

MOSES'S WRITTEN WITNESS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

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Abstract. This paper demonstrates that in John's Gospel the figure of Moses acts as a witness who fosters belief in Jesus. From the evangelist's self-designation as an "eyewitness" (ἑωρακῶς) in John 19:35, the gospel defines witnesses as those who lead others to belief. This paper discusses the role of witnesses in John's Gospel in general and then presents Moses as a written witness.

Keywords: Moses, witness, writing.

A character study of Moses in John's Gospel will yield many different results as the gospel presents Moses as a figure for investigation in various ways. Dorothy Lee identifies three roles that Moses plays throughout the gospel: as the writer of the Pentateuch, as a main "player," the one who leads Israel through the exodus, and as the giver of the law.¹ Catrin Williams believes that Moses's role "precisely in his capacity as giver/writer of the law—has been redefined in a way that allows continuity with the past insofar as it speaks to the present."² Thus, the Fourth Gospel presents Moses as a figure who not only connects the gospel's readers or hearers with the traditions of what God did for Israel in the past, but also connects them to what God is doing presently through Jesus's ministry. In this paper, I demonstrate that Moses primarily acts as a witness who fosters belief in Jesus. From the evangelist's self-designation as an "eyewitness" (ἑωρακῶς) in John 19:35, the gospel defines witnesses as those who lead others to belief. The paper seeks to answer this question: How does Moses's witness, which should foster belief in Jesus, relate to the other people and events presented as witnesses in the gospel? I will proceed by discussing the role of witnesses in John's Gospel in general and then present Moses as a written witness.

The first gospel text I examine is John 1:17, a verse in the prologue that presents both Moses and Jesus as instrumental to God's work. The Johannine Jesus

¹ Dorothy A. LEE, "The Significance of Moses in the Gospel of John," *ABR* 63 (2015): 52–66, here 54–55.

² Catrin H. WILLIAMS, "Patriarchs and Prophets Remembered: Framing Israel's Past in the Gospel of John," in *Abiding Words: The Use of Scripture in the Gospel of John*, ed. Alicia D. MYERS, RBS 81 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 201.

will insist that a true understanding of Moses's role as writer and witness should lead people to believe Jesus (John 5:45) rather than to doubt, or worse yet, to destroy Jesus. The gospel presents both Jesus and Moses as authoritative figures whose authority is rooted in and derived from God. Consequently, I will show that the gospel portrays each authority figure's relationship to God with a distinction, but not a disjunction, between them: God is the origin of Moses's authority, thus Moses's authority is instrumental. Both Jesus and his authority have their origin in God, thus Jesus's authority, like his own relation to God, is substantial. Yet Jesus places great emphasis on Moses's role as writer and a witness who fosters belief in him (John 5:45–47). Thus, this paper will address the gospel's references to Moses's written witness (John 1:45; 5:46; 6:31).³ I will demonstrate that Moses considered as a writer expands and clarifies the Gospel's presentation of Moses as a witness, since this relationship between writing and witnessing characterizes John's own writing of the Fourth Gospel (John 20:30–31; 21:24).

1. The Role of Witnesses in John's Gospel

To begin, I note that John's Gospel provides the qualifications and the purpose of witnesses in John 19:35, where John refers to his own witness of Jesus's crucifixion. In John 19:34, the evangelist reports that blood and water flowed from Jesus's side after the crucifixion. In the following verse, the evangelist steps out of the gospel's narrative plot to offer the audience this comment on the preceding report: "And the one who saw (ὁ ἑώρακὼς) has borne witness (μεμαρτύρηκεν), and true is his witness (μαρτυρία), and that one knows that he speaks truth, so that even you might believe (πιστεύ[σ]ητε)" (John 19:35).⁴ Here, John's audience learns that the purpose for his eyewitness report about the blood and water flowing from Jesus's side is to foster belief. For John, one who has seen (ὁ ἑώρακὼς) can bear witness (μεμαρτύρηκεν). Then the witness's testimony should lead others to belief (πιστεύ[σ]ητε) in Jesus.⁵ The criterion of witness in John 19:35 recalls what John began in the prologue where he first spoke of a witness leading others to belief in Jesus. The gospel describes John the Baptist thus: "This one came as a witness (εἰς μαρτυρίαν) so that he might witness (μαρτυρήσῃ) to the light, so that all might believe (πιστεύσωσιν) through him" (John 1:17). The purpose of John the Baptist's

³ I also discuss the figure of Moses where John presents letters and writing as themes in 7:15 and 8:6.

⁴ All (rather literal) translations of the Greek NT (NA 28) and LXX throughout the paper are my own.

⁵ In this paper, I have chosen to limit my discussion to the relationship between the role of witnesses and verbs of seeing, although based on John 19:35, one could also explore as a topic of further study a witness's role by examining verbs of speaking (λέγει).

witness is identical to John the Evangelist's witness: to lead others to belief in Jesus, the light.

Throughout the gospel, John provides other examples of witnesses to Jesus. Chapter five offers the largest collection of external witnesses after Jesus maintains, "If I witness concerning myself, my witness is not true" (John 5:31). Jesus claims that John the Baptist (John 5:32–35), the works from the Father that Jesus performs (John 5:36), and the Father himself (John 5:36) bear witness to him. Each occurrence in chapter five utilizes either a verbal or nominal form of "witness" (μάρτυς).⁶ Belief in Jesus is not mentioned regarding these witnesses, yet nothing prevents us from viewing them as additional witnesses to Jesus according to the evangelist's definition in John 19:35, namely people and events that lead others to belief in Jesus. Furthermore, in John's Gospel some events and persons that foster belief in Jesus are not specifically called witnesses. Jesus's act of changing water to wine at Cana is not called a witness, but rather a "sign" (σημεῖον), yet it functions like the other witnesses in the gospel as a source of belief: "Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana of Galilee, and he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed (ἐπίστευσαν) in him" (John 2:11). In John 6:30, the people whom Jesus feeds with the loaves and fish ask for another sign by which they can believe: "So what sign (σημεῖον) can you do, so that we might see and believe in you? What can you do?" The gospel's signs, like the gospel's other witnesses, should lead others to belief in Jesus.

