

(Not) Seeing God in the Prologue and Body of John's Gospel

Catrin H. Williams

One of the most distinctive features of the presentation of Jesus in the Gospel of John is the claim that he reveals the God who cannot otherwise be seen. Central to the Gospel's christological portrait is the conviction that seeing God is possible through Jesus alone. The basis of this claim and conviction, certainly as presented in the body of the Gospel, is that Jesus, unlike all other emissaries sent by God, has seen the Father (6:46) and, due to his heavenly origins, is the exclusive revealer of God. Following the conclusion of Jesus' public ministry it is announced that, for those who believe, the Father is seen in the Son: "Whoever sees me sees him who sent me" (12:45), an assertion also made by Jesus for the benefit of the disciples in the Farewell Discourse (14:7, 9). The theme of "seeing God," which is afforded a consistently christological focus by the fourth evangelist, also produces a significant point of contact between the Gospel narrative and its opening passage. The prologue is brought to its conclusion with an uncompromising and starkly phrased claim that no one has ever seen God (θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε), which is then followed by the affirmation that God has been revealed in the μονογενὴς θεὸς - the only-begotten, God - who is close to the Father's heart (1:18).

That v. 18 encapsulates a pivotal theme within the prologue in its present form is suggested by a number of factors. As several commentators have noted, its choice of the designation θεός to express the identity of Jesus as revealer – a reading which enjoys strong textual support¹ – together with the use of the metaphorical expression ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς, to describe his intimate relationship with God, form an *inclusio* with the prologue's opening statements about the Logos: καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος (1:1c; cf. 1:18b), καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν (1:1b; cf. 1:18c).² Furthermore, its crystallization of key christological themes to highlight the

¹ μονογενὴς θεός (P⁶⁶ B* C* L) or ὁ μονογενὴς θεός (P⁷⁵ B¹ 33). See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)* (AB 29; New York: Doubleday, 1966), 17, 36; C. Kingsley Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (2nd ed.; London: SPCK, 1978), 169; and especially Brian A. Mastin, "A Neglected Feature of the Christology of the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 22 (1975): 37-41.

² Michael Theobald, *Die Fleischwerdung des Logos: Studien zum Verhältnis des Johannesprologs zum Corpus des 4. Evangeliums und zum 1. Johannesbrief* (NTAbh 20; Münster: Aschendorff, 1988), 207-8; R. Alan Culpepper, "The Pivot of John's Prologue," *NTS* 27 (1979), 9-10; Hartwig Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium* (HNT 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 106, 108.

uniqueness of the revelation brought by Jesus suggests that v. 18 acts as a strategically placed bridge between the prologue and the main body of the Gospel.³

More specifically, John 1:18 closes the prologue section beginning in v. 14, which announces the coming of the Word made flesh “among us” and then elaborates, through a chain of connective statements, on the recognition and confession of the Word by those who “have seen his glory,” as attested by the prominence of “we” statements in this part of the prologue (1:14, 16). As indicated by the use of ὅτι at the beginning of v. 17, the two concluding verses of the prologue provide a rationale for the claims that the incarnate Logos manifests God’s glory, is full of grace and truth, and dwells among those who receive of his fullness (1:14-16), and do so by emphasizing that Jesus Christ alone – in virtue of his unique identity and relationship with God – has brought the revelation that entails seeing him as the manifestation of God’s glory and as the embodiment of his grace and truth.⁴

In this respect, good arguments can be adduced to support the view that 1:17-18 represent the fourth evangelist’s own commentary on what formed the original conclusion to an already existing passage or hymn.⁵ As well as striking verbal and thematic resemblances between v. 18 and the body of the Gospel - especially the use of μονογενής for Jesus (3:16, 18) and of πατήρ for God - several of its stylistic features suggest that it was the composition of the fourth evangelist. These features, which are listed in one of the lengthy footnotes provided by Rudolf Bultmann in his commentary,⁶ include the following: the use of ἐκεῖνος to take up a preceding subject or object (cf. 1:33; 5:11, 43; 9:37; 10:1), the prefacing of an explanatory clause with a negation that sets out the opposite case (cf. 1:31; 2:25; 3:17; 6:46; 7:22), and, as an addition to Bultmann’s list, the lack of an adversative particle where there is evident contrast between two clauses (cf. 2:9, 10). This last feature, together with the use of the designation “Jesus Christ” (cf. 17:3), suggests that v. 17 – like v. 18 – is the work of the fourth evangelist, picking up and reflecting upon the language of χάρις and ἀλήθεια as applied to the

³ Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John: An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 224-25: “Verse 18 now emphasizes the uniqueness of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, a revelation presently to be unfolded in the Gospel.” Cf. also Jean Zumstein, “Der Prolog, Schwelle zum vierten Evangelium,” in *Der Johannesprolog* (ed. Günter Kruck; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009), 51, 53-54.

