The Significance of Moses in the Gospel of John

Dorothy A. Lee
Professor of New Testament Studies, Trinity College Theological School, University of Divinity

Moses plays an important role in the narrative and theology of the Fourth Gospel. In the six narrative contexts in which he appears throughout the Gospel, he plays the roles of author (of Torah), actor (in the exodus story), and law-giver (Mt Sinai). In each case, Moses plays a symbolic role in relation to the Jesus of John’s Gospel, which goes beyond the notion of promise-fulfillment. As a proto-type of the Johannine Jesus, Moses’ parallel role points symbolically to Jesus’ identity and function. For the fourth evangelist, Jesus does not replace Moses; rather the Johannine Moses maintains an ongoing, christological function that endures in the life of the community of faith.

All four Gospels make key use of Moses in their understanding of Jesus’s identity and function. In part, Moses becomes a cipher for the relationship between Jesus and the law, which is answered in different ways by the evangelists. For Matthew, Moses is central in outlining the ongoing import of the law for the Christian community, the law as interpreted and lived out by Jesus himself (Matt 3:15; 5:17-20). The other Synoptic evangelists also give stress to Moses, even if not to the same extent. Most significantly, Moses is presented as a character in the Synoptic narrative of the transfiguration where he appears alongside Elijah in conversation with Jesus (Mk 9:2-8/pars.). By contrast, the Gospel of John, lacking the transfiguration story, has no appearance of Moses as a character in the narrative. Despite this, John makes substantial reference to Moses, who stands behind many of the Old Testament images and rituals of the Gospel and is appealed to in controversies over the law. The figure

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1 This article was originally given as a paper at the SNTS Conference, Perth, Australia, 2013.
2 No words of Moses are given in the transfiguration and only Luke makes explicit the subject of conversation (elegon tên exodon autou, Lk 9:31). For Mark, Elijah has priority because of his apocalyptic significance (Mk 9:4, 11-13; cf. 1:6); by contrast, John makes nothing of Elijah, either in relation to John the Baptist or Jesus (Jn 1:21, 25). Note that Luke elsewhere sets 'the prophets' alongside Moses (Lk 16:29, 31; 24:27, 44).
3 On the relationship between the transfiguration story and the Gospel of John, see D.A. Lee, Transfiguration (NCT; London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 100-111.
of the Johannine Moses has considerable theological consequence for the evangelist. This paper explores that consequence within the symbolic framework of John's Gospel.

Roles of Moses in John
It is true that Moses does not stand alone in the Fourth Gospel, but is paralleled by similar ancestral figures in Jesus’ public ministry: Jacob (4:5, 12), David (7:42), Abraham (8:33–58) and Isaiah (1:23; 12:38–41). In addition, John speaks more generally of ‘the prophets’ (1:45; 6:45; 8:52–53) and identifies Jesus as belonging in the same prophetic tradition, although he also surpasses it (4:19; 4:44; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17). Each of these Old Testament figures, emerging from the dim mists of Israel’s past, plays a similar function to Moses in relation to the Johannine Jesus. This function may be implicit rather than explicit. Nonetheless each figure is associated with past events that have meaning in their original contexts but reveal deeper significance in Jesus. Nonetheless Moses is pre-eminent among these ancestral figures. He is mentioned more times and allotted greater significance than they; indeed, Abraham and Jacob are part of the 'Moses-narrative’, the story which he (by tradition) recounts.

Moses is mentioned twelve times and referred to explicitly in six contexts in the Fourth Gospel:
- in the prologue he is named in the same sentence in which Jesus is first identified (1:17);
- John the Baptist explicitly denies that he is a Moses figure (‘the prophet’, 1:21) and Philip uses Moses’ name, in relation to the Old Testament Scriptures, to entice Nathanael to meet Jesus in (1:45);
- following Nicodemus’ disappearance from the narrative, Jesus refers to the story of Moses erecting the bronze serpent in the exodus (3:14);
- in the controversy following the healing of the disabled man at the pool in Jerusalem, Jesus appeals to Moses and the law for support against his opponents (5:45-46);

For John, Jacob is a water-giver surpassed in this role by Jesus (4:6, 12), as well as the one who dreams of a ladder to heaven (1:51). Abraham is the ancestor of the people of God and has foreknowledge of Jesus (8:33-58). David is the forerunner of Jesus and the source of the messianic title (7:41-42, 52), the title appearing in dispute with the crowds (7:26-27, 31, 41-42; 10:24; 12:34) or as a confession of faith (1:41; 4:25, 29; 9:22; 11:27; 20:31); it ties in with depictions of Jesus as King (1:49; 6:15; [10:11-18], 12:13; 18:37; 19:1-3; 19:19-21). Isaiah foretells Jesus and bears witness to him (1:23; 12:38-41).
• for the crowds pursuing Jesus after the feeding, Moses is the giver of the manna from heaven in the wilderness (6:31-32);
• in the context of Tabernacles and its key imagery, including the narrative of the man born blind, Moses signifies the sabbath command (7:19-23; 9:28-29).  

