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## Moses in the Gospel of John

Christopher A. Maronde

Like much of the New Testament, the Gospel of John seems to “breathe the air” of the Old Testament. The careful reader can find numerous quotations and allusions on every page. To many first-century Jews, these connections would come naturally, because they knew the texts of the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings from childhood. For first-century to twenty-first century Gentiles, these connections come with more difficulty. The Old Testament framework that underlies so much of the New Testament must be discovered and investigated. In the Gospel according to St. John, not only do we find allusions to or quotations of Old Testament texts, but, in addition, the actual figures of Israel’s history appear. Jacob, Abraham, and David are all interwoven throughout the narrative, used both by Jesus and by those with whom he interacts. The most significant Old Testament figure to be brought into the Gospel of John, however, is Moses. In John, a document steeped in the rich theology and history of the Old Testament, it is only natural that Moses would have a prominent place. He is the agent of God’s deliverance used to bring Israel out of Egypt. He is prophet and king, bringing the law and covenant of Yahweh to his people. David, Jacob, and Abraham all deserve mention, but Moses towers over them all.

The proper name Μωϋσῆς occurs thirteen times in the Gospel of John in eight separate pericopes.<sup>1</sup> These texts appear only in the first nine chapters of the Gospel, the so-called “Book of Signs.” A cursory reading of these texts (especially 1:17) appears to indicate a negative portrayal of Moses and the law associated with him, which are set in contrast to the gospel associated with Christ. However, this study will demonstrate that, while such a perspective is held by the opponents of Jesus, it neither characterizes the thought of Jesus nor John the evangelist. Moses is not only cited as a vital witness to Jesus, but Jesus consistently emphasizes that the only way to follow Moses is to believe in him, that is, in Jesus. Jesus’ opponents misunderstand Moses, failing to see his witness to Jesus, and so they reject him while clinging to their false interpretation of Israel’s greatest figure. At the same time that he claims Moses as a witness, Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> 1:17, 1:45; 3:14; 5:45–46; 6:32; 7:19, 7:22 (2 times), 7:23; 8:5; 9:28, 9:29.

ultimately and most importantly brings him to the fore as the instrument Yahweh uses to give Israel salvation, one who points to the Christ through his actions. Moses is used in John in a variety of ways, but ultimately in a positive sense in order to testify to Christ.

### **I. Old Testament Figures in the Gospel of John**

While no other Old Testament figure receives as much prominence as Moses in the Gospel of John, Jacob, David, and Abraham also appear in the narrative. A study of Moses in John is not complete until these other figures are first considered. The first appears in John 4, when Jesus stops for a rest at a well in Samaria. John is quite specific with the details he provides, telling us that the name of the town is Sychar, and then further informing us that this town was part of a property that Jacob had given to Joseph. Significantly, Jesus is actually resting upon Jacob's well (John 4:5–6a). Finally, the woman whom Jesus encounters there brings Jacob into the discussion to counter Jesus' claim to give living water: "Are you greater (μεῖζων) than our father Jacob, who gave for us to drink and he drank from it and his sons and his livestock?" (John 4:12).

In response, Jesus points to the fact that the well only supplies temporal thirst, whereas the water he gives has an eternal quality in that it truly conquers death. Jesus uses the well provided by Jacob to point forward to the greater gift that he brings. He does not dispute the gift of the well, but puts it in proper perspective as a temporal gift that does not provide what the woman ultimately needs, namely, eternal life.

David appears in John 7, where Jesus engages his opponents in sharp verbal combat. He disrupts the Feast of Booths in Jerusalem with bold declarations concerning his identity, to which the crowd responds with varying degrees of rejection and acceptance of his testimony. When he departs the feast, he leaves confusion and turmoil in his wake. Some believe, while many continue to have questions. One of these questions concerns the geographic origin of the Messiah. One person asks, "Does the Christ come from Galilee?" This anonymous person continues by citing the prophecy: "Did not the Scriptures say that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" (John 7:42). The questioner calls upon David to testify against Jesus. If Jesus did not come from the line of David or from Bethlehem, he cannot be the Messiah. Interestingly, John (unlike Matthew) does not answer these specific charges directly, addressing Jesus' origin in other ways.

The culmination of these texts appears in John 8 with the appeal to Abraham. Once again, Jesus' identity is in question. His opponents proudly claim Abraham as their father (8:39). They assert that they have been faithful to their father for they have been faithful to God (8:41). But Jesus turns Abraham against them, declaring that if they were the true spiritual offspring of Abraham, then they would not seek to kill him. Instead, they would do as Abraham did and "rejoice" to see the day of Christ (8:56). Their rejection of Jesus demonstrates that they cannot trace their spiritual lineage to Abraham but to Satan. If they followed Abraham, they would follow Jesus. This brings them to the crux of the argument, Jesus' identity: "Are you greater (μεῖζων) than our father Abraham, who died? . . . What do you make of yourself?" (John 8:53). Jesus ultimately responds with a powerful affirmation of his divine origin: "Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham became, I AM (ἐγὼ εἰμι)" (John 8:58).<sup>2</sup> This narrative concludes with many of the people rejecting Jesus, condemning him with the sentence of death as they unsuccessfully attempt to stone him.

From this brief comparative study, we can draw several conclusions. First, we observe that Jesus must compete for prominence with the figures of the Old Testament, each of whom is presented by the speaker as more important than him. Jacob, David, and Abraham are all produced to testify as witnesses against Jesus. Second, the identity of Jesus is on trial, and these Old Testament figures are adduced as expert witnesses. Jesus counters these claims by demonstrating not only that he is greater than the patriarchs, but also that these Old Testament figures actually point to him. They bear witness, but only to Jesus as Lord and God. Each of these elements will become much more explicit when examining John's use of Moses.

## II. Moses and ὁ νόμος

John's prologue has intrigued scholars and laypeople alike throughout the centuries for its beautiful language and deep theology. Here, John lays the foundation for the rest of his Gospel, describing the incarnation—that great act of God becoming human flesh to deliver his sinful people—in language and themes that will occur again and again. Within this text, we encounter Μωϋσῆς for the first time: "The law (ὁ νόμος) was given

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of this text in the wider context of the Johannine ἐγὼ εἰμι statements, see Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 243–250. Bauckham concerns himself mainly with the seven absolute ἐγὼ εἰμι statements found in 4:26; 6:20; 8:24; 8:28; 8:58; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8 (the last three are taken as one occurrence).