In chapter five where various witnesses to Jesus emerge, Jesus points to Moses as an additional figure who fosters belief yet without explicitly calling him a witness. Jesus says, "For if you believed (ἐπίστεύετε) Moses, you would have believed (ἐπίστεύετε) me, for concerning me, that one wrote (ἔγραψεν)" (John 5:46). Even John the Evangelist's act of writing the gospel serves as a witness without explicitly naming it as such, because the gospel exists to foster belief in Jesus: "So, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written (γεγραμμένα) in this book, but these things were written (γέγραπται) so that you might believe (πιστεύ[σ]ητε) that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and so that by believing (πιστεύοντες) you might have life in his name" (John 20:30). Thus, throughout John's Gospel, we find persons and events that lead to belief in Jesus and are called witnesses, and events and persons who act as witnesses to bring about belief in Jesus without being explicitly designated as witnesses.

⁶ Other occurrences where the evangelist explicitly names "witnesses" are the crowd who witnesses Lazarus's resurrection in John 12:17 and the promised Advocate from the Father, the Holy Spirit, in John 15:26.

As will be discussed below, the gospel relates many of its witnesses to verbs of seeing, based on John's self-designation in 19:35 as an "eyewitness (ὁ ἑωρακῶς).⁷ Moses's witness, however, does not occur through seeing, but rather through writing. Thus, Moses's role as a written witness in the gospel is similar to John the Evangelist's witness, not as John first describes his witness in 19:35 (as eyewitness), but rather in 20:30 (as writer). Before I address Moses's role as a written witness in comparison to John's witness as an evangelist, I first address the relationship between Moses and the one to whom he gives witness: Jesus. This relationship between Jesus and Moses is first established by John's prologue.

2. The Relationship of Moses and Jesus in John's Prologue

John's prologue states that the law "was given" (ἐδόθη) through Moses with a divine passive: "For the law through Moses was given (ἐδόθη), grace and truth through Jesus Christ came to be (ἐγένετο)" (John 1:17). Verse 17 is a programmatic statement that establishes a relationship between Moses and Jesus that the evangelist will develop as the gospel's narrative unfolds. From this initial description of Moses and Jesus's relationship, some commentators discern John's attempt to contrast Moses and Jesus. Lee holds that v. 17's verbal construction concerning the relationship of Moses to Jesus implies that "the latter eclipses the former: 'grace and truth' are greater than the law, Jesus Christ is greater than Moses."⁸ Lee also notes that the active verb "came to be" (ἐγένετο), in contrast to the passive construction "was given" (ἐδόθη), suggests Jesus's direct agency in bringing about "grace and truth." Williams agrees that an "element of contrast is strongly suggested by the swift movement from Moses as mediator of God's gift of the law (ἐδόθη) ... to the clear focus on Jesus as the embodiment (ἐγένετο) of grace and truth."⁹ Christopher Maronde observes, "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."¹⁰

Yet, the absence of a strong adversative such as *δέ* or *ἀλλά* in v. 17's second half suggests that a contrast between Moses and Jesus need not be drawn so sharply. As Jacob Enz rightly points out "John [1:17], linking Moses and Jesus is

⁷ The classic text from John's Gospel that connects believing (πιστός, πεπίστευκας, πιστεύσαντες) to seeing (ἴδω, ἴδε, ἑωρακάς), or rather, not seeing (οἱ μὴ ἰδόντες) is the risen Jesus's dialogue with the disciple Thomas (John 20:25–29).

⁸ LEE, "The Significance of Moses in the Gospel of John," 59.

⁹ WILLIAMS, "Patriarchs and Prophets Remembered," 186–212, here 193.

¹⁰ CHRISTOPHER A. MARONDE, "Moses in the Gospel of John," *CTQ* 77 (2013): 23–44, here 26.

intended to stress fulfilment rather than contrast.”¹¹ John’s verbal construction in 1:17 indicates that God works both through Moses and Jesus, yet in different ways, without necessarily diminishing Moses’s role. John portrays Moses as God’s instrument through whom the Israelites received the law. The book of Exodus highlights Moses as an intermediary between God and the people in response to the people’s request: “And all the people witnessed the thunder and the lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain with smoke. And the people feared, and they trembled, and they stood at a distance. And they said to Moses, ‘You yourself speak to us, and we will listen, but do not let God speak with us, lest we die!’” (Exod 20:18–19).

In John 1:17, grace and truth “came about” (ἐγένετο) through Jesus Christ. Indeed, the verb is an aorist middle, which is distinct from the (divine) aorist passive which John used previously to say that the law “was given” (ἐδόθη) through Moses; however, the parallel use of “through” (διὰ), suggests that Moses’s role concerning the law and Jesus’ role concerning grace and truth are not necessarily opposed. John 1:17 establishes Moses’s authoritative role concerning the written law and Jesus’s work to bring about grace and truth.

