

The Distinctive Use of the OT in John's Gospel, with Particular Reference to 1:14-18.

Abstract

This essay presents a general synopsis of John's distinctive use of the OT, before providing a detailed analysis of his unique use of the Moses/Christ comparison motif in John 1:14-18. Unlike the Synoptists, John excludes one of the key appearances of Moses in the gospels, namely, the transfiguration. However, as will be shown, he does not fail to neglect the Moses/Christ superiority motif. On the contrary, he presents a more prominent one as will be demonstrated from the exegesis of 1:14-18. Connections between the Moses/Christ theme and John's replacement theology are observed, before concluding with a proposal for a biblical theology connection between Deut 34:10-12 and 1:14-18, that presents Jesus, at his point in redemptive history, as the Incomparable One, the Prophet *par excellence*.

John's Gospel has been described as 'the most mysterious writings of the New Testament' (Hengel, 1994, 384). One writer even paints John as an eagle, 'the spiritual bird, fast-flying, God-seeing' (Eriugena, *Hom. Prol. Jo.* 4, tr. Bamford, 1990, cited in Edwards, 2003, 1). And who would disagree? It is, without argument, a most distinct piece of writing, not least when compared to writings within its own genre, namely, the Synoptics. John's distinctiveness also carries over into the area of OT usage. His is rich and varied, and space does not allow for a thorough overview of the material. So, following a general synopsis of the OT in John, a detailed exploration of John's distinctive Moses/Christ motif with respect to 1:14-18 will be presented, leading to a brief discussion about its contribution to John's replacement theology. In conclusion, a biblical theology connection between the Moses/Christ comparison and Deut 34:10-12 will be proposed.

John's use of the OT is distinctive as compared to the Synoptics in a variety of ways. First, Barrett (1947, 155) notes that the sheer number of OT references is smaller.¹ Second, John's referencing of Scripture is different. There are only 13 direct quotes with formula (1:23 cf. Isa 40:3; 2:17 cf. Ps 69:9; 6:31 cf. Ps 78:24; 6:45 cf. Isa 54:13; 10:34 cf. Ps 82:6; 12:14 cf. Ps 62:11 & Zech 9:9; cf. Isa 35:4; 40:9; 12:38 cf. Isa: 53:1; 12:39f cf. Isa 6:10; 15:25 cf. Ps 35:19 or Ps 69:5; 19:24 cf. Ps 22:18; 19:36 cf. Exod 12:46 or Ps 34:21 or Num 9:12; 19:37 cf. Zech 12:10); two quotes adduced without an introductory formula (1:51 cf. Gen 28:12

¹ Matt (24), Mark (70), Luke (109) and John (27).

[perhaps an allusion], and 12:13 cf. Ps 118:25f; Carson, 1988, 246), and four examples where the reader is clearly directed to the OT but no text is cited (7:38, 7:42; 17:12; 19:38 cf. Ps 22:15 [possibly]). On six occasions the Scripture or some OT person are said to speak of Jesus (1:45; 2:22; 3:10; 5:39; 45f; 12:13). 'The OT citations in one way or another point to Jesus, identifying him, justifying the responses he elicits, grounding the details of his life and death in the Scriptures' (Carson, 1988, 246). Whilst the purposes for the citations are unified, the formulae used to introduce them are not so uniform. John uses a diversity of introductory formulae (1:23; 2:17; 6:31, 45; 10:34; 12:14f; 12:38; 12:39f; 13:18; 15:25; 19:24, 36, 37) and never utilises the common *γράφεται* like other NT writers (Carson, 1988, 248). The cluster of fulfilment formulae in the second half of John's Gospel surrounding Jesus' death helps to stress the fulfilment of Scripture in Jesus' passion and the connecting obduracy motif (Carson, 1988, 248).