⁴ This was already recognized by Adolf von Harnack, “Über das Verhältnis des Prologs des vierten Evangeliums zum ganzen Werk,” *ZThK* 2 (1892): 214-15. See further Otfried Hofius, “‘Der in des Vaters Schoß ist’: Joh 1,18,” in *Johannesstudien: Untersuchungen zur Theologie des vierten Evangeliums* (ed. Otfried Hofius and Hans-Christian Kammler; WUNT 88; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 24 (with reference to v. 18).

⁵ See Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John: Volume 1* (trans. Kevin Smyth; New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 276-78; Michael Theobald, *Im Anfang war das Wort: Textlinguistische Studie zum Johannesprolog* (SBS 106; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1983), 95; Jean Zumstein, *L’Évangile selon Saint Jean (1-12)* (Commentaire du Nouveau Testament IVa; Genève: Labor et Fides, 2014), 51.

⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (18th ed.; KEK 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964), 53-54 n. 5.

incarnate Logos in the earlier part of the prologue. To claim that vv. 17-18 represent an explanatory elaboration of an already existing hymnic passage is not, of course, necessarily incompatible with the view that the prologue was intended, from the outset, as the introduction to the Gospel,⁷ even if, as will be argued below, its reflections on “seeing God” do not provide an exact template for what follows in the body of the Gospel.⁸

The close connection forged by the fourth evangelist between v. 18 and its immediate context is further suggested by the high concentration of visual images and related vocabulary appealing to the senses that can be found in this part of the prologue. Both vv. 14 and 18 maintain a clear focus on visuality, on that which has (or has not) been seen: the statement “no one has ever seen (ἑώρακεν) God” (1:18a) certainly recalls the earlier declaration “we have seen (ἑθεασάμεθα) his glory” (1:14c). Even if both statements, but particularly the latter,⁹ centres more on the perception and confession of faith than on physical sight,¹⁰ this is not to deny the prologue’s emphasis on the *visible* manifestation of God’s glory in Jesus’ earthly form – that is, in his flesh – and that “seeing,” as a result, is presented as a crucial medium for perceiving God’s revelation (cf. 11:40; 12:41; 17:24).¹¹ This is further suggested by the special prominence afforded to the visual aspects of the Sinai theophany (Exod. 16:10; 24:16-17; 33:18-19, 22; 40:31, 34-35), which has influenced much of what is said about the revelation of the Word incarnate in vv. 14-18.¹² It is the multivalent significance of “seeing” – to convey physical sight as well as spiritual insight – that underpins the various statements in the prologue about the vision of God in the person of Jesus.

Whatever the precise nature of the relationship between the two main parts of v. 18 (a subject to be examined later in this essay), the phrasing of its first clause (“no one has ever

⁷ See, e.g., Michael Theobald, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes: Kapitel 1-12* (RNT; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2009), 105-8.

⁸ Jean Zumstein, “Intratextuality and Intertextuality in the Gospel of John,” in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (ed. Tom Thatcher & Stephen D. Moore; Atlanta: SBL), 123, outlines what he describes as the meta-reflective character of the Johannine prologue: it is not intended as a summary – comprehensive or otherwise – of the Gospel’s plot or indeed of its theology, but sets out the hermeneutical framework in which the narrative should be read.

⁹ Although θεάομαι can be used to denote physical sight (e.g., John 1:38; 4:35; 6:5), it can also denote seeing with the eyes of faith (cf. I John 4:14), which is further suggested, in John 1:14, by its combination with δόξα.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Andrew T. Lincoln, “The Beloved Disciple as Eyewitness and the Fourth Gospel as Witness,” *JSNT* 85 (2002): 7-8. See also Zumstein, *L’Évangile selon Saint Jean (1-12)*, 65 (n 5).

¹¹ Marianne Meye Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 142; see further Ruben Zimmermann, *Christologie der Bilder im Johannesevangelium* (WUNT 171; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 49-59, esp. 55: “Auch das zum Glauben führende geistige Sehen schließt die sinnliche Dimension mit ein, weil gerade das Sichtbarwerden des Logos im Fleisch (Joh 1,14) die Voraussetzung des ganzen Evangeliums ist.”