In the six contexts in which Moses appears, he plays three roles in the Gospel. In the first place, for the fourth evangelist, he is the author and writer of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament (1:45; 5:46). These books constitute the core of Scripture for John, although not every quotation from the Old Testament is from the Pentateuch. Note the language that John uses to introduce his quotations or references, all of which speak of ‘writing’: ή γράφη (2:22; 7:38, 42; 13:18; 17:12; 19:24, 28, 36; 20:9) or υἱοί γραφαι (5:39); γεγραμμένον εστίν (2:17; 6:31, 45; 10:34; 12:14), ἐν γεγραμμένα (12:16) or οὗ λόγος οὗ ἐν τοῦ(ι) νόμῳ(ι) αὐτοῦ γεγραμμένος (15:25); γεγραπται (8:17). It is not always clear who the hidden subject of the passive voice is in these latter cases. Most likely, they are divine passives, but Moses may also sometimes be their subject (e.g. 6:31), since at one point Jesus speaks of τοῖς εἰκείνου γραμμασίν, referring to Moses as the author of the Torah (5:47). In this sense, Moses is not just a writer but the writer of Scripture itself, which is to say that God is the source of Scripture and Moses the agent of its composition. In this sense, Moses plays a central role in a community that depends heavily on the Old Testament for its theological validation and self-understanding.

Secondly, Moses is not just author and storyteller in the Gospel of John but is also a significant player in the narrative. The exodus story depicts Moses’ leadership of the people

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5 Most of the references to Moses occur in Jn 5-7 and Jn 9 (see S. Schapdick, ‘Autorität ohne Inhalt: Zum Mosebild des Johannesevangeliums’, ZNTW 97 [2006], pp. 180-181).
6 The only place that Jesus actually ‘writes’ is in the story of the woman caught in adultery, a narrative that lies outside the authentic scope of the Gospel (8:6, 8).
7 As C. Westermann points out, the basic question is ‘whether there is a commonality between the Gospel and the Old Testament in how they speak about God, the world, and human beings’ (The Gospel of John In the Light of the Old Testament [ET: Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1998], p. 61).
8 W. Roth argues that John, in a sense, re-writes the Old Testament, using specific examples of correlation between his own narratives and the five books of the Pentateuch; Roth sees similar correlations with 1 Kings 17 to 2 Kings 13 in the Elijah-Elisha narratives (‘Scriptural Coding in the Fourth Gospel’, Biblical Research 32 [1987], pp. 6-29).
of Israel on their journey from slavery to freedom, beginning with his hidden birth and rescue (Exod 2:1-10) and concluding with his death and secret burial on the verge of the Promised Land (Deut 34:5-6). John refers explicitly to two of the exodus narratives in which Moses plays a central role. In the narrative of the bronze snake, following God’s judgement in the shape of poisonous snakes, Moses acts as intercessor and mediator, enabling divine reconciliation and healing through a representation of the very thing which has caused the affliction (3:14; Num 21:8-9). Moses is also described (although the Johannine Jesus modifies this) as the provider of the manna in the wilderness in the context of the people’s complaining (Exod 16; 6:31-32). Indeed, John 6 is replete with exodus imagery, even apart from the manna: the Passover context (6:4), the mountain setting (6:3), Jesus’ walking on the sea (6:19), and the suggestions of the Passover lamb which is eaten and the blood sprinkled (6:53-57).9 In John's use of exodus imagery, Moses is a leading actor in the drama.

Thirdly, in the Gospel of John Moses is depicted as the law-giver. Although John makes no explicit reference to the Sinai narrative, the story is presupposed and some of its core motifs present, particularly that of glory (Exod 24:16-17; 33:18-23).10 God is the actual giver of the law, but Moses is its intermediary, as the first Johannine reference to Moses makes plain (1:17; cf 7:19). God gives the law to the people of God, even in the context of their disobedience and idolatry, through the person of Moses who alone can converse with God. The noun νόμος occurs fourteen times in the Fourth Gospel, either in explicit reference to Moses as its giver (1:17, 45; 7:19, 23) or in a more general sense (e.g. 7:49; 12:34).11

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Sometimes the Johannine Jesus speaks of ‘your law’ (10:34; 15:25), and in the Passion narrative the law is manipulated to condemn Jesus to death (18:31; 19:7).

Moses is associated also with several aspects of the law. John links him particularly to the gift of the sabbath, evident in the two healing narratives which are set in Jerusalem (Jn 5, Jn 9). The gift of the law gives rise to considerable controversy in its interpretation by Jesus and his opponents. Moses is responsible also for the command of circumcision (7:22), a rite than ironically (for John) can be performed on the sabbath. In each case, God is the source and giver of Torah, and Moses the one with whom God chooses to speak and through whom God chooses to work. By implication, Moses is the source of the two main Jewish festivals in the Fourth Gospel: Passover (2:13, 23; 6:44; 11:55; 12:1; 13:1; 18:28, 39; 19:34) and Tabernacles (7:2), along with their rites and imagery: the lamb (1:29, 36), the serpent and the manna of the exodus, as noted, and the motifs of water and light (7:37-39; 8:12; 9:5).