(ἐνδόθῃ) through Moses (διὰ Μωϋσέως), grace and truth (χάρις καὶ ἀλήθεια) became through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

It is hardly surprising to see Moses mentioned in John's prologue, for as the French exegete M.E. Boismard has convincingly argued, many of the themes developed in the prologue are also found in Yahweh's remarkable revelation to Moses in Exodus 33–34, connections to which we shall return shortly.<sup>3</sup> In 1:17 John gives an obvious contrast between Moses and Jesus. However, he does not necessarily contrast νόμος as a negative with χάρις καὶ ἀλήθεια as positives. Instead, the gift διὰ Μωϋσέως has an intimate connection with the gifts of Christ, a connection that the rest of John's narrative will explore. Stefan Schapdick concludes that, for John, "faith in the christologically shaped divine revelation is no contradiction to the Jewish religious tradition at all but the only way to keep it."<sup>4</sup>

John does draw a contrast between the figures of Moses and Jesus, though once again this does not imply a negative view of Moses or of the νόμος properly interpreted. The divine passive ἐνδόθῃ indicates that the Law did not originate within Moses, but instead came to the people of Israel "through" (διὰ) him. John introduces Moses into his narrative as an instrument of God, one through whom God chose to give the gift of the νόμος.<sup>5</sup> In a subtle way, this introduces a polemic, developed throughout the Gospel, against exalted views of Moses. He deserves respect, but only the respect befitting a human instrument of God's work. Boismard brings out this distinction: "Moses only transmitted to men what God spoke to him. Jesus is God himself (1:1) speaking to men."<sup>6</sup> Finally, this verse identifies Moses with Sinai, as John links Moses and the νόμος together. When you mention one, the other immediately comes to mind. Furthermore, Moses and the νόμος have some kind of relationship with the χάρις καὶ ἀλήθεια, which are associated with Jesus.

But the connection drawn between the two will be quite different depending on who is speaking, and there we find the key to understanding John's use of νόμος. Severino Pancaro, in a comprehensive study of the νόμος in John, posits this distinction: in John's narrative, νόμος has

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<sup>3</sup> M.E. Boismard, *Moses or Jesus: An Essay in Johannine Christology*, trans. B.T. Viviano (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1993), 93–98.

<sup>4</sup> Stefan Schapdick, "Religious Authority Re-Evaluated: The Character of Moses in the Fourth Gospel," in *Moses in Biblical and Extra-Biblical Traditions*, ed. Axel Graupner and Michael Wolter (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 188–189.

<sup>5</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967), 287.

<sup>6</sup> Boismard, *Moses or Jesus*, 98.

two separate meanings, one when used by the Jews and one when used by Jesus. He writes, "What opposes Jesus . . . to the Jews is a different understanding of the Law; the difference is determined by whether one believes in Jesus or not. The understanding of the 'Jews' is that of 'normative' Judaism; the understanding of John is that of Christians."<sup>7</sup>

The Jews who were opposed to Jesus held to the νόμος as interpreted by oral tradition. On the basis of this interpretation of the νόμος they make a fourfold accusation against Jesus: his violation of the Sabbath (John 5 and 9), blasphemy (John 5:17-18; 8:58; 10:24-28), false teaching (John 7:14-18, 18:19-24), and opposition to the nation (John 11:47-53).<sup>8</sup> This perspective on the νόμος obviously receives a negative portrayal throughout the Gospel. Jesus distances himself from the νόμος in these contexts, calling it "your law."<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, John operates with a definition of the νόμος as viewed through the lens of Christ. Jesus is not opposed to the νόμος, only to his opponent's stubborn interpretation of it. In fact, as we will see in the texts discussed below, the only way to follow the νόμος properly is to believe in Jesus. "What is attacked and condemned by John is a false understanding of the Law which would oppose the Law and Jesus, observance of the Law and faith in Jesus."<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, νόμος in John does not have a primarily ethical definition, as the Greek word νόμος or our English term "law" would imply.<sup>11</sup> In John's narrative, νόμος has a much more comprehensive meaning, one very much in accord with the concept of Torah (תורה) in rabbinical Judaism. Therefore, it can refer either to the Mosaic Law in the strictest sense, referring specifically to the body of legislation found in the Pentateuch (7:51; 18:31), to the entirety of the Pentateuch (1:45), or to the entire Old Testament (7:19, 7:49, 12:34).<sup>12</sup> Only the first sense could be considered strictly ethical, while the other two imply the record of all of

<sup>7</sup> Severino Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), 525.

<sup>8</sup> Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 517. Jesus uses the terminology ὁ νόμος ὑμῶν (8:17), ὑμετέρος (10:34), or αὐτῶν (15:25).

<sup>10</sup> Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 527.

<sup>11</sup> Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 2. Pancaro believes that Paul, for the most part, uses the term νόμος ethically. The νόμος has a regulatory function, governing man's conduct and demonstrating man's utter depravity before God. When discussed under the heading of justification, the works of the νόμος are opposed to faith. Paul seeks to answer the question, "What must one do to be saved?" in the heat of battle against the Judaizers (528).

<sup>12</sup> Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 514. The references cited are not intended to be comprehensive.

God's interactions with his chosen people. The latter uses are principally revelatory, which is the focus of John's use of νόμος throughout his narrative. The Gospel of John is concerned with the identity of Jesus, and the νόμος serves that emphasis by testifying primarily to Christ.<sup>13</sup> John's use of νόμος is broad and comprehensive, but he specifically and intentionally ties it to Moses in 1:17. If the concept of νόμος can encompass all of the Old Testament, why does John identify it with Moses? First of all, as noted in the introduction, such identification emphasizes the foundational nature of Moses. As Pancaro summarizes, "Even when John refers to a particular aspect or text of the Law, it is always the Law as a whole, as the body of divine revelation given to Moses, passed on from generation to generation and constituting the foundation of Judaism, which lurks in the background."<sup>14</sup> Just as "Torah" can stand for all Scripture, so "Moses" can stand as the representative of all through whom revelation was given by Yahweh. But perhaps the connection is tied up in the very structure of John's prologue.

