted him not to despair of his future favorites. He said further, that he did not forget their piety towards him, and would always reward them for it, as he had formerly granted his favor to their forefathers, and made them increase from a few, to so great a multitude. He put him in mind, that when Abraham was come alone out of Mesopotamia into Canaan, he had been made happy, not only in other respects, but that when his wife was at first barren, she was afterwards by him enabled to conceive seed, and bear him sons. That he left to Ismael and to his posterity the country of Arabia; as also to his sons by Keturah, Troglodytis: and to Isaac, Canaan. That by my assistance, said he, he did great exploits in war, which, unless you be yourselves impious, you must still remember. As for Jacob, he became well known to strangers also, by the greatness of that prosperity in which he lived, and left to his sons, who came into Egypt with no more than seventy souls, while you are now become above six hundred thousand. Know, therefore, that I shall provide for you all in common what is for your good, and particularly for thyself what shall make thee famous; for that child, out of dread of whose nativity the Egyptians have doomed the Israelite children to destruction, shall be this child of thine, and shall be concealed from those who watch to destroy him: and when he is brought up in a surprising way, he shall deliver the Hebrew nation from the distress they are under from the Egyptians. His memory shall be famous while the world lasts; and this not only among the Hebrews, but foreigners also:—all which shall be the effect of my favor to thee, and to thy posterity. He shall also have such a brother, that he shall himself obtain my priesthood, and his posterity shall have it after him to the end of the world."

<sup>13</sup> Allison, *New Moses*, 144-5; Brown, *The Birth of Messiah*, 114.

<sup>10</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 30.

<sup>11</sup> G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2012), 80-9.

Second, Josephus also writes that one of Pharaoh's sacred scribes predicts the birth of an Israel child that will bring Egyptian dominion low (*Antiq.* II. 205-209). Pharaoh is afraid because of that prophecy, and is advised then to cast all male children of Israel into the river (cf. Ex. 1:22). He also has his midwives to kill all male newborns.<sup>14</sup> This story is quite similar with Matthew's scene where Herod learns from the magi, the chief priest, and the teacher of the law about the birth of the Messiah (Matt. 2:4-6). He is disturbed by the prophecy (2:3), and later—when he knows that he was outwitted—he commands that all babies must be slaughtered.<sup>15</sup>

Third, in Moses' story Pharaoh is outwitted by the midwives, that is, Siphrah and Puah (Ex. 1:15-19). This is paralleled with the scene where the Magi outwit Herod by not fulfilling Herod's request to return to him and to inform him of the location of the baby. Instead, they take another way and go back to their home country (Matt. 2:12, 16).<sup>16</sup>

Fourth, because Pharaoh finds that his plan does not work, he then commands to kill all male babies (Ex. 1:22; cf. second point). It is similar to Herod's action: when

he knows that his purpose is not achievable, he commands to kill all male children (Matt. 2:16-18).<sup>17</sup>

Fifth, because the life of Jesus is threatened, Joseph brings Jesus and Mary to escape to Egypt (Matt. 2:13-14). This is paralleled with the escape story of adult Moses. In Exodus 2, it is written that Moses kills an Egyptian to help his fellow Hebrew. When Pharaoh knows about this, he tries to kill Moses (Exo. 2:15). It then causes Moses fleeing from Egypt.<sup>18</sup>

Sixth, both Mosaic tradition and Matthew record that wicked kings finally die and, as a response, God commands the main characters to return to their home lands. In Exodus 2:23, it is written that the king of Egypt dies. Two chapters later, God tells Moses to return to the Egypt (Ex. 4:19) and finally in Ex. 4:20, Moses brings his wife and his children to go back to Egypt. Similarly, in Matthew 2:19, it is written that Herod dies. The angel of the Lord then commands Joseph to bring his family to go back to the land of Israel (Matt. 2:19-20) and, finally in Matthew 2:21, Joseph brings his family to go back to the land of Israel.<sup>19</sup>

These parallels can be set into the following diagram:

<sup>14</sup> "While the affairs of the Hebrews were in this condition, there was this occasion offered itself to the Egyptians, which made them more solicitous for the extinction of our nation. One of those sacred scribes, who are very sagacious in foretelling future events truly, told the king, that about this time there would a child be born to the Israelites, who, if he were reared, would bring the Egyptian dominion low, and would raise the Israelites; that he would excel all men in virtue, and obtain a glory that would be remembered through all ages. Which thing was so feared by the king, that, according to this man's opinion, he commanded that they should cast every male child, which was born to the Israelites, into the river, and destroy it; that besides this, the Egyptian mid-wives should watch the labors of the Hebrew women, and observe what is born, for those were the women who were enjoined to do the office of midwives to them; and by reason of their relation to the king, would not transgress his commands."

