

# The Matrix

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## [Opening Clip – Sparring Match]... Glenn’s song... Welcome(JVS)

How many of you have seen the film? More than once? Did you like it? Evidently a lot of people did. Not only did it generate strong sales at the box office, it has also become a bit of a cult film! It’s certainly generated a lot of interest in the media and on the web. More than you expect from a high tech, special effects, sci-fi kind of film. That’s because it’s quite a bit more than just its special effects. I think one big reason the film connected with so many people was the fact that it asked some fundamental human questions. Questions like, **“What is reality?”** **“How do I transcend the mess I’m in?”** and **“How can I realize my potential as a human being?”**

These, of course, are the ultimate human questions. Is this life really all there is? Isn’t there more? And if there is, how do I get there? PAUSE... The Matrix is a movie that tries to answer important questions like these. And the answers it provides are filled with spiritual and religious allusions. If you want religious options this film has them. There’s Buddhism, Jungian, mathematical, and theoretical Psychology, Japanese Anime, Alice in Wonderlandology, Cyberpunk influences, Greek Mythology and Christianity. It was tough deciding how to preach this movie... there were so many different ways to go. I ended up sided with the Christian connection (What a surprise eh?) And I decided to steer clear of the most common connection methodology; the name by name, character by character paralleling with the Christian narrative. There’s tons of talk about these connections in the media. Morpheus is like John the Baptist... How

Neo is like Christ, etc... Instead of looking at these micro connections, I thought I would take a more macro approach.

This week I read a paper written by a Harvard Divinity student named Paul Fontana (URL is in Program). Its title was, **“Generation Exile and the Neo Restoration; A Study of Messianic hope in the Matrix”** << (do these kinds of titles in Sem!)... He made a very interesting connection between Matrix narrative and the biblical Judeo-Christian narrative.

Looking at the overall story of the Matrix he noticed that it very closely paralleled a specific time in Jewish history, a time when they were looking eagerly for deliverance and freedom from oppression, a time when they were looking for a Messiah, a time around the time of Christ, 2000 years ago. As I read his argument, I came to agree with his hypothesis. It looks like the parallel really is there. So then I wondered if the producers and directors, the Wachowski brothers put it there on purpose. Someone asked them directly in one chat room interview. **“Are all the religious symbolism and doctrine throughout the movie intentional or not?”**

starr22 Their answer?>> **“Most of it is intentional...”** Wachowski Bros.

What I want to do for the next few minutes is explore these two parallel narratives. I want to look at how the overall story of the Matrix connects to Jewish and Christian messianic hope, and then, once we see how the overall stories connect, I want to come back to the question of reality. Once we understand this messianic formula, I want to look at how it can apply to our lives today. So, stick with me through the parallels, this stuff will have some implication for your life.

Let’s start with the story of the film, and with a fundamental question, “What exactly is the Matrix?”... In this next clip, a character named Morpheus tries to explain it to another character named Neo.... **[CLIP #2 -**

- , ) **Confused?** Its kind of

hard to get it all in the first watching... But basically, the premise of the Matrix is this... **[READ QUOTE 1]**... Neo, Keannu Reeves, is the one who was prophesied about, the one promised by the oracle, the one who would bring freedom to the captives, restoration of humanity and sight to the blind.

So then, how does the story of the Matrix connect to the Judeo Christian story? I want to answer this question by asking 5 questions. These 5 questions address 5 theological issues that plagued religious thinkers around the time of Christ. They are also 5 questions that, I think, the film seeks to address.

**Q1 - Where are we?** If someone were to pose this question to a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish religious thinker in Ancient Palestine, his answer would have been, **“We are in exile”** At that time the Jews were a part of the Roman empire and living under their oppression. They were not free, they were in captivity, under the control of foreign landlords. Even though there was the appearance of freedom; there was some local self government, they were able to make choices and live their lives and do business, the overall system was out of their control. They truly were in exile.

Now, if we were to pose this same question to Morpheus, about the state of the world at the time of the Matrix, what would his answer be? Morpheus, **“Where are we?”** I think his answer would be the same. **“We’re in Exile”** He’d probably see this in two ways. 1. He, along with the other freedom fighters were relegated to living in the sewers, surely this is a place of exile. **[SEWER CLIP??]** 2. The people who were unknowingly trapped in the Matrix, in a false reality, were also understood to be in captivity.

The bottom line for both the Ancient Jew and Morpheus was that they were in exile, life was a mess, not the way it was supposed to be. And the only way out was to exit the exile. And it interesting to note that

both the ancient Jew and Morpheus believed that freedom from the exile was immanent, that the time for deliverance was soon.

So that's Q1 - Where are we? Both stories have the same answer. We're in Exile. Second Question...

**Q2 - "How did we get into this mess?"** Again, if we posed this question to the first Century Jew, how would he respond? I guess the first and most direct answer would be, "It's the Roman's fault!" But as he considered the question, eventually he may have come the conclusion that he, and his people, also contributed to the problem. Throughout their history the Jews always believed in a God who was active in history, actively involved in all that went on in his world. And so, when things went bad, and exiles came, they would understand this exile to have come from the hand of God. They would have believed that God allowed this to happen. And he would have allowed it because of the sins of the nation. Because the people turned away from God, he left them to their own devices and strengths, and this consequentially resulted in their fall. When they relied on God and were close to him, they were strong. When turned away from God and relied on themselves, trying to become like God, they were weak and vulnerable. Exiles happened when they turned from God... when God left them to fend for themselves.

So how did the 1st Century Jewish nation get into this mess? They sinned and thought they were more than they were and walked away from God. An OT bible story illustrates this concept well...