M.E. Boismard persuasively argues that we should see in John's prologue an echo of Exodus 33–34. In that remarkable section, Moses advocates for the people in the aftermath of their worship of the golden calf. Though God promises his presence, Moses asks for a sign; he wants a theophany, he wants to see God. More specifically, he asks, "Show me your *glory* (33:18)." God only shows his backside as Moses hides in the cleft of the rock. This has a strong echo in John 1:14, "We have seen his glory." John declares that in Christ we now see the glory of God, the visible manifestation of his presence. In addition, as Boismard notes, Exodus 33–34 is focused around the promise of God's presence among his people, specifically his presence at the tent of meeting (Exod 33:7–10) and the anticipation of his presence in the tabernacle. There is then no mistake that also in verse 14 of the prologue John declares: "The Word became flesh and tented (ἐσκήνωσεν) among us." Finally, and most importantly, the connection between νόμος and χάρις καὶ ἀλήθεια, found in John 1:17, is paralleled in the name that Yahweh gives himself in Exodus 34:6, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (חסד) and faithfulness (אמת)." Boismard argues that the proper Greek translation for אמת and חסד is χάρις καὶ ἀλήθεια.<sup>15</sup> Following this great statement of Yahweh, Moses is sent back down the mountain

<sup>13</sup> Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 530–531.

<sup>14</sup> Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 517.

<sup>15</sup> Boismard, *Moses or Jesus*, 96. The LXX has ἔλεος instead of χάρις, but Boismard argues that χάρις is the more appropriate Greek equivalent for חסד.



bearing new tablets of the law (Exod 34:10–29). God gave the νόμος through (διὰ) Moses again in Exodus 34, and John declares that the greater gift of χάρις καὶ ἀλήθεια alluded to by Yahweh himself in that text has now come in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup> God's faithfulness to his people, declared and demonstrated to Moses in Exodus 33–34, is fulfilled in Jesus.

Therefore, Exodus 33–34 is a key text for understanding John 1:17. There the νόμος and Moses are connected with one another, and together they are associated with χάρις καὶ ἀλήθεια. The two sides of 1:17 are not opposed to one another, but instead it is Moses and the νόμος that point to χάρις καὶ ἀλήθεια. A polemic is also implied here. Jesus' opponents attempt to find χάρις καὶ ἀλήθεια in the νόμος, but to no avail. The νόμος does not have χάρις καὶ ἀλήθεια in itself, but instead it testifies to the one who is χάρις καὶ ἀλήθεια incarnate, Jesus Christ.<sup>17</sup>

If the prologue lays the foundation for the rest of the Gospel, then it would follow that this identification of Moses with the νόμος would persist throughout the narrative. Indeed, it does stand in the background of every other appearance of Μωϋσῆς in John. In chapter seven, this identification comes to the fore during a dispute between Jesus and "the Jews" over his authority to teach. Here Jesus brings Moses into the argument in 7:19 with a question that parallels the statement in 1:17: "Has not Moses given (δέδωκεν) to you the law (τὸν νόμον)?" The preposition διὰ does not appear as we would expect, emphasizing Moses as an instrument of God. Instead, in verse 22 Jesus declares the same teaching through a different means. Here he describes Moses not only as the law-giver, but more specifically as the giver of circumcision, and then adds a caveat: "Not that it is from Moses (ἐκ τοῦ Μωϋσέως) but from the fathers (ἐκ τῶν πατέρων)." This fulfills the same function as a διὰ clause, indicating that the νόμος did not originate with Moses, but that Yahweh used Moses as his instrument to give the νόμος to Israel. As in 1:17, Moses appears here in identification with the νόμος, which Yahweh gave (δέδωκεν) through (διὰ) him. Jesus emphasizes this identification in the next verse by using the formulaic phrase ὁ νόμος Μωϋσέως. In a similar way, the scribes and the Pharisees identify Moses simply as the giver of the νόμος in 8:5. The theme of identification runs underneath and forms the foundation of all other occurrences of Μωϋσῆς, but as the prologue foreshadowed, other themes have a greater emphasis throughout the Gospel.

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<sup>16</sup> Boismard, *Moses or Jesus*, 93–98.

<sup>17</sup> Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 539–540.

### III. Moses as Accuser

In the texts examined above, Moses appeared in testimony to the νόμος, equated with the revelation given by Yahweh to his people throughout the Old Testament. He is a static character, inanimate, a stone statue bearing mute testimony to what God gave through him. But in 5:45–46, Moses becomes active, and for Jesus' listeners the results are shocking, to say the least. The implied polemic observed in the prologue now comes completely to the surface. As he will in John 7, Jesus himself brings Moses into the discussion. After healing an invalid on the Sabbath—an action that caused the Jews to grumble against him—Jesus replies in John 5:17: “My Father until now is working and I am working.” He then launches into a discussion of the authority of the Son, culminating with an appeal to three witnesses: John the Baptist, the Father, and finally Moses. The entire text has the appearance of a courtroom scene as Jesus defends his divine Sonship, leaving his most devastating witness for the end:<sup>18</sup> “Do not think that I accuse (κατηγορήσω) you to the Father. Your accuser (κατηγορῶν) is Moses, in whom you have hoped. For if you believe Moses, you would believe in me. For about me that one wrote” (John 5:45–46).

Shapdick emphasizes how shocking this statement was to the religious leadership: Moses' “classical role as intermediary between God and Israel who always intercedes for the Israelites is turned into its direct opposite.”<sup>19</sup> The Jews have set their hope (ἠλπίκατε) on him, not only in general but also quite specifically in this situation, as they accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath commandment. However, in a stunning reversal, Moses is their accuser (κατηγορῶν). Moses here acts not only as witness but also as prosecutor. The verb Jesus uses here can simply mean “to speak against,” but it most often acts as technical legal terminology for bringing charges in a courtroom setting.<sup>20</sup> Pancaro helpfully notes that while in Jewish legal parlance there was no “public prosecutor” as such, there were “witnesses against” the defendant, who acted as prosecutors (κατηγορῶν), as well as third persons who could speak against the defendant.<sup>21</sup> Moses makes his accusation on the basis of what he wrote (ἔγραψεν), for he wrote about the Christ. If the Jews claim to adhere to Moses, then they would believe in the

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<sup>18</sup> Stan Harstine, *Moses as a Character in the Fourth Gospel: A Study of Ancient Reading Techniques* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 57.