The lack of the strong adversative contrasting Moses’s role with Jesus’s role in v. 17 has led commentators to draw out other distinctions between Moses and Jesus by considering the verse’s context within the prologue. Raymond Brown uses v. 14, “the glory of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” to demonstrate how God reveals his “enduring love” through Moses and Jesus in distinct ways. Brown notes, “The theory that vs. 17 contrasts the absence of enduring love in the Law with the presence of enduring love in Jesus Christ does not seem to do justice to John’s honorific reference to Moses (i 45, iii 14, v 46). Rather vs. 17 contrasts the enduring love shown in the Law with the supreme example of enduring love shown in Jesus.”¹² Stefan Schapdick, who admits that John’s use of different verbs in v. 17 diminishes a strict parallel reading of the

¹¹ Jacob J. ENZ, “The Book of Exodus as a Literary Type for the Gospel of John,” *JBL* 76 (1957): 208–15, here 212. Enz takes the view that the evangelist highlights the relationship between Jesus and Moses in 1:17 against the view of contemporaries such as Otto Alfred PIPER, “Unchanging Promises: Exodus in the New Testament,” *Int* 11 (1957): 3–22, who argued that Moses was a transitory figure, while Jesus is a permanent one (p. 20), or Harald SAHLIN, *Zur Typologie des Johannesevangeliums*, UUA 4 (Uppsala: Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1950), who contrasts Moses as sent by God and Jesus’s identity with God (p. 61). Enz responds to Sahlin that John’s Gospel, too, portrays Jesus as “sent” (John 3:17).

¹² Raymond BROWN, S.S., *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 1, AB 29 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), 16. Brown translates the two Greek words χάριτος “grace” and ἀληθείας “truth” from v. 14 as the two-word term “enduing love,” stating that two separate Greek words “are used here in a unique way reflecting the famous OT paring of *hesed* and *’emet*” (p. 14).

distinction between Jesus and Moses, still favors an antithetical reading of Jesus and Moses's relationship.¹³ While John's Greek allows for either interpretation—comparing or contrasting Jesus and Moses—the next verse defines Moses's role differently without diminishing it. John 1:18 reads, “No one has ever seen God. The only begotten, God, who is in the bosom of the father, this one has revealed (him).” Schapdick reads v. 18 to imply “that a Gospel which solely connects the thought of divine revelation to Jesus Christ and his ministry has to deal with the traditional revelatory role of Moses.”¹⁴ If John's prologue asserts that the revelation of God comes through Jesus, then the remainder of John's Gospel must define Moses's role as a witness who testifies to God through Jesus Christ, who fully reveals the Father to the world.

John's prologue demonstrates that Moses's written witness is distinct from the gospel's other witnesses who are more commonly characterized by verbs of seeing. After v. 17, in which John establishes a relationship between Moses and Jesus that can be interpreted in several ways, the evangelist reminds us, “No one has ever seen (έώρακεν) God, the only begotten, God, who is in the bosom of the Father, this one has revealed (him)” (John 1:18). Here, John alludes to the fact that Moses begged of God, “Show to me your glory (Δείξόν μοι τήν σεαυτοῦ δόξαν)!” (Exod 33:18 LXX). Yet God told Moses, “You are not able to see (ιδεῖν) my face, for no person may see (ἴδῃ) my face and continue to live” (Exod 33:20 LXX). Although many witnesses will report what they see in John's gospel, the witness that Moses bears will not be of visions seen, but rather of words written.¹⁵

Perhaps the fulfillment of Moses's request to see God's glory finally comes in John 1:14 when the evangelist writes “And we saw his glory.” In v. 14, “John

¹³ 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, BZAW 372 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 186, n. 18.

¹⁴ SCHAPDICK, “Religious Authority Re-Evaluated,” 189.

¹⁵ What is striking in Exodus 33–34 is not only that God promises to show Moses his back when his glory passes by (Exod 33:22), but also that following this God instructs Moses to cut tablets of stone so that God can write upon them the words from the former tablets that had been broken (Exod 34:1). Thus, Moses seeking God's glory, the tablets of the law, and Moses's teaching are connected. Jesus may even have this connection in mind himself, as his question to the Jews is, “Has not Moses given to you the law?” Yet Jesus reminds them that despite their holding Moses and the law in such high regard, ultimately “none among you does the law” (John 7:19). In other places, Jesus even seems to distance himself from the law, referring to it as “your law” (έν τῷ νόμῳ δὲ τῷ ὑμετέρῳ, 8:17; έν τῷ νόμῳ ὑμῶν, 10:34), or “their law” (έν τῷ νόμῳ αὐτῶν) when referring to his opponents. See Riemer ROUKEMA, “Jesus and the Divine Name in the Gospel of John,” in *The Revelation of the Name YHWH to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity*, ed. Geurt Hendrik VAN KOOTEN, TBN 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 222.

declares that in Christ we now see the glory of God, the visible manifestation of his presence.”¹⁶ As John continues in v. 14, he introduces the fullness of “grace” (χάριτος) and “truth” (ἀληθείας) as qualities of the “glory” (δόξαν) made visible in Jesus Christ. Moses’s limited experience of God’s glory in Exodus 34 culminates in this proclamation: “The LORD, the LORD, a God compassionate (οἰκτιρῶν) and merciful (ἐλεήμων), patient and great-with-mercy (πολυέλεος) and true (ἀληθινός)” (Exod 34:6 LXX). Here, in 1:14 John connects “truth” (ἀληθινός) from the manifestation of God’s glory in Exod 34:6 with “truth” (ἀληθείας) in the manifestation of Jesus’s glory (John 1:14). In describing Jesus’s glory, John uses “grace” (χάριτος), which perhaps connects synonymously with “merciful” (ἐλεήμων) in Exod 34:6, since the LXX Greek is translating the Hebrew “gracious” (יְיָיָהוּוּ).¹⁷

Before leaving the discussion of John’s prologue some attention must be paid to John’s characteristic treatment of the Incarnation: “And the word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The Greek verb that John employs to articulate that the Logos who became flesh and “dwelt” (ἐσκήνωσεν) (literally, “pitched a tent”) among us connects verbally to the tent, “called the tent of witness (σκηνή μαρτυρίου)” that Moses constructed (Exod 33:7). Even Exodus (LXX) considers Moses to relate to God as a witness through the “tent of witness (σκηνή μαρτυρίου)” that he constructs. As the book of Exodus concludes, we read that “[t]he cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the LORD filled the tent” (Exod 40:34), which answers the dramatic question that is posed in the background throughout Exodus: Will God dwell among his people? In the NT, John’s prologue answers this question in 1:14 with a definitive yes. John 1:14, “and he dwelt (ἐσκήνωσεν) among us” alludes to God’s presence dwelling among Israel in the tent of meeting throughout the exodus account.