<sup>15</sup> Allison, *New Moses*, 146; Brown, *The Birth of Messiah*, 114.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Goldberg, *Jews and Christians: Getting Our Stories Right* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Trinity International, 1991), 145.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Goldberg, *Jews and Christians*, 147; Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 113; Allison, *New Moses*, 145; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 192; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009), 107; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2007), 63, 82-3; Nolland, *Matthew*, 121, 123.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Goldberg, *Jews and Christian*, 147; Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 113; Allison, *New Moses*, 146; France, *Matthew*, 63. Unlike most scholars, Mounce contends that this scene is actually parallel with the saving of Moses by his mother. See Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, NIBC (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991), 14.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Goldberg, *Jews and Christian*, 147; Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 113; Allison, *New Moses*, 142-4, 146; France, *Matthew*, 63, 89; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 193.

Mosaic Tradition	Matthew's Nativity Story
God comes to the dream of anxious Amram, telling that his son will be Israel's deliverer (Josephus, <i>Antiq.</i> II. 9. 3).	An angel of the Lord comes to Joseph's dream, telling that his son will save His people from their sin (Mt. 1:18-25).
Pharaoh learns the birth of Israel's deliverer from his sacred scribe (Josephus, <i>Antiq.</i> II. 9. 3).	Herod learns the birth of the Messiah from the Magi, the chief priest, and the teacher of the law (Mt. 2:4-6).
Pharaoh is outwitted by the midwives (Ex. 1:15-19).	Herod is outwitted by the Magi (Mt. 2:12-16).
Pharaoh commands to kill all male babies (Ex. 1:22).	Herod commands to kill all male children (Mt. 2:16-18).
Moses kills an Egyptian. His life is threatened by Pharaoh. He escapes from Egypt (Ex. 2:15).	Jesus' life is threatened; Joseph brings Jesus and Mary to Egypt (Mt. 2:13-14).
Pharaoh dies; God has Moses to return to Egypt; Moses and his family return to Egypt (Ex. 2:23; 4:19-20).	Herod dies; God has Joseph to bring Jesus back to the land of Israel; Joseph and his family return to Israel (Mt. 2:19-21).

Some scholars actually add some other parallels between Matthew and the Mosaic tradition. Goldberg, for instance, states that Matthew 2:18 may also be an implicit parallel with Mosaic story. He quotes Child and writes, "Matt. 2:18 may be intimating that just as the Israelite mother in Egypt most likely wept over their infants slain by Pharaoh, so too Rachel—one of Israel's ancestral, paradigmatic mothers—now weeps over her children slaughtered by Herod."<sup>20</sup>

The problem with this example is that even a casual reading would clearly show that the correspondence is very weak. Allison gives another example. He thinks that it is likely that Matthew is influenced by *The Chronicles of Moses* which writes, "all

the people are seized by a great fear because of Pharaoh's dream" when he writes that all Jerusalem residents are disturbed by the Messianic news.<sup>21</sup> He even argues that the miraculous story of Jesus' birth may also be related to the miraculous birth of Moses that is recorded in some later works (e.g., *b. Sota* 12a; *Exod. Rab.* 1. 20).<sup>22</sup> However, I do not think we need to pay much attention to this hypothesis since the sources that Allison quotes are mostly late and it cannot be discerned for certain whether it reflects an older tradition or a later variation. Thus, I think we have to be very cautious with the parallelomania symptoms here.<sup>23</sup>

### Verbal Correspondence

Besides structural and motifs parallels, scholars who think that Matthew shows Mosaic motifs in his nativity story also propose some verbal correspondence between Matthew's nativity story and the early life of Moses in Exodus.

First, Allison notes some resemblance between phrases that occur in Exodus 1:19 and Matthew 1:18. In Matthew 1:18, it is written *πρὶν ἢ συνελθεῖν αὐτοῦς*, while Exodus 1:19 writes *πρὶν ἢ εἰσελθεῖν πρὸς αὐτὰς*. The similar pattern of these phrase (*πρὶν* + *σύν/εἰς* + *ἔρχομαι* + personal pronoun accusative plural) seems to show that Matthew intends to echo the early chapter of Exodus.<sup>24</sup>

Second, the words Matthew uses to describe Herod's actions seem to resemble Pharaoh's too. Herod is going to search (*ζητεῖν*) Jesus to perish (*ἀπολέσαι*) him (Matt. 2:13). But knowing that he has been outwitted, he orders to kill (*ἀνεῖλεν*) all

<sup>21</sup> Allison, *New Moses*, 146.