¹² See Morna D. Hooker, “John’s Prologue and the Messianic Secret,” *NTS* 21 (1974): 53-58; Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, “John 1.14-18 and Exodus 34,” in his *The New Testament Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SPCK, 1980), 97-109; Craig A. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John’s Prologue* (JSNTSS 89; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 79-82.

seen God”) encourages the reader to interpret the central thrust of the second part as stating that God is “seen” in Jesus. This second part, in turn, explicates the earlier claim of the believing community, in v. 14, that they have experienced the theophanic manifestation of Jesus as the embodiment of God’s glory on earth. Nevertheless, there are immense difficulties in translating and pinpointing the exact meaning of the two-word declaration about Jesus that concludes v. 18 (ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο). While this isolated Johannine occurrence of the verb ἐξηγέομαι is clearly used intransitively without a direct object, most translators and commentators supply the accusative pronoun αὐτὸν (cf. NRSV: “who has made *him* known”), although there are some notable exceptions taking a different course of action.¹³ Other NT occurrences of ἐξηγέομαι are not really comparable to John 1:18, because in all of these cases an object is supplied and the verb is used in these settings in the sense of telling or giving an account of facts (Luke 24:35; Acts 10:8; 15:12, 14; 21:19). Attention is frequently drawn, in this respect, to the intransitive use of ἐκδιηγέομαι in the question posed about God in *Sira* 43:31, “Who has seen him and will describe him [or perhaps, more appropriately: and will give an account]?” (τίς ἑώρακεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐκδιηγήσεται),¹⁴ with some commentators even proposing that John 1:18 provides a direct response to *Sira*’s question.¹⁵ Even more promising, as far as possible parallels and comparisons are concerned, is the use of ἐξηγέομαι in Greek sources to denote the *disclosure* of divine things that are otherwise hidden.¹⁶ These examples provide further support for the view that what is encapsulated right at the end of the prologue is Jesus’ role as the one who brings, and indeed embodies, God’s revelation.¹⁷ And although

¹³ Note Hartmut Gese, “Der Johannesprolog,” in his *Zur biblischen Theologie* (3rd edition; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 169: “Das Fehlen irgendeiner Näherbestimmung, eines Objektes ist durchaus passend, weil so die Absolutheit des Geschehens zum Ausdruck kommt: ‘jener offenbarte’.” John Ashton remarks that it should not be assumed that an object such as αὐτὸν must be supplied, because “this makes it hard to find a rendering that does justice either to the general sense of the Prologue itself or to the body of the Gospel, where Jesus conspicuously refrains from saying anything about God that could be construed as an interpretation or explanation” (“Reflections on a Footnote,” in *Engaging with C.H. Dodd on the Gospel of John: Sixty Years of Tradition and Interpretation* [ed. Tom Thatcher and Catrin H. Williams; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013], 211).

¹⁴ On the possible affinities between John 1:18 and *Sir* 43:31, see Andreas Obermann, *Die christologische Erfüllung der Schrift im Johannesevangelium* (WUNT 2.83; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 338-39, who notes that, despite the lack of a precise verbal parallel between the two passages, their affinities demonstrate that the conceptual combination of God’s invisibility and how to “give an account” of him was already well established in the first century C.E.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Friedrich Büchsel, ἐξηγέομαι, *ThWNT* II: 910; J.H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (ed. Alan H. McNeile; 2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), 1:30.

¹⁶ See Pollux, *Onomasticon* 8.124: ἐξηγηταὶ δ’ ἐκαλοῦντο οἱ τὰ περὶ τῶν δημοσίων καὶ τὰ τῶν ἄλλων ἱερῶν διδάσκοντες (“They were called ‘exegetes’ who teach the things concerning the signs of the gods and of other holy things”). Cf. Plato, *Republic* iv.427c (the Delphic Apollo is called ἐξηγητής); and v.469a. Note Michael Theobald, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 138 (n 7): “Immer geht es [in these Greek sources] um Offenbarung oder Aufdeckung verborgener göttlicher Wahrheit.”

¹⁷ Cf. Ignace de la Potterie, *La vérité dans Saint Jean: Tome 1: Le Christ et la vérité. L’Esprit et la vérité* (Analecta Biblica 73; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1977), 228: “il fut, lui, la révélation”; Hofius, “‘Der in des Vaters Schoß ist,’” 29 (n 4): “deshalb hat er – und er allein – als der Menschgewordene ‘die Offenbarung gebracht’.”

the declaration ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο undoubtedly embraces the verbal dimension of that revelation,¹⁸ it does not exclude the visual aspect of God being “seen” in Jesus.¹⁹

For the purpose of examining the function of v. 18, both within the prologue and in relation to the body of the Gospel, this essay will now focus on two particular aspects. First, it will compare and contrast the prologue’s handling of the dual themes of “seeing God” and Jesus as the focal point of revelation with the evidence attested elsewhere in John’s Gospel. Secondly, given the function of v. 18 as the outworking of a thought sequence beginning with the pronouncement that the incarnate Word manifests God’s glory (1:14: “we have *seen* his glory”), attention will be given to another passage where the presentation of Jesus in relation to God’s glory provides a christological response to the impossibility of seeing God. The text in question, which also occurs at a significant point of transition in the text – this time between the two main halves of the Gospel – is the description of Isaiah as one who “saw his glory and spoke about him” (12:41).