Third, John's appropriation of Scripture into his narrative is dominantly typological (Goppelt, 1982, 179-95). That is, John's main use of Scripture is to show how Jesus fulfils types in the OT e.g. David, with the Psalm quotations (2:17; 15:25; 19:24; 28). However Carson (1988, 250) provides a necessary qualifier, that not every OT citation is 'utilised in some typological fashion' (e.g. John 12:37-41 cf. Isa 53:1; 6:10). Connected to John's dominant typological use is the fact that his appropriation technique is unique to the Fourth Gospel:

'John... has taken an O.T. symbol, ridded it of local associations and worked it up in a new and original Christian form' (Barrett, 1947, 164).

Fourth, prevalent throughout the gospel are John's more subtle and implicit OT allusions. For example, with reference to the Moses motif, Evans (2001, n.p.) notes eight verbal parallels to the LXX (3:17 cf. Num 16:28; 4:26 cf. Deut 18:18; 6:14 cf. Deut 18:18; 8:28 cf. Exod 4:12; 10:9 cf. Num 27:12; 10:11 cf. Num 27:12; 12:37 cf. Num 14:11; Exod 4:30-31; 14:31 cf. Lev 16:34; Num 27:22). Glasson (1963), Meeks (1967), Hanson (1991) and Boismard (1993) have noted similar Mosaic allusions, with some elaborative suggestions.²

Fifth, John utilises OT themes and institutions as ingredients to his replacement motif. Jesus not only fulfils the office of the Christ (6:41; 20:31) and other christological titles such as Son of God (1:49), king of Israel (1:49), Son of Man (1:51), the prophet (6:14), king of the Jews (19:33), but he is also the Lamb of God (1:29), the bringer of new wine (2:10), the new temple (2:19-22), the antitype to the salvation given through the uplifted serpent (3:14), the herald of true worship (4:21-24), the one greater than Jacob (4:12) and Abraham (8:53-58), the one whom Moses wrote about (5:46), the true manna (6:35), water (7:37-39), light (8:12; 9:5), the good shepherd (10:14), the resurrection and the life (11:25),

² For example, Glasson (1963, 40-44) and Boismard (1993, 18-20) see a connection between the postures of Jesus and Moses in John 19:18 (ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐντεῦθεν) and Exod 17:12 (ἐντεῦθεν εἰς καὶ ἐντεῦθεν εἰς) (LXX). They propose that as Moses defeated God's enemies with outstretched arms between two people, so does Jesus. This, and other such parallels concerning Moses and Jesus, raise the issue of inter-textuality, and surface some interesting methodological questions particularly in regard to how much of an OT text must be present for an allusion to be plausible.

and the true vine (15:1ff). He fulfils the redemptive purposes of God in relation to circumcision and the Sabbath (7:21-24 cf. 5:1-18).³ The 'I am' sayings with predicate pick up on themes from the OT and demonstrate how Jesus fulfils them (6:35; 8:12; 10:7; 10:14; 11:25-26; 14:6; 15:1). Moreover, the traditional Jewish feasts – Passover (2:13), an unnamed feast (5:1), Tabernacles (7:2), and Dedication (10:22) – are given a new significance through Jesus' words and actions (Carson, 1988, 254-5). Jesus is the true⁴ antitype of all these variegated types in the OT, and thus is presented as their ultimate fulfilment.

By fulfilling all the OT themes and institutions, Jesus surpasses them, and, therefore, in effect replaces them (Carson, 1988, 255-6).⁵ This brief overview of John's distinctive use of the OT is best summarised by Barrett (1978, 30): 'The Old Testament, therefore, so well known and understood that John could use it not piecemeal but as a whole, may be taken as an essential element in the background of the gospel.'

Our attention will now be given to John's distinctive use of the Moses/Christ comparison⁶ with particular reference to 1:14-18. That such a comparison is present in John is widely attested.⁷ It is worth noting that all of John's direct

³ '... Jesus is not a Sabbath-breaker, but the one who fulfils both Sabbath and circumcision' (Carson, 1991, 314-6).

⁴ By 'true' we mean, 'ultimate' (Carson, 1991, 111) in the sense that Jesus is the final antitype.

⁵ The relationship between types, fulfilment, supersession and replacement will be discussed later.