¹⁶ MARONDE, “Moses in John’s Gospel,” 28.

¹⁷ M. E. BOISMARD, *Moses or Jesus: An Essay in Johannine Christology*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 84 (Leuven: University Press, 1993), 96, believes that the Greek of John 1:14, “grace and truth” (χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας), is actually a better translation of the Hebrew of Exod 34:6, *hesed w’emet*, than “steadfast love and truth.” See also MARONDE, “Moses in John’s Gospel,” 28.

3. The Role of Moses's Written Witness to Jesus

3.1. Jesus identifies himself with imagery from Moses's writings

(John 1)

John 1 concludes with a reference to Moses when Philip, having encountered Jesus in Galilee, finds Nathaniel and shares with him the following proclamation of good news: “Him of whom Moses wrote (ἔγραψεν) in the law and also the prophets, we have found, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth” (John 1:45). John references Moses's authority as the one who wrote the law and confirms his authority by mentioning the prophets' witness, too. For Philip, however, Jesus exercises a different authority. We might have expected Philip to quote a specific passage from the law where Moses's writings point to a figure like Jesus.¹⁸ Rather, Philip offers Jesus's background as the son of Joseph (but with no reference to Davidic lineage as in Matt 1:20) who is from Nazareth, a locale that appears nowhere in the law or prophets. Small wonder then that Nathaniel responds as he does, emphasizing his disbelief by fronting the mention of the town: “Out of Nazareth can anything good come?” Philip ignores Nathaniel's misgivings, imploring him to “Come and see (ἴδε)” for himself (John 1:46). Philip's witness, which is inspired by what Moses “wrote” (ἔγραψεν), will lead Nathaniel to “see” (ἴδε) Jesus.

Philip's witness about Jesus culminates in Nathaniel's belief (John 1:49). Thus, Philip's witness does what the evangelist hopes all witnesses will do throughout the gospel: lead others to faith in Jesus. While Philip's witness to Jesus is grounded in the one about whom “Moses wrote in the law” (John 1:45), Moses is unique as a written witness at this point in the gospel. Philip's witness, which began with Moses's writings, encourages Nathaniel to “come and see” Jesus (John 1:46). At the culmination of Nathaniel's encounter with Jesus, Jesus refers to himself using the Jacob's ladder imagery (Gen 28:12) from among Moses's writings. Jesus, speaking to Nathaniel, says, “Amen, amen, I say to you all, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man.” (John 1:51). Jesus's self-designation recalls the patriarch Jacob's experience at Bethel of “a ladder being stood up on the earth and its top reaching to heaven, and look, the angels of God ascending and descending on it” (Gen 28:12). Philip may not have had a specific verse in mind when he claimed that Jesus was the one about whom Moses wrote, yet Jesus identifies himself with an image found in Moses's writings, the Pentateuch.

¹⁸ See section 3.3 below on possible connections to specific places in Moses's writings (such as Deuteronomy 18) that may be in the background for John's descriptions of Jesus.

3.2. Moses's writings give witness to Jesus's words (John 5)

John 5 contains a lengthy speech from Jesus in response to his healing of a sick man at the pool of Beth-zatha (Βηθζαθά) (John 5:1–9). The Jews take offense at Jesus because he performs this healing on the Sabbath (John 5:16). When Jesus responds to their charge of working on the Sabbath with “My father still works now and I myself also am working” (John 5:18) it only makes matters worse. John records, “Then on account of this the Jews all the more were seeking to kill him, since he was not only breaking the Sabbath, but also he was calling God his own father, making himself equal to God” (John 5:18). Jesus's lengthy response (John 5:19–47) concludes with references to Moses and the scriptures. Jesus asserts that the scriptures are “the ones testifying” (αἱ μαρτυροῦσαι) (John 5:39) to him of whom Moses “wrote” (ἔγραψεν) (5:46). As Sookgoo Shin observes, “The Jews accuse Jesus of blasphemy based on the law given by Moses (5:18), whereas Jesus claims his innocence by testifying that Moses wrote of him (5:39, 46)—the only difference between them is their interpretation of the law.”¹⁹ Moses and the scriptures act as witnesses to Jesus, even though in this instance they do not lead the Jews to believe in him.

When Jesus tells the Jews, “You search the writings (τὰς γραφάς), because you think (that) in them you have eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον)” (John 5:39), “[t]he witness of scripture is placed beside the one given by John the Baptist, by the Father and by the works the Father has given to Jesus (5:31–38).”²⁰ Jesus admits that testimony about him must come from these external sources, since his testimony about himself could never be verified (John 5:31–32). The testimony of the “other” (ἄλλος)—John, the works, and the Father—“who testifies on [Jesus's] behalf” (John 5:32) should lead a person to believe in Jesus whom the Father sent. This is not the case, however, for Jesus's opponents who “do not have [the Father's] word remaining in you” (John 5:38). As noted above, most witnesses in John's gospel bear witness because of what they see. Jesus speaks in chapter five, however, of the possibility of witnesses neither being observed nor heeded: “And the one who sent me, the Father, that one has borne witness (μεμαρτύρηκεν) to me, but his voice you have never heard, nor his form have you seen (ἐωράκατε)” (John 5:37). Jesus will acknowledge that another form of witness, like the written witness of Moses and John the evangelist, would also lead others to believe in him.