1. Who Can See God?

The theme of “seeing God” appears in various parts of the Gospel narrative, invariably to highlight the exclusive revelation of God in Jesus.²⁰ Commentators regularly identify a cluster of other passages in John’s Gospel that bear resemblance to 1:18, although the different emphases and nuances of these passages is often overlooked.²¹ Not all of the cited passages share the same set of features as 1:18, with several elements relating closely to the specific contexts in which these passages appear. In fact, an explicit denial of the possibility that God can be seen only occurs on two other occasions, in both of which Jesus is directly challenged by his Jewish interlocutors. On the first occasion, in 5:37, where the Sinai theophany provides the likely scriptural screen or backdrop for the content of the exchange, those addressed are accused of never (πώποτε) having heard God’s voice or of having seen God’s form (cf. Deut. 4:12, 15), which, in the case of the first accusation, amounts to them being deprived of a

¹⁸ Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 57 (n 6). Cf. also Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (NCB; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 100; Theobald, *Die Fleischwerdung des Logos*, 207 (n 2).

¹⁹ See further Zumstein, “Der Prolog,” 54 (n 3): “Durch sein Leben, seine Worte und sein Geschick ist der Sohn der Exeget Gottes für die Menschen.” See also Elizabeth Harris, *Prologue and Gospel: The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist* (JSNTSS 107; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 114-15.

²⁰ On the importance of this theme in John’s Gospel, see Marianne Meye Thompson, “Jesus: ‘The One Who Sees God,’” in *Israel’s God and Rebecca’s Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity. Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado and Alan F. Segal* (ed. David B. Capes, April D. DeConick, Helen K. Bond, and Troy A. Miller; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 215-26, esp. 216-17, 219, 224-25.

²¹ Johannes Rinke, *Kerygma und Autopsie: Der christologische Disput als Spiegel johanneischer Gemeindeggeschichte* (Herders Biblische Studien 12; Freiburg: Herder, 1997), 73, describes 1:18 as a *Leitmotiv* that becomes apparent in 5:37; 6:46; 14:9; I John 3:2.

fundamental aspect of the Jewish understanding of revelation.²² The demonstration of this is the fact that they do not believe in Jesus, because acceptance of the one sent by God is deemed to be crucial for not only “seeing” but also “hearing” the Father (5:38).²³

Similarly, in John 6 the point is made that one hears and learns from the Father (that is, is “taught by God”) by coming to Jesus and believing in him. As noted by Andrew Lincoln: “No one comes to Jesus unless taught by God, but no one truly listens to God except through Jesus.”²⁴ However, in contrast to John 5:37, only the “seeing” of God is denied in this particular context (6:46a: οὐχ ὅτι τὸν πατέρα ἑώρακεν; cf. 1:18a), because the text states, albeit indirectly, that it is possible to hear God’s voice by listening to and observing the one who really has seen the Father. Though frequently overlooked, 6:46 is in fact the only passage in John’s Gospel to state explicitly that the vision of God is restricted to Jesus: “Not that anyone has seen the Father *except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father* (οὗτος ἑώρακεν τὸν πατέρα).” There are, admittedly, passages in which Jesus refers to what he has heard (John 8:26, 40; 15:15) or seen in the Father’s presence (8:38: παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ; cf. 3:11, 32; 5:19), but none of them actually states that Jesus has seen the Father in the way that this is phrased in 6:46. Where John 6:46 bears resemblance to the final verse of the prologue is in its highlighting of the claim that Jesus alone can reveal the Father because of his unique relationship with God (ὁ ὢν παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ; cf. 5:19; 8:38).

If Jesus’ words to his Jewish interlocutors emphasize their inability to see God and, in the case of 6:46, stress that it is Jesus’ exclusive privilege to have seen the Father, it is the possibility of seeing God in Jesus, his authorized representative, that is given unequivocal expression in 12:45: “And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.” This is also the thrust of Jesus’ words to his disciples in 14:9: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (cf. 14:7). Both of these cases, it can be argued, represent a variation within Jesus’ own speech of the prologue’s concluding assertion that Jesus brings – even brings out - revelation (ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο), because, as indicated by the use of the aorist (ἐξηγήσατο), God is seen in the earthly Jesus.²⁵

A number of the motifs encountered in these passages (5:37; 6:46; 12:45; 14:9) could be described as compatible with, and may even closely resemble, some of the assertions made in the final verse of the prologue. However, what is absent from v. 18 is a statement to the effect

²² This stands in stark contrast to passages where it is stated that Israel has heard God’s voice (cf. Exod. 19:9; Deut. 4:12, 33, 36; 5:22, 24; Sir. 17:13).