<sup>19</sup> Shapdick, “Religious Authority Re-Evaluated,” 194.

<sup>20</sup> Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 533.

<sup>21</sup> Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 254–255.

Christ. In this text, Jesus establishes Moses not only as a witness (μάρτυς) but also as an accuser (κατηγορῶν).

### *The Trial Motif*

These dual designations are not only paradigmatic for several other texts in which Moses is mentioned, but they also place Moses firmly into the Fourth Gospel's "trial motif." In a monograph on the subject, A.T. Lincoln makes the convincing argument that the readers of John's Gospel are to see the entire narrative as a trial or lawsuit. This judicial motif has a rich Old Testament lineage. Lincoln specifically points to Isaiah 40–55 as influential on John's narrative, but examples of this motif abound in Scripture, especially in the prophets.<sup>22</sup> "This narrative, unlike that of the Synoptics, has no account of a Jewish trial before the Sanhedrin. Instead, throughout his public ministry, Jesus can be viewed as on trial before Israel and its leaders."<sup>23</sup> The religious leaders, in a variety of encounters with Jesus, attempt to demonstrate that he is a false prophet by bringing against him the four charges described above: his violation of the Sabbath, blasphemy, false teaching, and opposition to the nation.<sup>24</sup> Jesus, on the other hand, seeks to confirm his divine identity and Messianic mission. Here Moses finds his place in the motif. As we will see in the following texts, both Jesus and his opponents appeal to the authority of Moses and the νόμος to make their case. He functions as a witness (μάρτυς) claimed by both sides, a witness absolutely vital to the trial. We noted that Jesus appeals to three such witnesses in chapter five, punctuated by Moses, the advocate turned accuser.

On the basis of the first part of the trial scene, it could be alleged that Jesus was appearing as the sole witness in his own defense. In terms of Jewish legal conventions, this would make his testimony invalid (5:31) . . . . Deuteronomy 19:15 holds that three, or at least two, witnesses are needed for valid testimony. So in John 5:32–40 Jesus appeals to a series of further witnesses.<sup>25</sup>

The people must determine on the basis of the case presented throughout the narrative whether Jesus is the Messiah or a false prophet. Considering the prominence of Moses within this motif, the people must essentially decide whether Moses testifies on behalf of or against Jesus.

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<sup>22</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 37.

<sup>23</sup> Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 23.

<sup>24</sup> Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 77.

Ironically, John's audience sees another lawsuit or trial in progress. The religious leaders think that they have placed Jesus on trial, but instead it is Yahweh who has placed them on trial. He will judge them on the basis of whether they believe or reject the one whom he has sent (John 3:17–18).

They choose a bandit rather than the good shepherd and thereby show that they do not belong to the flock that hears the shepherd's voice . . . . The full implications of the narrative's trial (therefore) become apparent. In rejecting Jesus, the religious leaders reject their God. They, not Jesus, are the ones who are judged and condemned.<sup>26</sup>

In a further irony, Jesus brings forth the ultimate verdict of life and salvation only through such rejection and condemnation. In Christ's atoning death on the cross, the judge undergoes the verdict of death that humanity deserved, and instead delivers life.<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, as Jesus clearly states in 5:45–46, those who reject the testimony of Moses about the Christ have rejected his destruction of the verdict of death. Moses therefore becomes not their advocate but their accuser.

To which text does Jesus refer? Where does Moses act as an "expert witness" in defense of Christ? These questions naturally send scholars to the Torah (νόμος) in an attempt to find Messianic prophecies, or perhaps typological parallels. Deuteronomy 18:18 most commonly comes up in these discussions: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him." Indeed, this text has great importance in John's Gospel, with numerous references to "the Prophet" as a messianic figure.<sup>28</sup>

However, within the context of the Gospel as a whole and chapter five in particular, this seems incomplete. Jesus does not argue in John 5 that the Scriptures speak about him in specific places; he confesses that fact in other texts. No doubt, direct prophecies and typological parallels are very significant for Christ's teaching about himself. John does employ specific Old Testament citations in a similar way to the other evangelists, demonstrating that he sees many direct prophecies fulfilled in Christ.<sup>29</sup> But instead of referring to direct prophecy, in John 5 Jesus strongly declares his unity with the Father, making four bold claims: first, that he works on the Sabbath (17); second, that he "gives life" (ζωοποιεῖ; 21) and indeed "has

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<sup>26</sup> Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 26.

<sup>27</sup> Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 206.

<sup>28</sup> See Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 212–225.

<sup>29</sup> Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 54.

life in himself" (ἔχει ζωὴν ἐν αὐτῷ; 26); third, that God has given "all judgment to the Son" (22); fourth, that all should "honor the Son just as they honor the Father" (23). Richard Bauckham notes that with each claim, Jesus has laid hold of "divine prerogatives," functions that belong intrinsically to the divinity *as such*.

God is the only living One, that is, the only One to whom life belongs eternally and intrinsically. All other life derives from him, is given by him and taken back by him. Another key aspect of God's sole sovereignty over creation was his prerogative of judgment: his rule is just, implementing justice, and therefore judging nations and individuals. Such divine prerogatives have to be understood, not as mere functions that God may delegate to others, but as intrinsic to the divine identity. Ruling over all, giving life to all, exercising judgment on all—these belong integrally to the Jewish understanding of who God is.<sup>30</sup>

Jesus takes on these divine prerogatives, but not in such a way as to set himself up as a rival of the Father. Instead, he is wholly dependent on the Father, even while he exercises these prerogatives. He therefore shares the divine identity in unity with the Father as "the only living one, the only giver of life, the only judge of all."<sup>31</sup> The claims Jesus makes in John 5 concur with both John's testimony and his own throughout the Gospel. The prologue makes it clear that the Word, while distinguished from the Father, is yet included within the unique divine identity proclaimed in the Old Testament.<sup>32</sup> Charles Gieschen notes that Jesus portrays himself throughout John's Gospel using the language of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, identifying himself as the visible image of Yahweh come to suffer in atonement for sin. The close connection between the language of being lifted up (ὑψόω) and being glorified (δοξάζω) indicates that Christ will show himself as the visible image of Yahweh principally on the cross.<sup>33</sup> The fourteen famous ἐγὼ εἰμί statements (seven absolute, seven predicate) found throughout the Gospel are all instances of Jesus identifying himself with the one God of Israel.<sup>34</sup> In 8:28, ἐγὼ εἰμί is linked with ὑψόω, connecting once again the ultimate disclosure of Christ's divine identity with the cross.<sup>35</sup> Finally, in 10:30 Jesus includes himself in

<sup>30</sup> Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 242.