<sup>22</sup> Allison, *New Moses*, 147. Allison notes some sources telling that Jochebed's virginity is restored before the conception of Moses, that is, *Tg. Exod.* 2.1; *Exod. Rab.* 1.19; and *b. Sota* 12a. Allison, *New Moses*, 148.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Samuel Sandmell, "Parallelomania," *JBL* 81, no. 1 (1962): 1-13.

<sup>24</sup> Allison, *New Moses*, 155.

<sup>20</sup> Goldberg, *Jews and Christian*, 149, note 2.

babies in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16). This resembles Pharaoh's action who seeks to kill (ἐζήτει ἀνελεῖν) Moses (Ex. 2:15).<sup>25</sup>

Third, the word Matthew uses to describe Jesus and his family's escape to Egypt (Matt. 2:14) is the same word that is used to describe Moses' escape from Egypt (Ex. 2:15). Both account use the word ἀνεχώρησεν.<sup>26</sup>

Lastly, the command of the angel of the Lord to Joseph to return from Egypt is quite similar to God's command to Moses to return to Egypt. In Exodus 4:19, God tells Moses, "Go back to Egypt, for (γὰρ) all the men who wanted to kill you (οἱ ζητοῦντές σου τὴν ψυξὴν) are dead (τεθνήκασιν)" and in Matthew 2:20, the angel of the Lord says to Joseph, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for (γὰρ) those who were trying to take (οἱ ζητοῦντές) the child's life (τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ παιδίου) are dead (τεθνήκασιν)." Notice that both commands contain the verb τεθνήκασιν, conjunction γὰρ, nominative οἱ ζητοῦντές, and accusative τὴν ψυχὴν.<sup>27</sup>

### Evaluation

Reading the text meticulously, however, will show that the arguments above are not wholly persuasive. There are three things to note here. First, there are some significant differences in the parallels that those scholars propose. For instances:

- In Joseph's dream, there is no 'afraid' motif as in Amram's. Similarly, there is also no consolation motif in Joseph's dream. In Matthew, the dream generates positive action, but in Josephus, the

dream increases the fear of Amram and Jochebed (*Antiq.* II. 9. 4).

- Jochebed does not experience virginal conception, while Mary does. Allison's effort to show that Jochebed also experiences virginal conception is not convincing since he relies on later sources (see above).
- The midwives want to save babies in general, while the Magi are warned to save only Jesus. Pharaoh commands to kill all male babies in general and it takes place before the birth of Moses. In Matthew, Herod commands to kill all male babies in Bethlehem and it takes place after Jesus' birth.<sup>28</sup>
- In Exodus, the adult Moses escapes from Egypt because he has just killed an Egyptian. His escape, however, harms nobody. In Matthew, Jesus and his family escape to Egypt not because he killed somebody. Their escape harms all male children in Bethlehem.
- Divine intervention is shown in Jesus' escape, while it is absent in Mosaic account. In Exodus, the *adult* Moses returns to Egypt with his family, while in Matthew, the *baby* Jesus is brought to Israel by his parents.

Second, there are also some unparalleled scenes in both account. In Matthew, there are no paralleled stories of saving baby Moses by his family and the daughter of Pharaoh (since Matthew jumps from the massacre of babies straight to adult story of Moses), Moses kills an Egyptian, Moses' marriage, etc. Moreover, we do not have parallels for the star, the Magi, and the virgin birth in reliable Mosaic tradition. Also, if Matthew wants to echo the Mosaic motifs, it is not understandable why he would jump from the parallel of infancy story of Moses straight to the parallel of the escape of adult Moses. Why does he not

<sup>25</sup> Allison, *New Moses*, 155-56.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Osborne, *Matthew*, 98.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. R. T. France, *Matthew*, TNTC (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1985), 93, 63, 77, 89-90; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 193; Mounce, *Matthew*; 20; Keener, *Matthew*, 112; Osborne, *Matthew*, 101; Nolland, *Matthew*, 126.

<sup>28</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, EBC (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1984), 8:94.

make parallel with the saving of baby Moses?

Third, verbal correspondence which those scholars propose is very weak. There are indeed very few words from Exodus that are found in Matthew's nativity story (e.g. *ἀνεχώρησεν*). However, if Matthew really wanted to echo Mosaic motifs, he certainly would have used more words from Exodus. One can compare, for instance, with Matthew's echo of Isaiah 50 in the fifth Antithesis (Matt. 5:38-42), which gives more words parallels of the two accounts, e.g. *ἀνθίστημι* (Isaiah 50:8; Matthew 5:38), *δίδωμι* (Isaiah 50:4, 6; Matthew 5:42), *σιαγών* (Isaiah 50:6; Matthew 5:39), *ραπίζω* (Isaiah 50:6; Matthew 5:39), *ἀποστρέφω* (Isaiah 50:6; Matthew 5:42), *κρίνω* (Isaiah 50:8; Matthew 5:40), *ιμάτιον* (Isaiah 50:9; Matthew 5:40).<sup>29</sup> So, if Matthew really wanted to echo Mosaic story, he should provide us with more Exodus's words.

