

## Sounding Similar

Matthew crafts his Gospel to draw the reader into the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures and specifically to Moses, to see parallels between what God has done and what God is now doing. However, in drawing these parallels, we also see comparisons between the 'old' and the 'new.' In his Gospel account, Matthew has 5 major discourses in which the teachings of Jesus are contained. This parallels the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Pentateuch. He then draws a parallel between Moses, the exemplary deliverer of the Israelites in the Old Testament to Jesus, the true Messiah and Deliverer of all people in the world. There is the killing of the young males by the decree of the Pharaoh in Egypt which parallels Herod's decree to kill baby boys less than 2 years old. In the Old Testament, the Israelites return to the Promised Land just as the Holy Family returns to Israel after Herod dies.

But Matthew also want us to see the contrasts between Jesus and Moses. He is saying that Jesus is not just another Moses, He is not Moses 2.0 but something more than that. This is evident in the magi appearing to honor Jesus after seeing the star in the heavens announcing that a new king has been born. While both Moses and Jesus faced death threats when they were just babies, once that immediate threat was removed, Moses did not face the same kind of death threats that Jesus did as they got older.

In both stories, we see presence of God. While we can agree that ultimately it was God who led Moses' mother to hide him among the bulrushes in the Nile River; and through the angel in Joseph's dreams to take family to Egypt to escape Herod's threat; it leads to the question, why doesn't God just do away with the threats (that is, Pharaoh and Herod) instead of letting them live to cause others to

suffer? There are several possibilities of why the slaughter of the innocents in Jesus' time and the death of newborn boys in Moses' time was allowed to happen. One possibility is that if God did away with the Pharaoh and Herod, then it would only change who was the 'king of the hill.' The world would still be operating from a premise of 'might makes right' and nothing would have really changed. It would be similar to when Jesus fed the 5000 in John's Gospel account. The people wanted to make Jesus king, not because of who He is, but simply because He fed them and they wanted to control Jesus and so that they could be fed again.

Another possibility is that when God created the universe, we were given free will to choose between doing the right thing or not to doing it. For example, Adam and Eve, while told not to eat from the tree of Knowledge of Good & Evil, they still retained the choice of eating or not. God never 'forces' us to do one thing over another. Even with sin present in the world, God still allows us to choose.

Despite humanity's penchant for choosing to do the wrong thing, that is not what God wants us to do; God has promised to be here with us, helping us to make the right choices, guiding us along the right pathways, getting us back to the path on which we belong. Throughout Biblical history we can see when God does this for us, using others to help us along the way.

God came to us in an unprecedented way with the birth of Jesus. Still not forcing us to make the right choice (which would turn out to be no choice at all, really); God shows us the possibility of what following God through Jesus gives us. It is a different way of looking at the world, of relating to the world and each other. In John's Gospel of the Incarnation, we are told that through Jesus we were given power to become children of God and do all those things associated with that - live a life through love and compassion; to resist the forces of evil; to use

power not to make others serve us, but to serve others so that they may know and share in God's love.

Seeing the ties to the past that Matthew makes, draws us also to see the parallels to the present. There still is killing around the world; children's lives are still taken away from them; people are abused. But we can see God's presence still in the world today - in those who bring comfort to those who mourn; in those who strive to protect the abused; in those who work for peace on the world; in those who live according to God's way.

So, while the story of Jesus may sound similar to other stories, especially the story of Moses, we also see contrasts. Those contrasts are because of God interrupting our lives, coming to us in new ways, giving us a foretaste of the promise of something better. This promise of God breaking into our world, giving us comfort and assuring us that through this child born in the most common of ways to a common couple, we are given the promise of living in God's love for all eternity.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/tBGwsij94kk>

Service: [https://youtu.be/3obJ\\_Zt\\_6xo](https://youtu.be/3obJ_Zt_6xo)