¹⁹ Sookgoo SHIN, *Ethics in the Gospel of John*, BibInt 168 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 101.

²⁰ Johannes BEUTLER, S.J., “The Uses of ‘Scripture’ in the Gospel of John,” in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith*, ed. C. Clifton BLACK and R. Alan CULPEPPER (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 152.

External witnesses to Jesus provide a reason for belief in Jesus. Thus, the scriptures can be added the list of “other” (ἄλλος) witnesses (John 5:31–38) that testify to Jesus (5:39). J. Scott notes, “No particular text is in focus here, but the later reference to Moses suggests the Torah.”²¹ Indeed, Moses—like John the Baptist, the works, the Father, and the scriptures—gives witness to Jesus because belief in Moses should translate into belief in Jesus: “For if you believed Moses, you would believe me” (John 5:46). Jesus adds the comment in v. 46 that Moses “wrote (ἔγραψεν) about [him].” Moses’s written witness to Jesus is comparable to the evangelist’s witnesses to Jesus upon composing the Fourth Gospel: “Now, on the one hand, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written (γεγραμμένα) in this book, but on the other hand, these things have been written (γέγραπται) so that you might believe (πιστεύ[σ]ητε) that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that by believing (πιστεύοντες) you might have life (ζωὴν) in his name” (John 20:30).

The witness of John’s Gospel—in which what is written leads to belief, and belief leads to life—shows what Jesus’s opponents are missing in John 5:39, “You search the writings (τὰς γραφάς), because you think (that) in them you have eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον).” Belief in Jesus is the middle term that is lacking from this formulation. Believing the scriptures should mean believing in Jesus; believing in Jesus means experiencing life. For those who fail to place their belief in Jesus, of whom Moses wrote, Moses changes from writer to accuser: “Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father, your accuser is Moses in whom you have hoped” (John 5:45). As Williams notes, “Jesus explains that Moses, now brought to center stage in his capacity as one whose writings testify about Jesus (5:46–47; cf. 1:45), can also accuse those who do not accept his testimony. Because Jesus is the interpretive key to the Scriptures, believing in Moses should lead to belief in Jesus.”²² What Moses writes of and what all the scriptures witness to is Jesus; then, belief in Jesus gives life.²³

Jesus’s admonition to the Jews “You search the writings (τὰς γραφάς), because you think (that) in them you have eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον)” (John 5:39) also recalls his pronouncement to Nicodemus that “it is necessary (that) the Son of Man be lifted up so that all who believe in him may have eternal life (ζωὴν

²¹ J. MARTIN C. SCOTT, “John,” in *Eerdman’s Commentary on the Bible*, eds. James D. G. DUNN and John W. ROGERSON (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1176.

²² WILLIAMS, “Patriarchs and Prophets Remembered,” 197.

²³ BEUTLER, “The Uses of ‘Scripture’ in the Gospel of John,” observes that “John 5:46 (note v. 47) supposes that Moses ‘wrote about’ Jesus, without any specific scriptural reference. This Johannine text is particularly interesting because it shows clearly that the witness of scripture for Jesus seems to be, for John, independent from this or that particular passage” (p. 152).

αἰώνιον)” (John 3:14). Jesus does not say that the scriptures are of no avail and that belief in him replaces the scriptures, but rather that the scriptures should lead one to belief in him, since “those are the ones testifying (αἱ μαρτυροῦσαι) about me” (John 5:39). In other words, the scriptures are worthy of belief as they give witness to Jesus; yet, the ultimate source of life is not only to search the scriptures, but “to come to [Jesus] so that you may have life (ζωὴν)” (John 5:40).

Jesus maintains that he does not accept “glory from human beings” (Δόξαν παρὰ ἀνθρώπων) (John 5:41). Jesus tells the Jews that “accepting glory from another” while not seeking “the glory (τὴν δόξαν) that comes from God alone” (John 5:44) hinders belief. Jesus’s example of one who seeks God’s glory alone calls to mind Moses who implored God, “Show me your glory” (τὴν σεαυτοῦ δόξαν) (Exod 33:18 LXX). That we should have the example of Moses seeking God’s glory in mind is evident from Jesus’s next warning: “Do not think that I myself will accuse you before the Father. The one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have hoped” (John 5:45). Jesus demonstrates that Moses is not only an instrument through whom God works (in giving the law, cf. John 1:14), but also a witness to bring about belief in Jesus: “For if you were believing Moses, you would believe me. For about me, that one wrote (ἔγραψεν)” (John 5:45). That Moses should act as an instrument for belief in Jesus is clear when Jesus concludes, “But if you do not believe in the writings (γράμμασιν) of that one, how will you believe in my words?” Jesus maintains that the outcome of true belief in Moses’s writings is belief in Jesus’s words.²⁴

3.3. Moses’s signs point to Jesus’s signs

John 6 begins with the note that “A large crowd followed him because they saw (ἑθεώρουν) the signs (σημεῖα) which he was performing upon the sick” (John 6:2). The signs that the crowd observes do not lead all in the crowd to belief, but the signs contribute to the curiosity about Jesus. The sign that follows in John 6—the multiplication of the loaves and fish—brings Moses to the crowd’s mind. Moses’s own signs, however, are not the focus, but rather what Moses had written. John 6:14 reads, “So the people having seen (ιδόντες) the sign (σημεῖον) that he performed were saying that ‘This is truly the prophet, the one who is coming into