⁶ 'Every comparison involves an element of contrast...' (Glasson, 1963, 25).

⁷ Glasson (1963); Meeks (1967); Pancaro (1975); Hanson (1991); Boismard (1993); Harstine (2002). A main connection point is seen in the word 'sent' (Evans, 1993, 137): ἀπόστολος (3:17, 34; 5:36, 38;

references to Moses do not parallel any in the Synoptics, highlighting that his use of the Moses motif is, to some extent at least, distinct.⁸ However, whilst there are no overlapping references to Moses in John and the Synoptics, there is nevertheless still a Moses/Christ comparison clearly evident in the latter at the transfiguration. Matthew utilises the account to show Jesus' greatness: 'As Moses' antitype, Jesus so far outstrips him that when Moses is put next to him, men must "listen" to Jesus, as Moses himself said' (Carson, 1984, 386). Mark introduces Moses and Elijah in their 'prophetic roles as joint preparers of the final Prophet to come...' (Edwards, 2002, 265). Their 'talking with Jesus' means that 'they hold an audience with Jesus as their superior' (Edwards, 2002, 265). Bock (1994, 869) observes a similar superiority theme in Luke's account: 'The ἕξοδος itself recalls the great OT event of salvation and suggests that Jesus is doing something not just equivalent, but even greater. Moses' presence and the refusal to equate Jesus and Moses with the Feast of Booths in 9:33 show Jesus' superiority.' However, why does John exclude this narrative apex from his gospel?⁹ For it is not that John excludes the Moses/Christ motif; on the

6:29, 57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25) and πέμπω (13:16; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7; 20:21) are replete throughout John, as is שלח in the Pentateuch in reference to Moses (Exod 3:10, 12, 13, 14, 15; 4:28; 7:16; Deut 34:11). Both were God's *shaliach*, God's 'sent one', and their offices are clearly paralleled in John (see Evans, 1993, 137-141).

⁸ Compare John 1:17, 45; 3:14; 5:45-47; 6:32; 7:19-23; 9:28-29 with Matt 8:4; 17:3-4; 19:7-8; 22:24; Mark 1:44; 7:10; 9:4-5; 10:3-4; 12:19; 12:26, and Luke 2:22; 5:14; 9:30; 9:33; 16:29; 16:31; 20:28; 20:37; 24:27; 24:44.

⁹ Glasson (1963, 65-73) thinks that the transfiguration is seen throughout John's Gospel as Jesus reveals his glory in his whole ministry and ultimately at the cross. Whilst we are not opposed to the idea, we nevertheless propose that John's 'transfiguration' is seen, at least most distinctly, in 1:14-18.

contrary, his is more prominent than any of the Synoptists.¹⁰ Rather, he chooses to display the Moses/Christ comparison against the background of that epoch inaugurating event at Sinai (1:14-18 cf. Exod 33-34), which is particularly Johannine. And he chooses to do so in his Prologue, which is seminal for the rest of his book.

The Prologue, seen as the 'foyer' to the whole book (Carson, 1991, 111), is full of allusions to Moses at creation¹¹ and Sinai, providing a paradigm for the comparisons in the rest of the gospel (Evans, 1993, 135-136). John 1:14-18 is loaded with allusions to God's revelation of his glory at Sinai (Exod 33:7-34:55). The use of the verb σκηνοῶ recalls how God tabernacled (שָׁכַן) among his people (Exod 25:8; 40:34-35) and revealed his glory (כָּבֹד) (Köstenberger, 2004, 41-2). The words 'grace' (חֶסֶד) and 'truth' (אֱמֶת) recall the revelation God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 34:5-7; Carson, 1991, 127ff; Meeks, 1967; 288). But now, at this point in redemptive history, a new, fresh revelation has dawned, the glory of God's Word, who is full of grace and truth (1:14).

¹⁰ 'In general it is a mark of the Moses/Christ typology in John's Gospel that it emphasises more strongly than other early Christian literature the contrast between Moses and Christ' (Jeremias, 1967, 873). He notes that the Moses/Christ typology is distinct in John because it is 'plainly formulated' whereas in Matthew it is 'presupposed' (1967, 867). Allison (1993, 274) concurs, arguing that John emphasises the differences between Moses and Jesus, whilst Matthew assumes them.