<sup>31</sup> Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 243.

<sup>32</sup> Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 240.

<sup>33</sup> Charles A. Gieschen, "The Death of Jesus in the Gospel of John: Atonement for Sin?" *CTQ* 72:3 (2008): 250–254.

<sup>34</sup> Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 247.

<sup>35</sup> Gieschen, "The Death of Jesus," 251.

the great confession of Israel, the *Shema* (Deut 6:4), with the assertion: "I and the Father are One."<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, throughout John's Gospel and especially in chapter five, Christ identifies himself as Yahweh in the flesh come to give life. He therefore establishes a hermeneutic for interpreting the books of Moses. When Moses wrote about the words and acts of Yahweh, he wrote about Jesus. This includes every Messianic prophecy, but is not limited to them. If all of Moses' writings speak of Christ, then one can only fully understand them through faith in him. Those who reject Christ cannot properly interpret Scripture, for they do not view them in "the light of God's new revelation in the incarnate Word."<sup>37</sup> We can therefore surmise that Philip's confession in 1:45 that Jesus is "the one (about) whom Moses wrote in the law" expresses the same view of the Torah. In the context of John 1, where John confesses the preexistence and divinity of Christ, the evangelist would not want us to see that confession in any other way.

In John 5, Jesus takes Moses and establishes him as μάρτυς to himself. Moses wrote about Christ, therefore any who claim to embrace Moses should follow Christ. To those who do not see Christ as the one spoken of by Moses, namely Yahweh in the flesh, Moses becomes the κατηγορῶν, the one who accuses and condemns them. "Going against this interpretation standard makes him the prosecutor of such a misguided reading."<sup>38</sup> Therefore, Jesus here introduces a strong polemic. He attacks his opponent's misinterpretation and misappropriation of the νόμος and Moses. The Jewish leaders want to force the people to make a decision between Jesus and Moses, between this wandering rabbi and Israel's most significant figure. But in 5:45–47, Jesus rejects this notion: "For that one wrote (ἔγραψεν) about me." Stan Harstine summarizes, "It is not a decision between Moses and Jesus. Rejecting Jesus equates to unfaithfulness to Moses."<sup>39</sup> Forcing such a decision means holding to a false dichotomy, for one can only truly follow Moses by believing in Jesus as Yahweh in the flesh. Philip understood this already in 1:45, where he accurately interpreted the νόμος as speaking of the eternal Son of God who would become the incarnate Jesus Christ.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 250.

<sup>37</sup> Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 55.

<sup>38</sup> Shapdick, "Religious Authority Re-Evaluated," 195.

<sup>39</sup> Harstine, *Moses as a Character in the Fourth Gospel*, 60.

<sup>40</sup> Shapdick, "Religious Authority Re-Evaluated," 195.

*John's Polemic*

Jesus can only combat the false dichotomy of his opponents by introducing a second part to his polemic. He must assault the exalted views of Moses in his day. As noted above, the Gospel of John emphasizes Moses as an instrument of God. Jesus adds the designations *μάρτυς* and *κατηγορῶν*, but these remain the roles of an instrument of God, inextricably tied with the *νόμος* delivered through him. But in the Jewish mystical literature current in the first century, Moses has a much larger role, for he is depicted as actually ascending to heaven several times during his life, most importantly to receive the *νόμος* when he went up to Mount Sinai.<sup>41</sup> Wayne Meeks notes that first-century Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria considered the incident at the burning bush, the incident at Mount Sinai, and Moses' death all as examples of mystical experiences. Every mystic longed for a vision of God, and Philo believed that Moses came nearer to that goal than any other human. In fact, he held Moses in such high esteem that he sees the ascents of Moses as "virtually a deification."<sup>42</sup> Philo writes, "This (Exodus 24:12a) signifies that a holy soul is divinized by ascending not to the air or to the ether or to heaven (which is) higher than all but to (a region) above the heavens. And beyond the world there is no place but God."<sup>43</sup>

For Philo, both at Sinai and at his death Moses leaves the bodily realm to enter the "incorporeal and intelligible." His death is an ascent to heaven after the pattern of the ascent of Sinai, but this ascent has a slightly different character, as Meeks explains: "The mystic ascent (Sinai) is a kind of 'realized eschatology'; the final ascension is a projection and fulfillment of the goal of the mystic ascent."<sup>44</sup> Other sources follow Philo in seeing Moses on Mount Sinai as an example of mystic ascent, including the *Apocalypse of Ezra*:

I (Yahweh) told him (Moses) many wondrous things, showed him the secrets of the times, declared to him the end of the seasons: Then I commanded him saying: These words shalt thou publish openly, but these keep secret. And now I do say to thee: The signs which I have shewed thee, the dreams which thou hast seen, and the interpretations which thou has heard—lay them up in thy heart! For thou shalt be

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<sup>41</sup> Other Old Testament figures, including Abraham and Jacob, are also associated with this mystical tradition.

<sup>42</sup> Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, 123.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, 124.

<sup>44</sup> Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, 125.

taken up from (among) men, and henceforth thou shalt remain with my Son, and with such as are like thee, until the times be ended.<sup>45</sup>

Moses therefore became a paradigm for other mystics to follow, as he modeled for them the mystic ascent. But the tradition of Moses' ascent not only makes him a mystic example, it also makes him the originator of prophecy and the ideal king. "(In heaven) he received the Torah, was crowned king of Israel and thus God's vice-regent, and learned the secrets which made him teacher of all prophets."<sup>46</sup> We find an example of this understanding in one of the earliest accounts of Moses' ascent, a document called *Exagoge* from the second century BC:

On Sinai's peak I saw what seemed a throne so great in size it touched the clouds of heaven. Upon it sat a man of noble mien, be-crowned, and with a scepter in one hand while with the other he did beckon me. I made approach and stood before the throne. He handed o'er the scepter and he bade me mount the throne, and gave to me the crown; then he himself withdrew from off the throne. I gazed upon the whole earth round about; things under it, and high above the skies. Then at my feet a multitude of stars fell down, and I their number reckoned up. They passed by me like armed ranks of men. Then I in terror wakened from the dream.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to the subtle polemic already noted, Jesus directly and explicitly combats the mystical ascent tradition in 3:13, where he declares: "No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man."