²⁴ Compare the juxtaposition of Moses’s writings and Jesus’s words in John 5:46–47 with John’s editorial note in chapter 2 concerning the aftermath of Jesus’s cleansing of the temple. The evangelist records that Jesus’s words are placed beside the scriptures and that both are worthy of belief. The disciples, after Jesus’s resurrection, recall him speaking about destroying the temple and rebuilding it within three days: “But this one [Jesus] was speaking about the temple of his body. Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he said this, and they came to believe the scripture and the word that Jesus spoke” (John 2:21–22).

the world.” The crowd likely has in mind passages from Deuteronomy in which Moses writes, “A prophet from your brothers like me the LORD your God will raise up, you will heed him” and “A prophet I will raise up for you from your brothers just like you, and I will give my words in his mouth, and he will speak to you whatever I might command to him” in Deut 18:15 and 18, respectively. The crowd’s association of Jesus’s signs with the “prophet like Moses” is curious, as Deuteronomy envisions a prophet who is God’s spokesperson rather than a wonder worker.²⁵

Even if Moses’s primary role throughout the book of Exodus is God’s spokesperson, God still gives Moses various “signs” to perform—the ability to change his staff into a snake (Exod 4:3–5) and to make his hand leprous and clean again (4:6–7)—so that the Israelites might believe (πιστεύσωσιν) and listen to him (see Exod 4:1). God assures Moses, “But if they neither believe (πιστεύσωσιν) you nor heed the voice of the first sign (τοῦ σημείου τοῦ πρώτου), they will believe you from the voice of the last sign (τοῦ σημείου τοῦ ἐσχάτου)” (Exod 4:8 LXX). As Nahum Sarna notes, “The sign, as it were, ‘speaks’; it testifies to divine commissioning.”²⁶ In the book of Exodus, God continues, “And if it will be that they neither believe you by these two signs nor heed your voice, you will take from the water of the river, and you will pour it out upon the dry land, and the water, which you took from the river, will be blood upon the dry ground” (Exod 4:9 LXX). The Exodus text does not explicitly mention that this final sign—Moses’s ability to pour out water on the dry ground as blood—is for the purpose of belief; rather, it reads more like a judgment upon those who fail to believe the two previous signs. When Moses performs the signs (turning the staff into a snake in Exod 7:10 and the water of the Nile to blood in 7:20), the audience is not made up of Israelites, but rather Egyptians who react with disbelief. By comparison with John’s Gospel, it is significant that Jesus’s first sign in Cana of Galilee involves the transformation of water not into blood, but into wine, “the blood of the grape” (John 2:9).²⁷ Moses’s signs, whether they lead to belief or not, point toward Jesus’s

²⁵ Jeffrey H. TIGAY, *Deuteronomy = [Devarim]: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 176. Tigay notes, “The prophet’s role is not limited to mantic and quasi-magical activities, responding to pleas for information and assistance. His primary role is as God’s messenger and spokesman ... communicating God’s will in all matters of national life, including religion and domestic and foreign affairs.”

²⁶ Nahum M. SARNA, *Exodus = [Shemot]: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 21.

²⁷ Robert Houston SMITH, “Exodus Typology in the Fourth Gospel,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 329–42, here 335. Smith observes in n. 11, “This idiom appears both in the OT (e. g., Deut 32:14) and in the intertestamental literature (e. g., I Macc 6:34).”

signs: “But the signs and wonders accomplished by Moses in the time of the exodus in the desert allow the understanding of the meaning that John recognizes in the signs accomplished by Jesus: they show him, not only a prophet without parallel (Dt 34, 10) but the unique and definitive Envoy.”²⁸ Jesus’s first sign at Cana acts a witness according to the evangelist’s definition in 19:35, because it “revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him” (John 2:11).

In dialogue with Jesus about performing the works of God in John 6, the Jews quote scripture to Jesus prompting another reference to Moses. The Jews ask Jesus, “Then what sign (σημείον) are you doing, so that we might see (ἴδωμεν) and believe (πιστεύσωμεν) in you? What are you working? Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, as it is written (γεγραμμένον) ‘bread from heaven he gave to them to eat’” (John 6:30–31).²⁹ Here, the crowd acknowledges that the signs that they see Jesus performing function like the other witnesses in John’s gospel to lead to belief. In the following verse, however, they acknowledge a type of witness, not visible as a sign, but rather written (γεγραμμένον) by Moses (John 6:31).

The crowd seeks a sign from Jesus “to match the miracle of manna that Moses gave their fathers.”³⁰ In John 6:30–31, the Jews who question Jesus about what sign he can give and quote scripture about “bread from heaven” fail to see the connection between Moses’ writings and Jesus (John 5:45). Jesus corrects this misunderstanding. Jesus replies in John 6:32, “Amen, amen, I say to you all, not Moses (οὐ Μωϋσῆς) has given you bread from heaven, but my father gives the bread from heaven, the true one.” Martyn notes the sharp contrast that the evangelist sets up in Jesus’s reply between God’s action and Moses’s agency: “The emphatic negative by means of which he introduces his reply stands immediately before the word ‘Moses.’ And the subject of the second line is changed. The ‘correction’ therefore is, ‘not Moses gave, but my Father gives.’”³¹ Jesus’s correction

²⁸ M. E. BOISMARD, *La tradition johannique*, Introduction critique au Nouveau Testament 4 (Paris: Desclée, 1977), 207–8. “Mais les signes (*sēmēia*) et prodiges accomplis par Moïse au temps de l’exode en au désert (cf. Dt 34, 11) permettent de comprendre le sens que Jean reconnaît aux signes (*sēmēia*) accomplis par Jésus: ils montrent en lui, non plus seulement un prophète sans pareil (Dt 34, 10) mais l’Envoyé unique et définitif.”