Other important Johannine images also fall within the purview of Moses, whether as author, participant or law-giver. The jars of water for purification at Cana connect to the purification laws of Leviticus (2:6). Other Johannine motifs, such as Jacob’s well (4:6), have their origins in Pentateuchal narratives. The same is true for creation imagery. The clay/earth by which the man born blind has his sight restored (9:6, 11), and the breath which the risen Jesus breathes onto his disciples (20:22), both parallel the creation of Adam (Gen 2:7). There are also

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12 According to J. Augenstein, the phrase signifies not the distance but the proximity of the Gospel to Jewish tradition; ‘your law’ is not perjorative but is a way of directing the opponents to the law (“‘Euer Gesetz’ - Ein Pronomen und die johanneische Haltung zum Gesetz’ ZNTW 88 [1997], pp. 311-313).
13 F. Thielman identifies the basic legal controversies in John as consisting of two charges against Jesus, breaking the sabbath and blasphemy, against which the Johannine Jesus defends himself (The Law and the New Testament: The Question of Continuity [CNT; New York: Herder & Herder, 1999], pp. 81-92).
14 S. Pancaro interprets this exception as the law having ‘prepared the way for a correct understanding of the significance of Jesus’ Sabbath work’ (The Law in the Fourth Gospel. The Torah and the Gospel, Moses and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity according to John [SNovT 42; Leiden: Brill, 1975], p. 508).
allusions to the ark of the covenant in the resurrection narrative in Jerusalem (20:12). In this sense, the law is not just a series of instructions to sustain the life of the community but covers, more comprehensively, the story of God’s participation in forming Israel as a holy, covenant people.

Symbolic Significance
Each of these aspects of Moses’ appearance, either explicitly or by implication, whether as author, actor or law-giver, bears an extended meaning that, for John, finds its completion in Jesus. This is nowhere more startlingly expressed than in the assertion that Moses wrote about Jesus, a statement first made by Philip in his witness to Nathaniel (1:45). Jesus himself says the same thing later in his public ministry (5:46): εἰ γὰρ ἐπιστεύετε Μωϋσεὶ, ἐπιστεύετε ἄν ἐμοί· περὶ γὰρ ἐμοῦ ἐκεῖνος ἔγραψεν. Here the parallels with Abraham and Isaiah are plain: Abraham and Isaiah both saw Jesus — either ‘his day’ or ‘his glory’ — but Moses actually wrote of Jesus. This assertion means that John is assuming a deeper level to the meaning of the Old Testament than that which appears at a surface level. There is a ‘surplus of meaning’ in the biblical text — a trajectory leading directly from the Old Testament to a point of meaning in the future. In this sense, the evangelist sees the

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17 Pancaro, Law in the Fourth Gospel, pp. 514-517, defines nomos in John as having a range of meaning: referring sometimes to the Pentateuch, sometimes to a specific legal principle, sometimes to ‘the body of teaching revealed to Moses which constitutes the foundation of the whole social-religious life and thought of Israel’ (p. 514), and sometimes to the whole of the Old Testament.
19 So P. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Forth Worth: Texas Christian University, 1974), esp. pp. 45-69. This notion of an extended signification within discourse (where meaning lies in front of the text) is less problematical than the classic notion of typology which sees the primary meaning of the Old Testament as christological. In Ricoeur’s framework, Old Testament texts can have meanings that are not exhausted by their historical context.
Johannine Jesus, not simply as a figure in consecutive time, following chronologically from
the prophets and writers of the Old Testament, but also in theological terms as the centre of
history: its apex, and indeed origin and goal. It is this pronounced christological reading not
just of the Old Testament Scriptures but also of history itself which is a chief characteristic of
John’s eschatology.\footnote{Note that the words of Jesus hold equivalent status to those of Scripture; see C.S. Keener, The
Gospel of John: A Commentary (2 vols.; Peabody, MS; Hendrickson, 2003), vol 1, pp. 530-531. This
equivalence seems also to suggest that the ‘author’ of the fourth evangelist sees himself as writing
prophetically, under divine inspiration (21:24); see Hanson, ‘John’s Use of Scripture’, pp. 370-379.}
Whether looking back or looking forward, John reads the march of
Israel’s history and the Church’s destiny through a christological lens.\footnote{In contrast to this view, cf. C. Petterson who, reading from a postcolonial perspective, sees both
Moses and Abraham as undermined by the fourth evangelist in favour of the Johannine Jesus (‘Moses
and Abraham Go Arctic’, BibInt 16 [2008], pp. 370-371).}