Scholars understand this polemic in different ways. Jey Kanagaraj considers the Gospel of John a "mystical" document, written in part to proclaim Christ to those enamored with the mystic tradition. According to this view, John wrote under the framework of mysticism, and therefore tried to understand Jesus within that context.<sup>48</sup> Mystical communion with God is only possible through Christ. Kanagaraj summarizes: "By means of the ascent-motif John polemizes, proclaims, and persuades the people of his day by reinterpreting the contemporary mystical belief in terms of the person and function of Jesus."<sup>49</sup> Meeks comes to a similar conclusion,

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, 157.

<sup>46</sup> Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, 215.

<sup>47</sup> Jey J. Kanagaraj, 'Mysticism' in *the Gospel of John: An Inquiry into Its Background* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 112. The Greek text is provided by Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, 148.

<sup>48</sup> Kanagaraj, 'Mysticism' in *the Gospel of John*, 317.

<sup>49</sup> Kanagaraj, 'Mysticism' in *the Gospel of John*, 213.



positing that the portrayal of Jesus in John's Gospel owes much to the mystical traditions surrounding the early Christians. In the opinion of both scholars, the polemic exists not against mystic traditions as such, but against the superior view of Moses in those traditions. Jesus fulfills the functions earlier attributed to Moses, and he does so in a far superior way.<sup>50</sup>

Such approaches do not appreciate the depth of the polemic we find in the Gospel of John. Jesus does not simply replace Moses or others as the greatest mystic or as the fulfillment of mystical yearnings. He rejects these mystic traditions outright as a false way to understand God. Despite what the mystics taught, Moses did not ascend to heaven, nor should others attempt to commune with God in this way. Instead, Yahweh has come down to his people throughout history and climactically in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>51</sup> Christ is the only one who ascends and descends, and he does so not as the greatest mystic, but in order to be lifted up on the cross, "that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (3:15). The mystical ascent tradition by no means characterizes the view of all first-century Jews, but in the context of this tradition, we can see why Jesus needed to put Moses into his proper place as the instrument of God through whom he gave the νόμος, thereby making Moses the one who wrote about Jesus.

Under the framework established in 5:45–47 and in the preceding discussion, we can now reexamine Jesus' use of Moses in chapter seven. We already noted that Jesus emphasizes Moses as an instrument of Yahweh, not through a διὰ clause as in the prologue, but instead through the phrase: "Not that it is from Moses but from the fathers." Now we can see the polemical rationale for this phrase. As he brings Moses into the discussion, Jesus seemingly gives him high status as the giver of the νόμος, using the active verb δέδωκεν rather than ἐνδόθη coupled with διὰ, as in the prologue. The phrase in 7:22 therefore functions to combat such a misinterpretation. Moses does not give anything of his own accord, but instead Yahweh uses him, as he did the πατέρων, to give his νόμος. The rabbinical teachings based on the νόμος Μωϋσέως (7:23) passed through human hands, while Jesus received his teaching directly from the Father.<sup>52</sup> As 3:13 emphasizes, Moses did not ascend to heaven to partake of the

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<sup>50</sup> Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, 319.

<sup>51</sup> Charles A. Gieschen, "Merkavah Mysticism and the Gospel of John" (unpublished paper, Jerome Exegetical Seminar, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN, October 28, 2009), 10–11.

<sup>52</sup> Harstine, *Moses as a Character in the Fourth Gospel*, 66.

mysteries of God. Instead, Jesus, who descended, teaches with the authority given to him by the one who sent him (7:16–18).

But this does not mean that Jesus has no use for Moses in this text. Even though he puts Moses in his proper place, Jesus still calls on him as the κατηγορῶν. Moses accuses Jesus' opponents of not keeping the νόμος: "Didn't Moses give to you the law (τὸν νόμον)? And none from among you does (ποιεῖ) the law (τὸν νόμον). Why do you seek to kill me?" (John 7:19). This accusation is once again especially surprising in a context where the Jews oppose Jesus for breaking the Sabbath law (the same incident that prompted the discourse in chapter five!). Jesus here teaches that doing (ποιεῖ) the νόμος Μωϋσέως involves much more than following the "rules." Instead, as Jesus explicitly teaches in John 5, it involves a recognition that Moses wrote about Jesus throughout the νόμος. It requires the assertion that Jesus is Yahweh come in the flesh. Jesus therefore once again rejects the false dichotomy between Moses and himself. One who follows the νόμος and Moses would not seek to kill Jesus, but instead would embrace him. As noted above, Jesus will use a similar argument when the people call Abraham as a witness against him in chapter eight.

All of the themes noted in 5:45–47 come together dramatically in John 9. Here the Pharisees attempt to claim Moses for themselves. Jesus begins the narrative with yet another healing on the Sabbath. He moves on, but the healed man's friends and family bring him before the Pharisees. There they interrogate him, and the healed man asks the provocative question in verse 27: "Do you also want to become his disciples?" The Pharisees seize on this opportunity to bring forth Moses as the κατηγορῶν. They will judge Jesus' actions on the basis of the νόμος Μωϋσέως, for they consider themselves disciples of Moses, unlike the healed man, whom they describe as disciples of "that one" (ἐκείνου). Why do they hold so firmly to Moses? "Because God has spoken to Moses" (9:29). This could simply refer to the intimate relationship between Yahweh and Moses described in the Pentateuch.<sup>53</sup> However, in light of the ongoing polemic described above, we could perhaps also detect a reference to the ascent tradition, that God spoke to Moses when he ascended into heaven to receive the νόμος. Regardless, the Pharisees will stake their claim on Moses, for they do not know the origins of Jesus. The healed man knows that Jesus came "from God" (9:33). Philip declared much the same in 1:45, correctly identifying Jesus as the one about whom Moses wrote. The irony runs deep in this text. The Pharisees attempt to claim Moses as the κατηγορῶν, but instead

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<sup>53</sup> See especially Exodus 33:11.

the healed man accuses them of refusing to recognize Jesus' divine origins. The healed man exposes their false use of Moses, just as Jesus did in John 5 and 7. As Jesus said in chapter five, if they claim to believe in Moses, then they would believe in him.<sup>54</sup>

With the conclusion of this incident, Moses disappears from the narrative. The polemic has found its final conclusion, as the religious leaders fully embrace the false dichotomy and follow Moses rather than the one to whom he pointed.<sup>55</sup> And in doing so, they will put to death the one whom Moses proclaimed, losing both Moses and the Messiah.