²³ Cf. Severino Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel: The Torah and the Gospel, Moses and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity according to John* (NovTSup 42; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 230; Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John* (BNTC; London: Continuum, 2005), 206-7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 231.

²⁵ Cf. Theobald, *Die Fleischwerdung des Logos*, 261 (n 2).

that *Jesus himself has seen God*.²⁶ Very few scholars have noticed its absence, and even fewer have made anything of it. While it seems clear that v. 18 contains some kind of antithesis – and this despite the lack of a connective δέ between its two main parts²⁷ – does the second part, as many appear to assume,²⁸ make the following implicit claim: no one has ever seen God, but Jesus – the μονογενὴς θεός – has seen God, which is why he is able to bring revelation? Furthermore, has he seen God in virtue of his presence “close to the Father’s heart?” One could perhaps respond by suggesting that the notion of Jesus seeing God is presupposed but not stated in this verse, because the fourth evangelist’s strategy is to telescope as many key motifs as possible into what is still a lengthy two-part statement. However, if this is what is intended, it would only involve modifying the text to include a few additional words such as εἰ μὴ between the two main parts of v. 18.²⁹

In a recently published essay, John Ashton has proposed that the final verse of the prologue categorically denies that *anyone* has seen God (including Jesus) and that, in this respect, v. 18 is contradicted by John 6:46, the one place where Jesus’ vision of God is explicitly stated, because v. 18 does not allow for any exceptions. The prologue, claims Ashton, is anti-apocalyptic in that its emphasis lies on Jesus as the embodiment of revelation.³⁰ “God’s plan for the world (the Logos) is not revealed by a visionary seer who has seen God and is consequently in a position to pass on his knowledge to others. Rather it take the form of a theophany (‘we have gazed on his glory’), a form of God’s communication with the world found very often in the Bible.”³¹ Thus, Ashton’s explanation of this difference between 1:18 and 6:46 is that, in the second edition of the Gospel, which, he claims, is when both the prologue and John 6 were added to the text, the fourth evangelist decided to modify 6:46 by allowing that the one who is from God *can* be said to have seen God.

While I agree that John 1:18 contains no hint of the presentation of Jesus as “one who sees God,” it should be noted that it serves a different function from 6:46, where Jesus’ ability to see God is presented as part of his self-legitimation in confrontation with his Jewish

²⁶ Very few scholars betray awareness of this fact. Exceptions are Harris, *Prologue and Gospel*, 93-94; Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 206 n. 34 (n 23); Ashton, “Reflections on a Footnote,” 209 (n 13); idem., *The Gospel of John and Christian Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 167-68.

²⁷ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003), 1:422, notes the lack of an adversative particle in other cases of evident contrast (John 2: 9, 10; 7:36).

²⁸ Cf. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 36 (n 1); Christian Dietzfelbinger, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (ZBK 4; Zürich: TVZ, 2001), 1.33; Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John*, 112 (n 11); Johannes Beutler, “Der Johannes-Prolog – Ouvertüre des Johannesevangeliums,” in *Der Johannesprolog* (ed. Günter Kruck; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009), 98.

²⁹ See Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 206 n. 34 (n 23): “Jn does not continue: εἰ μὴ ὁ μονογενὴς θεὸς καὶ ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.”

³⁰ Ashton, “Reflections on a Footnote,” 209-11 (n 13).

³¹ Ibid., 210.

opponents. In particular, the last verse of the prologue acts as the gathering together, or outworking, of the section beginning in v. 14. The fourth evangelist is not so much interested at this point in whether Jesus has seen God, in representing him as the seer who has been sent by God (cf. 5:37; 6:44; 12:44-45), but in his unique identity as the *μονογενὴς θεός*, the one whom *others see* and recognize as the incarnation of God's Word, as the manifestation of God's glory, grace and truth. The emphasis in 1:14-18, therefore, is on what Jesus reveals in his capacity as the incarnate Logos, on what he makes available to those who "see" him. This does not involve glossing over the declaration about the intimate contact between the Father and the Son (1:18b: ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς), because it serves to provide a rationale for the claim that Jesus embodies God's revelation (ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο) rather than to indicate that Jesus has indeed seen the Father.