Nonetheless, there is more present here than the notion of fulfilment. Moses also plays a
fundamentally symbolic role in the Fourth Gospel, which parallels the role of other key
figures, images, and events throughout the narrative. This role helps to shape John’s
Christology and is responsible, at least in part, for its unique character and articulation.
Johannine Christology is made up of a number of symbols, which both point and
communicate the identity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. In this theological view, symbols are
not a secondary element, functioning as ornamental or pedagogical devices, but rather are
constitutive of meaning and substantial in their own right. Symbol and truth are inextricably
linked in John's theological worldview: truth is revealed in and through the symbols and
apprehended by a faith that includes imagination on the part of the Johannine reader: the
capacity to envisage a reality deeper and truer than what is immediately perceptible.
Understanding the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel means grasping imaginatively its core
symbolism and the way the symbols function as revelation.\footnote{Further on this, see D.A. Lee, Flesh and Glory: Symbol, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John
(New York: Crossroad, 2002), pp. 9-28.}
How does Moses compare to other symbolic features of the Gospel?\textsuperscript{23} By creating new meaning, the Johannine symbols bring together unusual or previously unthought-of connections between two otherwise disparate elements. Some of John’s christological symbols derive from common human experience, such as bread, water, blood,\textsuperscript{24} and can play a core or supporting role in the Fourth Gospel.\textsuperscript{25} Thus Jesus is the Light of the world for those in darkness, the Bread of life for the hungry and the giver of living water to the thirsty. In each case, John uses the concrete and literal level to communicate the spiritual. Other symbols derive from Old Testament feasts, rituals and traditions, along with their further elaborations in subsequent Jewish thinking. In this case, John takes notions that are already theologically laden and gives them a radically new dimension, taking on symbolic meaning as they are pressed into the service of his Christology.\textsuperscript{26} Whilst possessing theological import, these elements are grounded in concrete existence, the material opening the way for the spiritual.

But John takes this symbolic construction further to include Old Testament figures. Thus the personal and textual ‘figure’ of a biblical figure can become the palpable signifier of an ultimately spiritual reality, going beyond the religious role he (or she) may already possess. Here John extends his use of symbols to include not only concrete elements but also persons. In this sense, the past is revived and re-interpreted, becoming in its eschatological re-interpretation a vital aspect of the present. Indeed, John sees such bygone figures as rendered present in their assumption by the Johannine Jesus. Pre-eminent among these symbolic manifestations from the past is the figure of Moses and all that he stands for in Old Testament ritual and theology. In doing so, John makes a daring nexus between Moses and Jesus in which the one can be said to ‘write of’ the other, though separated by centuries.

\textsuperscript{23} Bearing in mind the warning of P.N. Anderson against seeing symbols in everything Johannine without adequate criteria (‘Gradations of Symbolization in the Johannine Passion Narrative: Control Measure for Theologizing Speculation Gone Awry’, in Frey et al. [eds.], \textit{Imagery}, pp. 157-194).


\textsuperscript{25} On this distinction, see C.R. Koester, \textit{Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel} (2nd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), pp. 5-6.

\textsuperscript{26} Further on this, see D.A. Lee, \textit{The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning} (JSNTSS 95; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 141-146.
Moses and Jesus play parallel functions in the Fourth Gospel in a number of respects, but in each case there is a fundamental difference between them that is the key to John’s theological vision. This divergence is formed precisely in the symbolism. John’s Gospel does not portray Moses as having no further function with the advent of Christ, to be set aside or rejected. On the contrary, Moses is pressed into the service of John’s Christology. All that Moses is, does and communicates, points symbolically to Jesus: who Jesus is, what he does and what he communicates. In acting symbolically, moreover, Moses is not simply a signpost pointing in the direction of Jesus, but rather himself conveys the reality of the Johannine Jesus: bringing the reader or hearer to Jesus. Moses, read aright (that is, according to John), leads the reader directly to Jesus. Moses both points to and conveys a christological reality. The fourth evangelist makes this clear in the parallelism and distinction between the two figures which together form the symbolism:

a) Both Moses and Jesus are associated with God’s dynamic and saving word. The prologue, the opening hymn of the Word, associates Moses explicitly with Jesus. Indeed, the point of comparison occurs also at the first mention of Jesus’ name: ho nomos dia Môüseôs edothê, hè charis kai hè alêtheia dia Iêsou Christou egeneto (1:17). The three elements of the sentence parallel each other: the subject of the verbs (‘the law’, ‘grace and truth’), the agency expressed in the prepositional phrase (‘through Moses’, ‘through Jesus Christ’), and lastly the verb (‘was given’, ‘came into being’). The sentence as a whole is speaking of the different phases or manifestations of God’ word and self-communication. In each case, the latter eclipses the former: ‘grace and truth’ greater than the law, Jesus Christ greater than Moses, the verb ‘become’ being active rather than passive and thus implying a more direct agency on Jesus’ part than that of Moses, with the passive verb. Thus, while Moses is given the law by God, grace and truth come into being through the one who embodies them and who not only speaks