¹¹ In first-century traditions Moses, as mediator of the covenant, was connected with creation (Evans, 1993, 136).

With verse 15 being a parenthetical remark,¹² it follows that ὅτι in verse 16 explains verse 14 and helps unpack John's bold statement (Carson, 1991, 130, 134). The meaning of the phrase 'grace upon grace' turns on the force of the preposition ἀντί (Carson, 1991, 131). The most popular interpretation is that ἀντί means 'upon' or 'in addition to',¹³ carrying the idea of 'one grace succeeding another, not necessarily superseding another' (Hanson, 1991, 27). Edwards (1988, 193) however rightly points out that 'there is no parallel to this usage in all Greek literature', opting for the more common usage, 'instead of'.¹⁴ This means then, that the grace that comes in Jesus replaces the grace of the law. 'God's grace may not come in grades; but it may come in degrees, the gracious revelation that anticipates what is yet to come, and the gracious revelation that fulfils the anticipation, the very epitome of grace and truth' (Carson, 1988, 256). And 'The new grace is superior to the old [...] but the old covenant was still an act of grace...' (Edwards, 1988, 197).

Verse 17 contains a clear parallelism:

ὅτι	ὁ νόμος	διὰ Μωϋσέως	ἐδόθη,
	ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια	διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ	ἐγένετο.

However, commentators are divided over whether it is an antithetical or synthetic parallelism. Four factors support the view that John is depicting a synthetic parallelism that denotes the idea of progression. First, no adversative

¹² Contra Hanson (1991, 26-7) who purports that John the Baptist speaks from 1:15-18.

¹³ NRSV, NEB, GNB, NIV, and ESV.

¹⁴ See Wallace (1996, 364-368) and Harris (1978, 1179-1180) for a discussion on the meaning of ἀντί. In support of Edwards' rendering are Carson (1991, 132) and Köstenberger (2004, 46-7).

such as *ἀλλά* or *δέ* exists in verse 17. Second, there is no synonymity between the 'law' and 'grace and truth', or between 'Moses' and 'Christ', or even that the two verbs 'give' and 'came' carry the same meaning (Edwards, 1988, 197). Third, *ἐδόθη* is a divine passive, complementing the view that the law was given as a gracious gift from God (Köstenberger, 2004, 48). Fourth, the *ὅτι* of verse 17 is causal explaining verse 16, and so verse 17 should be read: 'Just as the law was given through Moses, so grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (Lindars, 1968, 98 cited in Edwards, 1988, 197). All this means that the law is not set over against the gospel in a Pauline fashion as some have tended to do (cf. Calvin 1961 [1558], 24; Barrett, 1978, 168),¹⁵ but rather 'the law itself is understood to be an earlier display of grace' (Carson, 1991, 132). This then sets in place the superiority motif of John's Gospel in which Christ is seen to surpass Moses and thus replace Moses. 'Jesus' ministry is superior to that of Moses, just as he is superior to Jacob (4:12) and Abraham (8:53)', for 'Although the law is God's gracious revelation, it is not adequate as a vehicle of the "true, ultimate grace" (1:17) that came through Jesus Christ' (Köstenberger, 2004, 48).

We believe that this interpretation of 1:16-17 fits best. Grammatically *ἀντί* is given its natural meaning, and the interpretation makes sense of *ὅτι* in verse 17.

Moreover, it helps to pick up on the supporting echoes of Exod 33-34.

Furthermore, the superiority motif established in 1:17 is in keeping with much

¹⁵ 'But we must notice the antithesis in his contrasting of the law to grace and truth; for he means that the Law lacked both of these' (Calvin 1961 [1558], 24). It is interesting to note that Calvin then immediately brings Paul into the argument. However, we must 'let John be John' (Edwards, 1988, 196).

of the Fourth Gospel's theology in which Jesus is seen to be the 'superior antitype' to Moses (Hengel, 1994, 388, 391), and thus to all the OT types.