²⁹ Robert Houston SMITH, “Exodus Typology in the Fourth Gospel,” 334, indicates that “when we find the expression σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα (or simply σημεῖα) occurring in the Fourth Gospel in connection with specific miracles [John 2:11; 4:48, 54; 6:14; 9:16; 11:47] as well as by way of general reference (e.g., [John 2:23; 6:2]), it is evident that the tradition of Moses’ signs and wonders lies in the background.”

³⁰ Thomas R. VALLETTA, “The ‘Bread of Life’ Discourse in the Context of Exodus Typology,” *Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 11 (1991): 129–43.

suggests that the people quoting what was “written” (γεγραμμένον) in scripture, “Bread from heaven he gave to them to eat,” take Moses to be the subject of ἔδωκεν, “he gave” (John 6:31). The possible scripture passages to which the people refer are “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I myself am raining (ἐγὼ ὕω) to you bread from heaven” (Exod 16:4), or “This is the bread which the LORD gave you to eat” (Exod 16:15), or even “And he rained for them manna to eat, and bread from heaven he gave them” (Ps 78:24); yet, the actor in all the instances is clearly God.³² Edwin Freed believes that the evangelist combined Exod 16:4, 15 with Ps 78:24 in John 6:31, while Johannes Beutler treats John 6:31 under the category of “unclear or unspecified references” and holds that “targumic or midrashic tradition cannot be excluded.”³³

The claim that Moses is the one who gives bread from heaven or performs the other signs from Exodus 4 fails to recognize God as the one who performs the signs using Moses as an instrument. Exodus 4:17 connects the signs with Moses’s staff, another instrument. Exodus 4:28 affirms that God is ultimately accomplishing the signs: “And Moses told to Aaron all the words of the Lord which he sent, and all the signs (τὰ σημεῖα), which he commanded to him.” Moses can perform signs in Exodus because the signs originate in God. Jesus performs signs in John’s Gospel because Jesus is identified with and as God (John 1:1–14). Yet, seeing Jesus and his signs does not translate into the crowd’s belief. John 6:36 states, “But I said to you that even though you have seen (ἐώρακατέ) me, even you do not believe (πιστεύετε).” A witness that outlasts what can be seen is needed to foster belief in Jesus. Could a written witness like that of Moses or the Fourth Gospel be that type of witness?

3.4 Jesus’s knowledge of letters, the instruments of Moses’s written witness

In John 7:15 we find the Jews amazed at Jesus’s learning as they ask, “How does this one know letters (γράμματα) not having learned?” The only other reference to “letters” in John’s Gospel came earlier when Jesus asked the Jews about their failure to connect what Moses wrote and what Jesus says: “But if you do not believe the letters (γράμμασιν) of that one [Moses], how will you believe

³¹ J. Louis MARTYN, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 122.

³² Esther KOBEL, *Dining with John: Communal Meals and Identity Formation in the Fourth Gospel and Its Historical and Cultural Context*, BibInt 109 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 190–91. See also Maarten J. MENKEN, “The Provenance and Meaning of the Old Testament Quotation in John 6:31,” *NovT* 30 (1988): 39–56.

³³ BEUTLER, “The Uses of ‘Scripture’ in the Gospel of John,” 150. See also Edwin D. FREED, *Old Testament Quotations in the Gospel of John*, NovTSup 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 11–16.

my words?" (John 5:47).³⁴ The Jews who question Jesus's knowledge of "letters" remark that he "was an irregular teacher since he had not received his doctrine from a recognized master."³⁵ As a writer, Moses employs certain instruments to leave behind his written witness, not only the material tools of writing, such as ink, pen, and paper, but the letters themselves. Moses's witness to Jesus is based upon the words, the very letters that Moses leaves behind as testimony. What Jesus's opponents in John 7:15 find so amazing is his knowledge of Moses's writings without having had formal study or learning. Jesus quickly puts the discussion about his teaching in the proper framework: "My teaching is not mine but of the one who sent me (πέψαντός με)" (John 7:16). Jesus's authority to teach comes from God who sent (πέψαντος) him, just as Moses's authority came from the one who sent (ἀπέσταλκεν) him (Exod 3:14 LXX).³⁶

³⁴ *The Interpreter's Bible* notes that "the same Greek word (γράμματα) is used for learning or 'letters' (vs. 15), and for 'writings' in 5:47. The sequence seems convincing, and the point of the question is bewildered admiration rather than disdain." See George A. BUTTRICK et al., eds., *The Gospel According to St. Luke; the Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 8, IB (New York: Abingdon, 1952), 583.

³⁵ BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:316.

³⁶ SAHLIN, "Zur Typologie des Johannesevangeliums," 61–62, posits a sharp distinction (based upon Exod 3:14 and John 1:14, 18) between Moses and Jesus and their commissions from God. "Moses was a messenger of God; an 'Angel of God' had revealed himself to him. Jesus is the only Son; he alone has seen God and brought news of him. The difference can also be expressed thus: Moses was sent from 'I am'; Jesus is identical with 'I am'—he himself can say: ἐγώ εἰμι. It is a strong antithetical parallelism." ("Mose war ein Gottes Gesandter; ihm hatte sich ein 'Engel Gottes' offenbart. Jesus ist der einzige Sohn; er hat Gott selbst gesehen und hat Kunde von ihm gebracht. Der Unterschied lässt sich auch so ausdrücken: Mose war von 'Ich bin' gesandt; Jesus ist mit 'Ich bin' identisch — er kann selber sagen: ἐγώ εἰμι. Es handelt sich um einen stark antithetischen Parallelismus.") Emphasis is in the original.