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28 Fernando summarises the parallels and the distinctions thus: ‘The parallelism becomes clear when we consider the relationship of the personalities (Moses-Jesus) to the realities they have brought. Though Law was through Moses, it was something external to him. But grace and truth are the Person of Jesus Christ Himself’ (‘John 1:17 as Window’, p. 187).

but *is* the divine Word.\textsuperscript{30} The one acts symbolically for the other, grace building upon grace (1:16), *charis anti charitos* manifesting the same parallelism as at 1:17 between Moses and Jesus. The law is itself an act of grace, representing the more complete grace revealed in Jesus.\textsuperscript{31} As the later narrative reveals, the contrast between Moses and Jesus, through feasts and imagery, is not part of John’s characteristic dualism but rather exemplifies the relationship (in the language of metaphor) between ‘tenor’ and ‘vehicle’, between that which symbolises and that which is symbolised. The law, in John’s hands, becomes the symbol of grace which both points to and communicates the Johannine Jesus.\textsuperscript{32}

b) Moses and Jesus are both *healers and life-givers*, performing ‘signs and wonders’ (however dubiously John sometimes seems to regard them, 4:48\textsuperscript{33}). Although the Fourth Gospel makes no explicit reference to those performed by Moses, the phrase is particularly associated in the Old Testament with the exodus events and the powerful role of Moses (Exod 7:3; Deut 4:34, 6:22, 7:19, 26:8, 34:11; Neh 9:10; Ps 135:9; Jer 32:20; Bar 2:11). The two ‘signs’ to which John makes reference, as we have noted, are the lifting up of the serpent (3:14; Num 21:4-9) and the giving of the manna in the wilderness (6:31; Exod 16), which demonstrate Moses’ miraculous power — although it is clear that God is the healer and

\textsuperscript{30} Note the contrast between ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ throughout the prologue, the former associated with the divine realm and the latter with the material world. See F. Kermode, ‘John’, in R. Alter & F. Kermode (eds.), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (London: Fontana, 1989), pp. 445-447. In this case, the verb γίνομαι is linked to its immediately prior use, in relation to the incarnation: the Word became flesh (1:14).


\textsuperscript{32} In rhetorical terms, to quote S.F. Winter, John’s use of the law intends to ‘reconstrue the relationship between the Torah and Jesus’ in order to ‘renegotiate its multiple aspects in relation to the ultimate criterion that is Jesus’ (‘The Rhetorical Function of John’s Portrayal of the Jewish Law’, in M. Tai & P. Oakes [eds.], *Torah in the New Testament. Papers Delivered at the Manchester-Lausanne Seminar of June 2008* [LNTS 401; London: T & T Clark, 2009], pp. 91-92).

\textsuperscript{33} The ‘signs’ in John are ambiguous, since they ‘are ineffective in bringing about full Christian faith if they are perceived only externally or sought for as sensations’; they ‘only disclose their meaning when they are greeted with faith and when their inner meaning is grasped under the outward event’ (R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John* (ET: Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1968), vol 1, Excursus IV, p. 519.
nurturer, the one who instructs Moses to raise the serpent and the one who is the provider of
the manna (ou Môüsês, 6:32). As life-givers, however, Jesus far surpasses Moses,
particularly in bestowing eternal life.\textsuperscript{34} Indeed, the giving of the manna and the lifting high of
the serpent take on symbolic value for the fourth evangelist, so that the true meaning of both
events is realised only in Jesus. Thus Jesus is the true life-giver, the one who is both giver and
gift, the giver of the ‘bread from heaven’ through his own self-sacrificing and saving death.
Like the bronze serpent, Jesus is lifted up, exalted in glory precisely on the cross, by which
the wounds of the world, the sin of the world, are healed, cleansed, made whole. The one
points to and conveys the reality of the other: Moses to Jesus, serpent to Jesus, manna to
Jesus. Not just the imagery but also the person of Moses (as metonymy) symbolises the
Johannine Jesus.

c) Moses and Jesus are intimately associated with core Old Testament \textit{festivals and rituals}.
The two great feasts of the Gospel, Passover and Tabernacles, along with the sabbath (also
counted as a festival, Lev 23:2-3), play pivotal roles in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel.
These have their origin in Moses who, at God’s command, gives the sabbath as the gift of
divine rest (Gen 2:2-3; Exod 16:25-26; 20:8-11; Deut 5:12-15), inaugurating and perpetuating
the Passover as the yearly recollection of freedom from slavery (Exod 12:1-28; Lev 23:5-8;
Num 9:1-5; Deut 16:1-8), and ensuring the annual celebration of Tabernacles to
commemorate both harvest and exodus (Lev 23:33-36; Deut 16:13-15). These festivals are
’signs and shadows’ that find ultimate realisation in the Johannine Jesus.\textsuperscript{35} More pertinently,
in the hands of the fourth evangelist, they become symbols that both indicate and
communicate Jesus’ identity. Thus the water and light, the morning and evening rituals of
Tabernacles, are embodied in the one who is the Light of the world, illuminating people’s
lives (8:12; 9:5), and the Giver of living water quenching the thirst for life (4:10-14; 7:37-
39).\textsuperscript{36} Similarly with Passover: the Johannine Jesus both gives and is the Bread of life to
whom the manna of the exodus points (6:35), satisfying the spiritual hunger for life (6:22).
Jesus’ sabbath work reveals his true identity as the one who carries out the uniquely divine
tasks of giving life and making judgement (5:17). In each case, these major festivals, Mosaic
in origin and character, convey the presence of the Johannine Jesus. Their presence in the