The unequivocal nature of the initial statement in 1:18 – "no one has ever seen God" – suggests that it forms a response to claims that some chosen individuals have indeed seen God, either in theophanies or through visionary experiences (a topic to which I will return), but the response is such that it overtly, and retrospectively, sets Jesus in a completely different category from all other possible contenders.³² In other words, v. 18 stresses that God is now seen in and through Jesus, for, as Brian Mastin succinctly remarks in his article on *theos* christology in John's Gospel, what the evangelist insists in v. 18 is that "only God can reveal God."³³ It is possible, of course, that if the evangelist were to be pressed as to whether v. 18 takes for granted that Jesus has seen God, he may well have given an affirmative answer, but this was not his aim in the final part of the prologue.

2. Moses and "Seeing God"

To propose that the initial assertion in v. 18 ("no one has ever seen God") reacts to claims made by, or are attributed to, other possible contenders raises the issue of the role played by Moses, particularly if the evangelist is pursuing a train of thought that was initiated in v. 14 and is followed through to vv. 17-18.³⁴ Therefore, despite the lack of a connective between these last two verses, the stance taken on "seeing God" picks up the "comparison and

³² See Craig S. Keener, "We Beheld His Glory!" (John 1:14)," in *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 2: Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel* (ed. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just and Tom Thatcher; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 20, who interprets 1:14-18 as drawing out a "multifaceted parallel" between Moses' vision of God's glory on Sinai and the disciples' vision of God's glory in the enfleshed Logos.

³³ See Mastin, "A Neglected Feature," 41 (n 1). Cf. also Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, 108 (n 23); idem., *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2000), 232.

³⁴ Verses 16-17 are connected to vv. 14-15 by ὅτι (1:16a) and are also linked together by ὅτι (1:17a). Furthermore, πλήρωμα (1:16a) harks back to πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας (1:14e), which appears again in 1:17b (ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια). See further Theobald, *Die Fleischwerdung des Logos*, 199, 206-7, 258 (n 2), who describes vv. 14-18 as a "geschichtete Zeugnisrede" (p. 199).

contrast,”³⁵ in v. 17, between Moses as the mediator of God’s gift of the law and Jesus as the source of grace and truth (cf. Exod. 34:6).³⁶ That the contrast between Moses and Jesus continues into v. 18 is suggested by the structural symmetry of this pair of verses: the law, on the one hand, may have been given (ἐδόθη) through Moses, but this did not bring about a direct vision of God; grace and truth, on the other hand, have come (ἐγένετο) through Jesus Christ because he is the definitive revelation of God.³⁷ Like elsewhere in vv. 14-18, scriptural language associated with the Sinai theophany contributes to the wording of the assertion that “no one has ever seen God,” here recalling the rejection of Moses’ request to see God’s face, on the grounds that “no one shall see me and live” (Exod. 33:20; cf. 19:21; Judges 13:22; 1 Kings 19:11-13; Isa. 6:5).³⁸ Consequently, despite Moses’ reputation in biblical traditions as one who knew or spoke with God “face to face” (Exod. 33:11; Deut. 34:10; cf. Num. 12:8; Sir. 45:3), as one who enjoyed a privileged position in contrast with the more limited visual access afforded to other Israelites, the overall assessment of Moses that underpins John 1:18a is that even he was denied a direct vision of God, probably because of its catastrophic consequences,³⁹ and that he was shielded from seeing God’s face while his glory was passing by (Exod. 33:21-23). Thus, regardless of the wide spectrum of traditions in the Hebrew Bible relating to the theme of the “invisibility and palpable presence” of God,⁴⁰ the fourth evangelist – in a way that resembles other strands of Jewish tradition about Moses⁴¹ – focuses, at least initially in v. 18, on the veiled character of God’s revelation in the past.

³⁵ T. Francis Glasson, *Moses in the Fourth Gospel* (Studies in Biblical Theology 40; London: SCM, 1963), 24, 26.

³⁶ Cf. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, I: 272 (n 5): although ἔλεος is usually employed by the LXX to translate *dsx*, χάρις becomes more prominent in later texts (Esther 2:9; Sir. 7:33; 40:17; cf. Symmachus 2 Sam. 2:6; 10:2). See also C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 82, 175-76; Theobald, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 130 (n 7): not through the LXX but rather a different – and now unknown – translation of the Hebrew rendering of Exod. 34:6 into Greek.

³⁷ Hofius, ““Der in des Vaters Schoß ist,”” 30 n. 44 (n 4), notes that both v. 17 and v. 18 contain an antithetical parallelism; therefore there is a correspondence between v. 17a and v. 18a and between v. 17b and v. 18b.