3.5 Jesus resembles Moses, the teacher who writes³⁷

Jesus's opponents make a final attempt to discredit Jesus by distinguishing his authority from Moses's authority. A brief reference to Moses is made at the beginning of the pericope about the woman caught in adultery in John 8. Here, the evangelist may be signaling to his readers that the figure of Moses, the teacher of the law, is in the background throughout the account. John notes that Jesus was on the Mount of Olives. Coming down from the mountain (like Moses in Exod 19:25), Jesus arrives at the temple, and assumes the traditional posture for a teacher by sitting down (John 8:2). The scribes and Pharisees approach Jesus, calling him "teacher" (διδάσκαλε) for the only time in John's gospel. Presenting the woman caught in adultery, they try to expose Jesus ("testing him... to accuse him" in 8:6) contradicting the law by stating, "But in the law Moses commanded us to stone such ones. Now what do you say?"³⁸ The scribes and Pharisees attest that Moses's action concerning the law is to "command," although we have seen previously in John that Moses's designated activity is to "write" (see John 1:45; 5:46). In John 8, the evangelist portrays Jesus as the teacher engaged in the act of writing: "And Jesus, having bent down, wrote (κατέγραφεν) with a finger (τῷ δακτύλῳ) on the ground" (John 8:6). Jesus, the teacher who writes, recalls Moses, the teacher of the law, who receives what is written: "And [God] gave to Moses, when he finished speaking with him on the mountain, the two tablets of witness (τοῦ μαρτυρίου), stone tablets having been written (γεγραμμένας) by the finger of God (τῷ δακτύλῳ τοῦ θεοῦ)" (Exod 31:18 LXX; cf. also Deut 9:10). Exodus 31 (LXX) describes

³⁷ Brown's treatment of the woman caught in adultery pericope addresses three questions: whether the passage was originally part of the gospel or a later interpolation, whether the passage is originally Johannine, and whether the passage is canonical. To the first question, Brown notes the fact that the none of John's commentators in the first millennium of Christianity address it, and the fact that only after 900 CE is it included in the standard Greek text. These observations strongly suggest that it is a later addition. As to the second question, concerning the passage's origin, Brown observes that the vocabulary is more Lucan than Johannine, a fact further attested to by the pericope's placement in some manuscripts after Luke 21:38. Finally, to the question of canonicity, the passage's acceptance by Jerome and its inclusion in the Vulgate fulfills the Roman Catholic criteria for canonicity. See BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:335–36. I include John 8 in my discussion because of its explicit mention of Moses, the characterization of Jesus as a seated teacher, and the fact that from a canonical perspective, it forms part of the written witness of John's Gospel.

³⁸ Jesus's opponents here may have in mind Deut 22:22 which states, "If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then also the two of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman and the woman. And you will purge evil from Israel." While the passage does not explicitly mention death by stoning, separate laws around the passage (regarding a woman who is suspected and found not to be a virgin in Deut 22:21 and a man who has sexual relations with a virgin engaged to be married to another in Deut 22:24) mention stoning.

Moses neither writing nor commanding but receiving from God “tablets of witness” (πλάκας τοῦ μαρτυρίου). God’s finger (τῷ δακτύλῳ τοῦ θεοῦ) in Exodus 31 inscribes the law. Jesus’s finger (τῷ δακτύλῳ) in John 8 does not point toward the accused woman, but rather toward her accusers. Responding to the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus reinterprets the written law: “Let the sinless one among you first throw a stone at her” (John 8:8). Jesus neither opposes Moses nor contradicts the law, but rather he exemplifies what the evangelist first said of the relationship between the two in the prologue: “For the law through Moses was given, grace and truth through Jesus Christ came to be” (John 1:17).

4. Conclusion

What, then, is Moses’s role as a witness to Jesus in relation to other witnesses in John’s Gospel? The role of any witness in John’s Gospel is to foster belief in Jesus. Some people and events are specifically called witnesses, and they lead to belief in Jesus (John the Baptist, the works, the Father, the Scriptures, the Spirit, and the evangelist himself). Some events and people are not called witnesses explicitly, yet they too lead to belief in Jesus (the signs that Jesus performs, Moses, the writing of the Gospel itself). Most witnesses in John’s Gospel are related to verbs of seeing. John the Evangelist refers to himself as an eyewitness (John 19:35). Moses’s witness is not based on seeing; in fact, we are reminded that Moses was unable to see God’s face (Exod 33:20). Thus, Moses’s witness in relation to other witnesses in John’s Gospel is unique. The closest witness in comparison to Moses’s written witness is John’s written gospel. The evangelist’s witness is not only from seeing, but also in writing (John 20:30–31). John highlights this irony regarding the power of Moses’s written witness: while Moses’s witness endures in the days of the scribes and Pharisees who question Jesus about the law’s interpretation (John 8), Jesus’s opponents fail to see in Moses’s written text any reference to Jesus. Christian believers, however, who were familiar with Moses’s writings had come to believe that Moses’s writings gave witness to Jesus. Thus, the real power behind Moses’s written witness is the same as the power of the Fourth Gospel’s witness that provides a portrait of Jesus for an audience who “has no direct access to Jesus by means of seeing.”³⁹

³⁹ Kasper Bro LARSEN, *Recognizing the Stranger Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John*, BIS 93 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 162.

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A written witness remains after what has been seen is gone. Both John and Moses leave behind a written witness to accomplish the same purpose: to lead people to belief in Jesus.

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