Verse 18 further compounds Moses' inferiority to Jesus. It echoes the Sinai event in which Moses was unable to see God – or at least only see God in a diminished sense (Exod 33:20; Num 12:8 see Carson, 1991, 134).¹⁶ However, acting as an *inclusio* to verse 1 (Carson, 1991, 135), verse 18 shows us that the One who is in the bosom of the Father – and thus has seen God! – has made God known.¹⁷ The contrast is stark: under Moses no one saw God; under Jesus Christ we behold the fullness of his glory, for the Word *is* his glory.¹⁸ This superiority motif, hinted at in 1:9 with the 'true' light coming into the world, is now plainly seen in 1:14-18: the revelation of God through Moses is shown to be comparably inferior to God's new revelation in Christ. This 'greater than' theme is traced through the gospel as we see Jesus' salvific provision comparably greater than Moses': he only gave physical life during the rebellion in the desert (implicit in 3:14-15), and the bread that came through him from God did not sustain their lives in the wilderness (explicit in 6:49). In contrast, Jesus gives *eternal* life (3:15; 6:48-51) for he *is* life (11:25). And so the superiority motif of Moses/Christ is established. 'Jesus is presented as God's agent, a *shaliach* who speaks and acts with God's authority. But unlike Moses, Jesus is the *shaliach par*

¹⁶ Interestingly, Hanson (1991, 21) argues that Moses saw God the Word, but not God the Father.

¹⁷ ἔξηγησάτο, not in the sense of "explain" but "reveal," referring to communication of direct knowledge of God, here on the basis of having seen God' (Ridderbos, 1997, 59).

¹⁸ 'But Jesus is an agent vastly superior to Moses, for unlike Moses who only beheld glimpses of God's glory, Jesus *is* God's glory' (Evans, 1993, 186).

excellence, in whom God's Word, Torah and Wisdom and Glory have taken up residence and are revealed' (Evans, 1993, 145).

However, a qualifier at this point is necessary. Whilst 1:14-18 presents us with a contrast between Moses and Jesus, it does not create opposition to or diminish the importance of Moses and the law. 'The superiority of the revelation in Jesus is assumed, yet the one mediated by Moses is not denigrated' (Hay, 1990, 248). On the contrary, Moses is set up as a 'point of continuity' (Broyles, 2001, n.p.), for Moses wrote about Jesus as the prophet to come (1:45; 5:45-46).¹⁹ This important point illuminates the real irony in John 9:28-29 where the schools of Moses and Jesus are set up in opposition to each other.²⁰ For whilst Jewish hostility to Jesus is premised on loyalty to Moses, there is no such rivalry between the two legendary characters in the Johannine narrative (Hay, 1990, 248, 252). Rather, Jesus so fulfils the offices of Moses that the latter is 'stripped of those functions and made merely a "witness" to Jesus (like John the Baptist)' (Meeks, 1967, 319).²¹ Thus, the dichotomy of 9:28 – 'You are his disciple, we are disciples of Moses' – is a false one. For Moses wrote about Jesus (1:45; 5:45-46) and thus stands in support of him as a witness, and not as the head of a

¹⁹ Carson (1991,159), Boismard (1993, 26-30) and Köstenberger (2004, 80) all attest that 1:45 is alluding to Deut 18:15-18.

²⁰ Whilst the Synoptists use Moses like John does, as a point of conflict (Harstine, 2002, 95), none of them appropriate him into the irony of their plot.