\textsuperscript{34} Sänger, “‘Von mir hat er geschrieben’”, pp. 124-125.
written text ensures their perpetuity and their capacity to function as symbols of Jesus’ identity.\(^{37}\)

d) Both Moses and Jesus have *disciples* and give them *commands*. In the narrative of the man born blind, the Pharisees’/Jews’ claim to be disciples of Moses (*hêmeis … tou Mõüseiōs esmen mathētai*, 9:28). As students of the law and followers of the Mosaic precepts, the ‘Jews’ in John’s view should be able to make the connection between Moses and Jesus — *ei … episteuete Mõüsei, episteuete an emoi* — the reason being that *peri … emoi ekeinos egrapsen* (5:46). Once again, the evangelist is operating at a symbolic level. To believe in Moses is to believe in Jesus. To follow Moses as a disciple means to follow Jesus. If the deepest level of Moses’ words and actions is christological, as John argues, then these become symbolic of Jesus’ own teaching and ministry. Moses, in this sense, not only points to Jesus but also communicates him, conveying him to the Johannine believer. Moses and Jesus are on the same side, but Jesus is the greater since Moses in his writing bears witness to Jesus (5:39).

Conversely, Moses can be said to be, not only the witness for the defense in the world’s trial of Jesus, but also the witness for the prosecution against Jesus’ opponents who have ironically relied for their defense on their accuser: *ēstiv ó katηγορῶν ύμων Μωϋσῆς, eίς ὄν ύμεις ἥλπικατε* (5:45). Those rejected by Moses’ so-called disciples are gathered into the community of Jesus’ disciples who adhere also, and authentically for John, to Moses (cf. 9:35-38).

The only explicit ethical instruction which Jesus gives in this Gospel is the love-command,\(^{38}\) which functions as consolation for Jesus' departure and as sign to the unbelieving world (implying also love for those beyond the community): *ἐντολὴν καὶνίν δίδωμι ύμῖν, ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους, καθὼς ἦγάπησα ύμᾶς ἵνα καὶ ύμεῖς ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους* (13:34).\(^{39}\) John says nothing explicit about Moses’ commands. Nonetheless, as is generally

\(^{37}\) The same may be said of the jars of water for ritual cleansing at the wedding at Cana (2:6) which both point to and convey the glory of Jesus in the transfigured wine (2:11).

\(^{38}\) Both singular and plural are interchangeable in John and refer to the one command (*ejntolh/, ejntolai/, 14:15, 21; 15:10, 12, 17), being synonymous with the expression ‘keeping my word/words’ (*threivn*, 8:51-52; 14:23-24; 15:20; 17:6).

\(^{39}\) J.G. van der Watt demonstrates that, while there may be only a single command in the Fourth Gospel, much may be derived about John’s ethics and value system from the narrative of the Gospel: that is, from the behaviour of the actors in the drama and Jesus’ response to them (‘Ethics and Ethos in
acknowledged, the ‘newness’ or new dimension of the Johannine precept lies not in the command to love others in the community of faith, but rather in the concessive clause, \( \kappa\alpha\theta\omicron\varsigma \ \eta\gamma\alpha\pi\eta\sigma\alpha \ \omicron\acute{\mu}\alpha\varsigma \). In Leviticus, the command to love the neighbour extends even to the alien (Lev 19:18, 34) and is grounded in divine love (Exod 34:6-7, Num 14:18-19). What the Fourth Gospel provides is a christological extension of the Mosaic love-command.

Understood in symbolic terms, the commands of Moses, which are intended to promote love and justice among the people of God, find their ultimate meaning and true manifestation, for John, in the ‘as I have loved you’ of the incarnation and atonement. What is different here is the revelation of the extent of that divine love: ‘God loved the world in this way …’ (\( \omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron\omicron\varsigma \ … \ \eta\gamma\alpha\pi\eta\sigma\epsilon\nu \ \omicron \ \theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma \ \tau\omicron\omicron \ \kappa\omicron\sigma\mu\omicron \ ), 3:16). This extension includes not just the radical nature of God’s love in the giving of the Son but also its enlarged scope: not only for the ancestors and people of Israel but for the world (cf. 4:42; 6:33; 10:16; 11:52; 12:19). God’s love for Israel, and Israel’s response of love and justice within its own ranks, is itself the symbol of God’s love for the whole world, a love embodied in Jesus and embedded in the believing community.