³⁸ This is the view expressed by the majority of scholars. Cf. Peder Borgen, “God’s Agent in the Fourth Gospel” in *The Interpretation of John* (2nd edition; ed. John Ashton; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 90; Glasson, *Moses in the Fourth Gospel*, 68 (n 35); Dietzfelbinger, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 1.33 (n 28).

³⁹ For the interest in biblical traditions on the notion that seeing God *will lead to death*, rather than on his invisibility, see Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3-4.

⁴⁰ George Savran, “Seeing is Believing: On the Relative Priority of Visual and Verbal Perception of the Divine,” *Biblical Interpretation* 17 (2009): 322 (although see n. 39 above with regard to the notion of the invisibility of God). See further Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John*, 110 (n 11).

⁴¹ See Philo, *Post.* 168-69: “Not even to Moses did God reveal himself” (with reference to Exod. 33:23); cf. *Abr.* 76; *Spec.* 1.36-50; *Mut.* 9. For recent discussion of Philo’s views about the *visio Dei*, see Scott D. Mackie, “Seeing God in Philo of Alexandria: The Logos, the Powers, or the Existent One?,” *The Studia Philonica Annual* 21 (2009): 25-47; *idem*, “Seeing God in Philo of Alexandria: Means, Methods, and Mysticism,” *JSJ* 43 (2012): 147-79.

There is, in this respect, little textual evidence to support the proposal that the argument at the end of the prologue runs as follows: although no one, including Moses, has seen God (the Father), the Sinai revelation involved Moses' encounter with the pre-existent Word – a revelation of the grace and truth highlighted in v. 17.⁴² The wider context in vv. 14-18 suggests that what is in view is the revelation of the *incarnate* Word, with the structure and wording of v. 17 pointing to the grace and truth that was previously associated with the Law and the glory of YHWH (Exod. 34:6)⁴³ as having now come into being through Jesus Christ.⁴⁴ It may possibly be implied that the Law bears witness on behalf of *Jesus* as the personification of grace and truth,⁴⁵ but nothing is said – either here or elsewhere in the Gospel narrative – to indicate that Moses has seen the glory of the pre-existent Word. The emphasis rather is upon the contrast between Moses (and others), who experienced only a partial revelation of God, and the community of Johannine believers who, represented by “we” (1:14, 16), have seen God in his incarnate Word (cf. 14:9).

The final lines of the prologue thus clearly tap into the extensive debate on the impossibility of seeing God, one that is not limited to the biblical sources, but extends into many Jewish traditions of the late Second Temple period and beyond.⁴⁶ This debate finds varied expression in the Jewish apocalypses, where responses to possible visions of the terrifying and indescribable face of God can take the form of rejection,⁴⁷ reticence,⁴⁸ or, in

⁴² See Hanson, “John 1.14-18,” 103-4 (n 12); idem, *The Prophetic Gospel: A Study of John and the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 21-24; cf. Warren Carter, “The Prologue and John’s Gospel: Function, Symbol and the Definitive Word,” *JSNT* 39 (1990): 46-47; Michael Labahn, “Jesus und die Autorität der Schrift im Johannesevangelium – Überlegungen zu einem spannungsreichen Verhältnis,” in *Israel und seine Heilstraditionen im Johannesevangelium: Festgabe für Johannes Beutler SJ zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. Michael Labahn, Klaus Scholtissek, Angelika Strotmann; Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004), 191.

⁴³ Similarly, it is implied in John 5:37 (cf. 5:39, 45-46) and 6:46 that divine revelation is no longer connected with Israel’s past (including the gift of the Law) but with the present experience of Jesus.

⁴⁴ See further Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 539, 541 (n 23); Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology*, 224 (n 3). See also Judith Lieu, “Narrative Analysis and Scripture in John,” in *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J.L. North* (ed. Steve Moyise; JSNTSS 189; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 147: “The preceding promise of ‘grace in place of grace’ could be taken to give Law the value of ‘grace,’ but this is qualified by the explicit sourcing of ‘grace and truth’ in Jesus Christ, whom the reader will identify with the ‘only begotten, full of grace and truth’ in verse 14.”

⁴⁵ The purpose of the Law as God’s gift is explicated within the Gospel narrative, where it is presented as a witness leading people to the “truth” in Jesus (see John 1:45; 5:39, 45-47; 7:19, 23).

⁴⁶ In addition to the sources noted in n. 41 above, see Josephus, *Bel.* 7.346: ἄορατος... τοῖς ἀνθρώποις οὐ μυσιν. For later rabbinic evidence, see b. *Berakot* 7b; Sifre Numbers §103 on Num. 12:8; Sifre on Deuteronomy §357 (19); ExR 23:15; LevR 4:8: “He who sees and is not seen....” On the hiddenness of God in Graeco-Roman sources, see Rudolf Bultmann, “Untersuchungen zum Johannesevangelium,” *ZNW* 29 (1930): 169-75; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1.423 (n 27).