#### IV. Moses as Instrument of Salvation

In the prologue, John states that "the law (ὁ νόμος) was given (ἐνδόθη) through Moses (διὰ Μωϋσέως)." The Gospel of John demonstrates that God gave many gifts to his people διὰ Μωϋσέως. As discussed extensively above, the gift of the νόμος through Moses is ultimately the gift of revelation pointing to Christ. However, other gifts were given διὰ Μωϋσέως, and the provision of food and healing in the desert also are brought to the fore in the ongoing trial of Jesus. Following the miraculous feeding in John 6, the people demand yet another sign: "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave (ἔνδωκεν) them bread from heaven to eat'" (6:31). The people hearken back to God's gracious provision in the desert, or do they? The quotation that the people give (presumably from Nehemiah 9:15) does not mention who actually gave the bread.<sup>56</sup> The verb ἔνδωκεν could refer to either Yahweh or Moses.<sup>57</sup> Jesus obviously thought that the Jews confronting him regarded Moses as the giver, for he launched into the kind of polemic we encountered in other texts. Moses retains his importance as the one through whom the gift was given, but the manna originated from "my Father (πατήρ μου)." The people wanted to force a choice between Moses and Jesus, between Moses' provision of manna for forty years in the desert and Jesus' feeding of the five thousand on one afternoon. When viewed in those terms, as simply a competition between Moses and Jesus, Moses obviously had the greater miracle. In response, Jesus does not deny the earlier gift "through Moses" (διὰ Μωϋσέως), but instead rejects their conception of Moses' role in giving that gift. They have the wrong grammar, for Moses cannot be the subject of the verbs when

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<sup>54</sup> Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 103.

<sup>55</sup> Boismard, *Moses or Jesus*, 22–23.

<sup>56</sup> Nehemiah 9:15 *does* specify who gave the manna, using the second person verb in prayer to Yahweh.

<sup>57</sup> Shapdick, "Religious Authority Re-Evaluated," 196.

discussing Yahweh's gifts. Jesus provides a corrective, implicitly affirming the importance of God's gift of manna through Moses.<sup>58</sup>

Next, Jesus contrasts the gifts themselves. God did provide for his people in the desert διὰ Μωϋσέως, continuing the mighty acts of salvation he wrought διὰ Μωϋσέως to bring the people out from bondage in Egypt. However, this manna could not give eternal life. And so the same God who gave the gift of manna διὰ Μωϋσέως now gives to the world a much greater gift, for Jesus points to himself as the "true bread from heaven (τὸν ἄρτον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τὸν ἀληθινόν; 6:32)." God used Moses as his chosen instrument of temporal salvation for the people of Israel, but did not give to Moses the task of accomplishing eternal salvation. That role belongs solely and completely to Jesus, as he declares himself to be the one "giving life (ζωοποιεῖ) to the world" (6:33). Not only does this bread give eternal life, but Jesus also describes this bread as the one who comes down (καταβαίνων) from heaven, once again a polemic against the mystic ascent tradition. Moses did not ascend to heaven to receive the mysteries of God, but instead the same God who worked through (διὰ) him now brings ultimate and eternal salvation through the one coming down from heaven, Yahweh in human flesh.

Moses appears in a similar role in John 3. God gave the νόμος through Moses, he gave the manna through Moses, and in this text Jesus calls to mind the fact that God gave deliverance from serpents in the desert διὰ Μωϋσέως. Jesus had spoken of birth from above and being born of the Spirit, but those actions needed an anchor in God's work of salvation. He provides that anchor by connecting God's work of rebirth with his own death and resurrection. To do this, Jesus brings Moses to center stage: "And just as Moses lifted up (ὑψωσεν) the snake in the desert, thus it is necessary for the Son of man to be lifted up (ὑψωθῆναι), in order that all who believe in him have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

Jesus presents the incident in Numbers 21:4-9 as pointing directly to his death, specifically to his manner of dying. As per usual in John's Gospel, this statement does not stand alone without a polemic. Jesus implies the same facts that he emphasized in John 6, that all those delivered διὰ Μωϋσέως still died. Jesus, however, gives eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον).<sup>59</sup> Ultimate salvation only comes through the work of Christ, and he will accomplish salvation through an "ascent" of sorts, though a

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<sup>58</sup> Shapdick, "Religious Authority Re-Evaluated," 197.

<sup>59</sup> Shapdick, "Religious Authority Re-Evaluated," 192-193.

paradoxical one, as he is lifted up and glorified only upon the cross.<sup>60</sup> John 3:13, which sets the stage for this mention of Moses, provides the definitive counter to the ascent tradition. The Son of Man, the one who came down from heaven, provides eternal life to all who believe, even as God provided life with Moses' lifting up of the serpent. Christ's "ascent" on the cross brings ultimate and eternal life to all, as the Christ takes on the verdict of death declared by God on his sinful creation.

In both texts, Jesus places Moses into his most important role in the Gospel of John, that of "instrument of salvation." This title has been coined by the author of this study, though the concept is not without precedence. Harstine, in a similar investigation, identifies five different roles for Moses in John's narrative, including "one who acts in the salvific arena."<sup>61</sup> Stefan Schapdick in a more grudging way assigns to Moses a soteriological role:

[John's Gospel] also picks up certain events from [Moses'] life as they are described in the biblical traditions (cf. John 3:14; 6:31-33). The interest especially focuses on the life-saving or life-preserving role of Moses . . . . The Fourth Gospel refers to these specific traditions by emphasizing the true originator of all these life-preserving acts, God himself (cf. esp. John 6:32) . . . . Moses is depicted as the mediator of his divine will. Thus, the focus is primarily on God as the one who gives and preserves life.<sup>62</sup>

Schapdick is therefore willing to assign Moses a salvific role, but only if we keep firmly in mind the polemic expressed throughout the Gospel. Moses does not provide eternal life, and therefore no one should exalt him too highly, especially at the expense of Jesus. However, he pushes the polemic too far, and perhaps in the wrong direction. "All (Moses') efforts described in the biblical traditions which he performed on behalf of God's will are nothing but a narrative 'foil' on which the overall soteriological quality of Jesus' divine revelation can be demonstrated."<sup>63</sup> Shapdick incorrectly focuses the polemic on the person of Moses himself, not on the false conceptions of Moses current at Jesus' time, which we have investigated above.