Implications

The main implication of this reading of the Fourth Gospel is that the figure of Moses plays a continuing symbolic role. Strictly speaking, in the evangelist’s worldview, Jesus does not replace Moses. On the contrary, Moses has an enduring function, both for the Johannine community and for a right understanding of John’s Christology. If Moses does indeed ‘write of’ Jesus, as John asserts, then we need Moses in order to understand Jesus. Moses, and all he stands for, is essential for the understanding of the Johannine Jesus; he stands alongside other symbols of the God in not only pointing to Jesus but also bearing him. This conveyancing function renders Moses not useless or superseded but fundamental for grasping the significance of Jesus, as John presents him.

Several arguments seem to militate against this conclusion that Moses is not replaced by the Johannine Jesus. In the first place, the evangelist explicitly condemns the opponents of Jesus

the Gospel according to John’ ZNTW 97 [2006], pp. 150-166). See also R. Zimmermann, ‘Is there Ethics in the Gospel of John?’ in van der Watt & Zimmermann (eds.), Rethinking the Ethics of John, pp. 44-80; Zimmermann argues that, while there is ‘a lack of concrete ethical advice in John’ (p. 79), at a deeper level there is an ‘implicit ethics’ in John’s Gospel (pp. 74-79).
who are not σπέρμα Ἄβραάμ as they claim (8:33), but rather are ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου (8:44). This accusation is already suggested in the somewhat repetitive phrases of 1:13 (οὐκ ἔξ αἰμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρός), which seem pointedly aimed at the claim of descent from Abraham. Moreover, the final scene in John 9 between the man born blind and the Jerusalem authorities appears to pit Moses and Jesus against each other: one is either a disciple of Moses or of Jesus (9:28); God has spoken either through Moses or through Jesus (9:29); either Moses is right and Jesus is a sinner, or Jesus is right and Moses is redundant (9:31-33). These seeming oppositions are created, in the evangelist’s mind, not by antagonism between Moses and Jesus, but rather by the misunderstanding of the authorities — a wilful misunderstanding, according to John. In the Tabernacles Discourse, it is the opponents' rejection of Jesus, and their desire to kill him, that is the point at issue. Though Jesus admits that they are descended from Abraham (8:37), their behaviour reveals that ‘you do the works of your father’ (8:41). They fail to perceive that Jesus stands in solidarity with the central figures of the Old Testament, and particularly (in this case), Abraham. Behind this debate lies the sublime identity of the Johannine Jesus in relation to God (ἁμὴν ὑμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, πρὶν Ἄβραάμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί) which the authorities vehemently reject, despite their initially positive response to Jesus (8:31); not only so, but they are prepared to commit murder in order to discredit his claims. Similarly, in the case of the man born blind, the harshness of the authorities towards the man (9:34), combined with their stated conviction that Jesus is acting under the power of sin (9:24), discloses a glaring inconsistency in their professed commitment to Moses. In both cases, adherence to Moses (or descent from Abraham) is not enough. The murderous hostility of the authorities exposes, for the evangelist, their hypocrisy and true identity. It is not simply that they disagree with Jesus. It is that they explicitly scorn his claims and, in the end, violently reject him (8:59).

In the second place, according to the evangelist, only Jesus has truly seen God in the Fourth Gospel, implying that Moses has not. The claim that Jesus is alone is being able to see God seems to oust Moses from his pre-eminent position and status in the exodus where, not only on Sinai, but on a regular basis Moses enters the tent of meeting to confer with God. Presumably John is aware of the tradition of Moses speaking with God face-to-face on Sinai (Exod 33:11; 34:29-35). However, in the exodus narrative, not even Moses is permitted

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40 John also speaks of Abraham seeing Christ’s day and Isaiah ‘seeing’ his glory (8:56; 12:41).
actually to see God’s face (Exod 33:21-23), but only God’s back. For added protection, God hides Moses in the cleft of a rock for the duration of the vision: οὐ διηνήση ἱδεῖν μου τὸ πρόσωπον, since ‘no human being can see the face of God and live’ (LXX Exod 33:20). Jesus, however, is not simply ὁ ἄνθρωπος in this Gospel. It is not in this role that he uniquely and eternally experiences the vision of God, but as the divine, pre-existing Word (1:1). In terms of the core metaphor that defines the relationship between God and Jesus, by definition only the Son has unparalleled access to the Father. In John’s theology, human beings are able to see the face of God only in Jesus himself: indeed, he is the face of God in this Gospel (14:9). For John, this is not a greater human being ousting a lesser, but rather a fullness of revelation (πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας, 1:14) based not on superior merit or virtue but grounded in the divinely human identity that the Johannine Jesus uniquely and qualitatively possesses. From the evangelist’s perspective, Moses as author, participant and law-giver stands before the Son as much as he does before the Father. Like Thomas who acclaims the risen Christ as ὁ κύριος μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου (20:28), Moses both shares human solidarity with Jesus (ὁ ἄνθρωπος) and also stands over against him, confessing him as κύριος καὶ θεός. Servant, friend, witness, prophet — these are all titles that adhere to Moses, not explicitly in the Fourth Gospel but by implication; only the designation μονογενής θεός (1:18) belongs to Jesus, and that makes all the difference.