**[TOWER OF BABEL STORY]...** In trying to be like God, they separated themselves from God. In trying to be like God, they got into their mess.

Didn't the same thing happen in the Matrix? What was Morpheus' answer to the question, **"How did we get into this mess?"** This is

what he said to Neo, **“At some time around the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century all of mankind was united in celebration. We marveled at our magnificence as we gave birth to AI (Artificial Intelligence)”** [use this or clip]... This clear depiction of human arrogance sounds a lot like the builders of the Tower of Babel who described it this way, **“Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves...”** Genesis 11:4a

Ask an ancient Jew, ask Morpheus how we got into this mess, and the answer would be the same, **“Its our own fault...”** But what’s hopeful in both narratives is the fact that they weren’t stuck there.

**Q3 - “How do we get out of this mess?”** This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> question I want to look at. For the ancient Jew the answer to this question would be the return of the presence of God. This return would happen in conjunction with the repentance of the people, with them turning their faces toward God again instead of their backs. And this returning presence of God would be heralded through the arrival of a Messiah. A Messiah who would be sent to gather the lost flock of Israel and restore Zion (the city of God). For the ancient Jew the messiah would be understood as the one who would bring liberation from oppression and lead the people in the restoration of society. The messiah would bring freedom! He would have the power to do this because he was imbued with the power of God. At the time of the Roman oppression it was understood that this God empowered messiah would achieve this liberation via some kind of military coup. It was believed that freedom would come as a result of a power encounter led by God’s redeemer.

In the Matrix, this role of Messiah is, of course, taken up by Neo. Listen to how Morpheus explains to Neo what his role will be.... [CLIP or

Quote] **“When the Matrix was first built there was a man born inside who could change whatever he wanted...to remake the matrix as he say fit. It was he who freed the first of us, taught us the truth. As long as the matrix exists, the human race will never be free. After he died, the oracle prophesied his return and that his coming will hail the destruction of the Matrix, end the war and bring freedom to our people.”** Morpheus Exactly the same kind of messianic description! While there is no mention of repentance in the Matrix story, the parallels are really quite astonishing.

Even the idea of the messiah leading a military coup is common to both stories. The Jews expected a military leader... the Matrix freedom fighters got one! (If you've seen the film you know what I mean... quite a bit of messianic fire power I'd say!)

Anyway, the answer to the question, “How do we get out of this mess?” It's the same for both stories. We get out via a Messiah... one that has been prophesied... one who was chosen... one with amazing special powers.

**Q4 – How did the Messiah accomplish freedom from exile?** Its here that I want to look at the messiah question from a slightly different angle. I want to jump from a Jewish perspective to a Christian one. The reason I want to do this is the fact that the Jews, of course, do not believe that their Messiah has come yet, while we Christians believe he did in the person of Jesus Christ. (As my old Friend and Jewish development partner, Andy Jacob used to say, “John, why do you follow this Jesus character, he was just a nice Jewish boy.”) I want to make this jump in perspective because how Jesus accomplished his messianic role differed quite a bit from the ‘military leader expectations’ I just outlined. How did the messiah Jesus accomplish freedom from exile?

He did it through self sacrifice... and in so doing he took God's punishment for sin on himself and bought our freedom in the process. This is the classic doctrine of redemption in the church. Jesus died, took the bullet for me, and then just as he was resurrected and was victorious over death, so too will we, who call ourselves Christians be resurrected and be victorious over death.

Again, the parallel in the Matrix is intriguing. Near the end of the film we get a part where Morpheus has been captured by the AI agents. They are in a process where they hope to break him down, tap into his mind, and get a secret code that will allow them to finish off all the humans who have yet to be incorporated into the Matrix, those living in a city called Zion. At this point in the film Neo realizes that unless he saves Morpheus, all of humanity will be destroyed. Recognizing this fact he decides to risk his own life for their sake. If you've seen the end of the movie then you know that this risk resulted in his being shot and mortally wounded. He ended up taking the bullet for Morpheus and the rest of humanity. But the story did not end there. Through the love of another character in the film, one named Trinity, Neo underwent a resurrection. He was dead but became alive again. And when He rose, he rose with new power. He had power like he never had before, like a new body! Power to stop matter with his mind. **[Bullet scene]**

So again both stories are parallel. The Messiah accomplishes his work through sacrifice, is resurrected by love, and then has supernatural power, even power over death. Finally, last question... last parallel...

**Q5 – What will the world be like after the restoration?** In the Bible story, the answer is that we will live in a new age of peace. We will dwell with God and he will be our God and we will be his people. God will be an ever-present reality and that will mean shalom... peace... eternal rest in the land. There will be a new heaven and a new earth

and the restoration of God will be complete. God's kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. It's a beautiful picture of God's plan for our future. A place without all the impediments of captivity, a place of freedom.... A place of hope.

Again, in the Matrix we see a similar kind of future hope. At the close of the film we see Neo speaking to the machines who run the Matrix... **QUOTE 2... or CLIP....**

Both stories speak of a new world order... a time of peace... of freedom... of rest. Within Christianity we believe that Christ started the restoration process through his death and resurrection and will one day come and finish the job and wrap it all up. In the story of the Matrix, Neo started the process through his death and resurrection and one day hopes to wrap the job up (even if he's not sure how that will happen).

So, those are 5 questions whose answers show five interesting parallels between the Judeo/Christian story and the story of the Matrix. **RECAP THE 5...** Pretty interesting how the Matrix so closely parallels the biblical account. Now the question we need to answer is, **“So what!”**

**“The Matrix is not only an action film,  
but also a metaphor for the unexamined life.”**

**Wachowski Bros.**

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