²¹ Hanson (1991, 239) thinks it unlikely 'that John would adopt a typology which presents Moses as a type of Christ, since he was in conflict with a Jewish community that exalted the position of Moses against that of Jesus.' However, we trust that the evidence shown so far does show Jesus patterning the offices of Moses, not least in the role of mediating God's revelation (1:14-18). However, John's purpose is also to do more and show Jesus as greater than Moses (Hengel, 1994, 391; Meeks 1967, 319).

competing philosophical school (Harstine, 2002, 72). Moses, along with other legendary figures, is rather an ingredient in the plot to reveal Jesus' identity as the Messiah, the Son of God (20:31; Harstine, 2002, 73-74). And so ironically, though Moses should be a stepping-stone for the Jewish authorities to receive life in the name of the one of whom he wrote, instead they remain blind and in the end continue under God's wrath (John 3:18); and Moses becomes their eschatological accuser (5:45; Jeremias, 1967, 867).

It was observed earlier that John uses a variety of ways to show Jesus replacing previous types and institutions. Whilst Moses serves many functions in the gospel – for example, historical anchor, witness and point of conflict (Harstine, 2002, 72) – he is used by John primarily in a contrastive sense to identify Jesus' greatness and thus enhance his replacement motif, in a way that is peculiar to the Synoptists. For the grace that came in Jesus is greater than that which came through Moses (1:17). And if Jesus is greater than the legendary greats of the OT, such as Moses (1:17), Jacob (4:12) and Abraham (8:53, 58; Harstine, 2002, 74-5), then he also replaces them – for to surpass someone is in one sense to replace them. Edwards (2003, 134) however raises the need for some clarification at this point: John's replacement theology is not anti-Jewish, as if he is driven by a 'programmatically "replacement theology"; rather, 'The emphasis is on "fulfilment".' Granted, "'Fulfilment" may involve "supersession"[...] but that is not its prime purpose.' What then is the relationship between types, fulfilment,

supersession and replacement? Carson (1988, 255-6) provides a rounded answer for these interrelations:

'Thus again and again the typologies the evangelist develops do not *simply* interpret the OT, or *simply* utilise the categories of the OT to explain Jesus and his gospel, but become as well the vehicles by which Jesus and his gospel effectively *replace* those institutions, events and themes that have anticipated him [...] If they anticipate him, they point to him, prophesy of him; and he fulfils them and thus replaces them. This does not mean, for the evangelist, that they are discarded so much as fulfilled: they find their true significance and real continuity in him who is the true vine, the true light, the true temple, the one of whom Moses wrote' (emphasis original).

This essay has presented a general overview of John's distinctive use of the OT, as well as his peculiar use of the Moses/Christ comparison in 1:14-18. Unlike the Synoptists, John excludes the transfiguration event, but does not fail to neglect the Moses/Christ superiority motif. On the contrary, his is a more blatant one, as has been demonstrated from the exegesis of 1:14-18, serving to heighten the irony in chapter nine. If Goppelt (1982, 200) is correct when he says, 'Typology helps faith to recognise the greatness of Jesus', then the

Moses/Christ typology illuminates Jesus' greatness and enhances John's replacement theology.

We conclude with a reflection on this Moses/Christ comparison in the area of biblical theology, for 1:14-18 concerns the nexus of redemptive history. Lurking constantly in the background of John's gospel is Deut 18:15-19 (cf. 1:22, 45; 6:14; 7:40, 52), and thus with it Deut 34:10-12. In the latter, Moses is unsurpassed in his greatness because of the mighty and powerful acts that God wrought through him. A point often overlooked however, is that Moses is shown to be incomparable, not just in his mighty and powerful acts, but also *at his point in redemptive history*.²² The presence of the adverbial particle עוֹד ('since, still') situates Moses' incomparability in its temporal context. At this point in God's progressive revelation Moses is incomparable, but we also await a prophet like him (Deut 18: 15, 18). Since Jesus is that prophet whom Moses wrote about (1:45; 5:45-46), then he too is incomparable and unsurpassed, not just in his mighty acts of power, but also *at his point in redemptive history*. And since he is the terminus of that history, he is the Incomparable One, the Prophet *par excellence*. At this key turning point in salvation history God has made a new and greater revelation of his glory: 'the glory of the one and only [...] full of grace and truth' (1:14), which, says John, surpasses that of even the great Moses.

²² Neither Craigie (1976, 406-7) nor McConville (2002, 476-9) comment on עוֹד.

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