Without grasping this radical difference of identity in the Fourth Gospel, and the symbolic nature of John’s Christology, Jesus can easily be interpreted as the replacement for Moses. In the context of that identity, however, and within the symbolic framework of the Gospel, the Johannine Jesus and Moses are essentially united: the divine λόγος pre-exists Moses (like Abraham) and is, for John, a hidden element within the Mosaic narrative of creation, covenant, exodus, law-giving and Promised Land. The one ‘through whom all things were made’ (πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, 1:3) is present in all God’s dealings with creation and Israel. Jesus has also definitive eschatological significance beyond that of Moses; his resurrection denotes the divine, sabbatical authority over life and death, including his own: ἔγω τίθημι τὴν ζωήν μου, ἵνα πάλιν λάβω αὐτήν (10:17). Within the narrative of the Fourth Gospel, therefore, Jesus as the source of all life endorses Moses and brings to symbolic completion all that he represents, all that was given him by divine grace. All this is

grounded in the symbolic nature of John’s theology and his understanding of Jesus’ unique and unsurpassed identity.

At the same time, this christological identity forms a rather convoluted equation in John’s symbolic worldview. At its deepest level, Jesus himself is the ultimate Symbol of God in this Gospel.\(^{42}\) He himself is the Way to the Father who is the final destination, not Jesus himself (14:6); in this respect John’s Gospel is theocentric, despite the unequivocal nature of its Christology.\(^{43}\) In this sense, more than anyone or anything else, the Johannine Jesus both points to and conveys the Johannine God: the Son, and only the Son, is capable of revealing the Father because he himself is the Image of God (cf. Col 1:15). That implies a complex relationship between Jesus, as the true Symbol of God, and other figures of the Gospel, such as Moses (as well as some of the leading characters of the Gospel\(^ {44}\)), who plays an indispensable, symbolic role in relation to Jesus. There is no contradiction in this dual role. For John, there is the core Symbol and there are subsidiary symbols, all of which point in the same direction. In a similar way, for the early church, Jesus is seen as the Image of God while the believer is the image of Christ.

Conclusion

Moses is one of the most significant figures in the Gospel of John. Although he makes no actual appearance in the narrative, and is thus not a Johannine ‘character’, his presence is ubiquitous, particularly in the public ministry of Jesus. Here he becomes a figure of witness and dissension, called upon by both sides in the opposition between Jesus and ‘the Jews’. John claims him and his writings for Jesus in resounding tones. Although Jesus’ opponents


\(^{44}\) Earlier notions of ‘representative figures’ in John have been somewhat displaced by the more recent focus on character and characterisation (see the survey by C.W. Skinner, ‘Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John: Reflections of the Status Quaestionis’, in C.W. Skinner [ed.], Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John [LNTS 461; London: Bloomsbury, 2013], pp. xvii-xxxii). However, figures such as the beloved disciple, who possesses a distinctive characterisation in the Fourth Gospel, also play a symbolic role in relation to Jesus (e.g. 13:23) — including, like Moses, that of writing ‘about me’ (21:24).
attempt to divide Moses and Jesus, setting them on either side of the theological fence, John makes every effort to unite them, not dismissing Moses and all that he stands for but, on the contrary, securing him for the cause of the Johannine Jesus and the believing community which gathers around him. There is contrast, therefore, but no antagonism — active or passive — between Moses and Jesus, law and grace. Lying behind the giving of the law on Sinai and the manifesting of grace and truth in the incarnation is the divine self-donation, the divine desire for human flourishing in covenant with God. Moses is not discarded in this Gospel but absorbed into the evangelist’s theological worldview, where he plays a vital role in attesting, via the Scriptures, to the identity and function of Jesus.

At each point in his narrative, John the evangelist presents Moses, in his life and writings, as pointing ultimately to Jesus and communicating the meaning of his presence. Everything that the Johannine Moses does in relation to God’s revelation, through exodus and Sinai, has an additional level of meaning, a further dimension, beyond what its original context denotes. That deeper significance lies in the symbolic role played by Moses in John’s theology. In John’s hands, Moses becomes a key symbol for Jesus himself. In the end, the divine gift of the law, mediated through the personality and writings of Moses, makes possible and palpable the divine gift of the Word in the incarnation. Grace and truth signify the extended meaning hidden within the deeds and writings of Moses and manifest symbolically in the revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus does not replace Moses in this Gospel; on the contrary, the Johannine Jesus upholds his claims, making him therefore a core symbol for Jesus’ own identity in this Gospel.