Shapdick is no doubt correct that in John 3 and 6 Jesus wants to contrast the gift of life through Moses with that given by himself. He gives

<sup>60</sup> Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, 297. See also Gieschen, "The Death of Jesus," 250.

<sup>61</sup> Harstine, *Moses as a Character in the Fourth Gospel*, 72.

<sup>62</sup> Schapdick, "Religious Authority Re-Evaluated," 207.

<sup>63</sup> Schapdick, "Religious Authority Re-Evaluated," 207. While not as explicit, Harstine comes to a similar conclusion, declaring, "Those who want what is true will not find it in Moses." Harstine, *Moses as a Character in the Fourth Gospel*, 64.

eternal life, while all those saved by Moses still died. But Jesus does not on that account discard the salvific works διὰ Μωϋσέως as described in Scripture, instead giving them proper perspective as acts that point forward to, and are encompassed by, the ultimate deliverance he gives. Moses is clearly described as an instrument of Yahweh, but that does not entail a polemic against the Moses of Scripture, but only the Moses claimed by Jesus' opponents. Their conception of Moses, as demonstrated above, has perhaps been influenced by the ascent tradition, giving a view of Israel's greatest leader that needed to be combated, but not at the expense of the true Moses. The terminology "instrument of salvation" attempts to preserve this proper balance. It endeavors to express the meaning of the διὰ clause found in John 1:17 by putting Moses in his proper place as an instrument, perhaps the most important instrument in the Old Testament, but an instrument nonetheless of God's saving work. This saving work both pointed forward to the cross and occurred only because of the cross. God showed his love through Moses for the sake of Christ. God delivered his people διὰ Μωϋσέως, looking forward to Christ's ultimate redemption.

Though the courtroom scene found in other texts is not explicit in John 3 and 6, the salvific role of Moses is intimately tied to his judicial roles. The acts of salvation διὰ Μωϋσέως point to Jesus; they witness to him just as in the trial. Moreover, Jesus clearly demonstrates that clinging to Yahweh's acts διὰ Μωϋσέως without believing in the Christ is of no avail. Moses testifies to Christ and accuses his opponents in these texts through his actions as he mediates the gifts of Yahweh. In the prologue, John declares that Yahweh gave the gift of the νόμος through Moses. In John 3 and 6, Jesus notes that God used Moses as his instrument to bring Israel bread from heaven to sustain them in their journey, and as the one who held up the standard of salvation for all to see and live. "A single historical event of a divine act of life-saving presents Moses as its mediator. He has a kind of soteriological function, then."<sup>64</sup> Jesus presents his own mission as in many ways parallel to God's salvation διὰ Μωϋσέως, with one important difference, as Meeks emphasizes, "What takes places through Jesus is . . . far superior to that which was enacted by Moses."<sup>65</sup> God worked through Moses to preserve temporal life in bringing his people from bondage and preserving them in the desert. Jesus comes to bring eternal life, which he will give by being lifted up for the sins of the world. Humanity does not have to choose between Moses and Jesus, for Moses pointed to Jesus, both

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<sup>64</sup> Schapdick, "Religious Authority Re-Evaluated," 192.

<sup>65</sup> Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, 292.

through his words and the manner in which God gave his gifts through him.

### Conclusion

The figure of Moses in the fourth Gospel cannot be understood properly without considering together three elements of Johannine scholarship: John's understanding of the νόμος, the trial motif, and the polemic against the mystical ascent tradition. At issue in the Gospel according to John is the identity of Jesus, and this debate characterizes every encounter between Jesus and his foes, especially when Moses is involved. In these texts, Jesus operates with a two-sided polemic. The first is against the exalted views of Moses current in mystical circles. Without a proper understanding of the John's polemic against the ascent tradition, one runs the danger of completely misunderstanding Moses' role in John's Gospel. If this polemic is not taken far enough, John appears simply to be replacing Moses with Jesus as the greatest mystic. If it is taken too far, then the person of Moses is pitted against Jesus, which is exactly what Jesus' opponents want to do. Second, regardless of how highly one views Moses, Jesus declares that they have interpreted him incorrectly. Not only is Moses not greater than Jesus, in fact Moses subordinates himself under Jesus by testifying to him. Jesus builds the case for his divine origin by claiming Moses and the νόμος for himself. They are not to be discarded, but properly interpreted. This proper interpretation only comes through the lens of Christ, the incarnation of Yahweh in the flesh come to deliver eternal salvation to all people

The Gospel of John indicates that the Jews wanted to drive a wedge between Moses and Jesus, pitting one against the other. Modern readers of John are tempted to do the same, but as this study demonstrates, John writes specifically to counter such an approach. Moses and the νόμος are not the enemies of Jesus; in fact, when used properly, they both point to Christ. Moses did not ascend into heaven, but Jesus Christ has come down from heaven to deliver his people from their bondage to sin by ascending upon the cross.<sup>66</sup> Instead of presenting a tirade against Moses, John's Gospel puts him in his proper, important place. God selected Moses as his chosen "instrument of salvation," the one who would interact with Yahweh "face to face," and who would testify to the mighty acts of a God who would one day take on flesh and deliver Moses and all humanity from sin. In every way, Moses and the νόμος testify to Jesus as the one he

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<sup>66</sup> Gieschen, "Merkavah Mysticism and the Gospel of John," 10-11.

claims to be: the Son of God, Yahweh in the flesh. Moses wrote about Jesus on every page of the Torah, for he wrote about Yahweh and his great deeds among the people of Israel. Next to the testimony of the Father himself, Moses is therefore Jesus' greatest advocate, which makes him the accuser of Jesus' opponents. Rejecting Jesus means the rejection of Moses and indeed Yahweh himself, for as Moses declared, Jesus is the visible image of Yahweh. In the words he wrote, in the actions that Yahweh did through him, Moses constantly and consistently points to Jesus. John's argument is encapsulated in his prologue: the νόμος came through Moses, and it testifies to χάρις καὶ ἀλήθεια, found only in Jesus.