Moreover, some words that are proposed actually make common expressions that could be found elsewhere. For instance, the word *ἀνεχώρησεν* could also be found in Jos. 8:15; 1Sam. 19:10; Hos. 12:13, and Jer. 4:29. This word may be a typical Matthew's expression (he uses it seven times: 2:15, 22; 4:12; 12:15; 14:13; 15:21; 27:5), but it is not a typical word of Exodus. Thus, it is very problematic to say that the use of this word indicates that Matthew wants to echo the story of Moses in his nativity story.

In addition, there is only one instance where a syntactical pattern between those two accounts is quite identical. Allison's suggestion that the phrase *πρὶν ἢ συνελθεῖν αὐτοῦς* is related to Exodus 1:19 is not convincing. Carson writes that this phrase "occasionally refers in classical Greek to sexual intercourse"<sup>30</sup> If so, it is hard to see its relation with the coming of the midwives

in Exodus 1:19. The 'strongest' verbal correspondence so far is between Exodus 4:19 and Matthew 2:20.

**Exodus 4:19.** Βάδιζε ἄπελθε εἰς Αἴγυπτον τεθνήκασιν γὰρ πάντες οἱ ζητοῦντές σου τὴν ψυχὴν

**Matthew 2:20.** ἐγερθεὶς παρά·αβε τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ πρεῦου εἰς γῆν Ἰσραὴλ τεθνήκασιν γὰρ οἱ ζητοῦντές τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ παιδίου

However, even if Matthew really echoes the Mosaic motifs in this verse, we cannot think that he really does it throughout his nativity story. The fact that there are only a few words of Exodus and only one instance of identical syntactical pattern in Matthew's nativity story should prompt us to seriously revisit the correspondence between these two accounts.

## Conclusion

The existence of Mosaic motifs in Matthew's nativity story was also realized by some Church Fathers. Allison mentions two examples, namely Ephrem in his *Hymn 24* on the nativity<sup>31</sup> and Aphraates<sup>32</sup> in one of his writings. Chromatius also in some sense relates the escape of Jesus and his

<sup>31</sup> As cited by Allison in *New Moses*, 161:

"The Doves in Betlehem murmured since the serpent destroyed their offspring.

The eagle fled to Egypt to go down and receive the promises.

Egypt rejoiced to be the capitol for repaying the debts.

She who slain the son of Joseph labored to repay by the son of Joseph.

The debts of the son of Joseph. Blessed is He who called him from Egypt."

<sup>32</sup> Moses also was persecuted, as Jesus was persecuted. When Moses was born, they concealed him that he might not be slain by his persecutors. When Jesus was born they carried him off in flight into Egypt that Herod, his persecutor, might not slay him. in the days when Moses was born, children were drowned in the river; and at the birth of Jesus the children of Betlehem and in its border were slain. To Moses God said: "The men are dead who were seeking thy life"; and to Joseph the angel said in Egypt: "Arise, take up the child, and go into the land of Israel, for they are dead who were seeking the life of the child to take it away." Allison, *New Moses*, 161.

<sup>29</sup> See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 1:544.

<sup>30</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 74.

family to Egypt with Moses' escape to Midian.<sup>33</sup> Allison even adds that some ancient arts offer the same testimony as well (history of interpretation).<sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately, as we have seen, those ancient witnesses are incorrect. There are no strong hints that Matthew did echo Mosaic motifs in his nativity story. (1) Beside its superficial parallels, the dissimilarities between these two accounts are significant, (2) there are some parts that are unparalleled, and (3) there is no strong verbal correspondence between these two accounts. The notion that Matthew does echo Mosaic motifs in his nativity story is admittedly very interesting. However, the arguments above should prompt us to seriously revisit the validity of this notion. Using Hays criteria, this notion is plausible, but, unfortunately, the volume shows that it is not satisfying.

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<sup>33</sup> "After Egypt's ancient, grave sin, after many blows had been divinely inflicted upon it, God the omnipotent Father, moved by devotion, sent his Son into Egypt. He did so that Egypt, which had long ago paid back the penalty of wickedness owed under Moses, might now receive Christ, the hope for salvation" (Tractate on Matthew 6.1) See Manlio Simonetti, *Matthew 1-13*, ACCS (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 2001), 33.

<sup>34</sup>Allison, *New Moses*, 161-3.



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