⁴⁷ See especially *ApocAbr* 19:4: The seer encounters the angels and the fiery throne in the seventh heaven, but God, “the invisible glory,” remains hidden from human view.

⁴⁸ Other apocalypses do include visions of God, but choose to elaborate on what surrounds, rather than the precise contours of, the divine *kavod*. *I Enoch* 14, the earliest such vision, speaks of the enthroned “Great Glory” whose luminous garment is surrounded by blazing fire (14:20), and then adds that no angel is able to come and look at his face and that no flesh can see him (14:21).

some cases, more limited restraint.⁴⁹ And yet, in various Jewish apocalyptic and early mystical circles the tradition endured that Moses' ascent of Sinai was none other than an ascent to heaven to receive knowledge of the divine mysteries and a direct vision of God.⁵⁰ There is evidence elsewhere in John's Gospel of the deliberate refutation of such claims to heavenly ascents and visions (e.g., John 3:13: "no one [οὐδεὶς] has ascended to heaven") - refutations whose structural resemblance to the emphatic "no one (οὐδεὶς) has seen God" may provide additional support that Jewish claims about the visionary experiences of Moses are also in view, and rejected, in v. 18.

3. Isaiah and "Seeing the Glory"

Moses is not the only prominent individual from biblical tradition to feature in Jewish speculation about a direct vision of God. Another such figure is the prophet Isaiah. However, in comparison with Moses, there are fewer references in Jewish and early Christian tradition to Isaiah's heavenly ascents and visionary encounters with God, certainly those that can be confidently dated to the first century CE or earlier. Notwithstanding the fact that the Johannine prologue contains no explicit references to Isaiah or any clear allusions to his prophecies, he warrants consideration in a treatment of the theme of "seeing God" in the prologue and body of John's Gospel, and this for two reasons.

First, after providing a summary assessment of Jesus' public ministry with the aid of two quotations from the prophecies of Isaiah (John 12:38-40; cf. Isa. 53:1; 6:10), the fourth evangelist includes the remark that Isaiah "saw his glory and spoke about him" (12:41: ὅτι εἶδεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐλάλησεν περὶ αὐτοῦ). This explanatory comment is undoubtedly the consequence of the assertion made elsewhere in the Gospel that Jesus is the exclusive revealer of God. It is a comment that gives due regard to the prohibition in Exodus 33:20, and indeed to the statement in John 1:18a that no one has ever seen God, and it does so by claiming that the enthroned figure whose glory is said to have been seen by Isaiah was none other than Jesus. Despite the fact that he is not specifically named at this point, the phrase εἶδεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ must refer to Isaiah's vision of the glory of *Jesus* because he is consistently the referent of all the other occurrences of the pronoun αὐτός in the surrounding narrative comments: "they

⁴⁹ A more explicitly anthropomorphic description of God's appearance occurs in *2 Enoch*, where the seer declares that he has seen the face of the Lord "like iron made burning hot by a fire" (22:1) and has even gazed into his eyes (39:4), but that there is no way of communicating the indescribable face of God (22:2) and that to stand before the face of the divine King is both terrifying and dangerous (39:8).

⁵⁰ Philo, *Mos.* 1:158; *Quaest Ex.* 2.29, 40, 46; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.88, 96; 4.8, 49; *LAB* 12.1; *2 Baruch* 4:1-7; 59.3; *4 Ezra* 14.3-6. Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 14; Leiden: Brill, 1967), 156-59, 205-9; Carter, "The Prologue and John's Gospel," 44, 46, 56 (n 42).

did not believe in him (εἰς αὐτόν)” (12:37) and “many, even of the authorities, believed in him (εἰς αὐτόν)” (12:42). Given, moreover, that John 12:37-40 presents Isaiah’s words as being fulfilled in Jesus - hence the remark that “he spoke about him” (12:41) - the fact that the words “he saw his glory” immediately precede this comment, with no indication that αὐτός has a different referent, offers further support that the figure in question is Jesus. He appears to Isaiah and converses with the prophet, declaring that God (“he” to which reference is made in the opening lines of the quotation from Isa. 6:10) has caused the spiritual blindness and hardness of heart of those who cannot be healed by Jesus.⁵¹ Thus, whereas Jesus (alone) has seen God (cf. John 6:46), Isaiah – like Jesus’ disciples (14:9; cf. 12:45) – has been privileged to experience the revelation of God in Jesus. Indeed, while the prologue’s concluding declarations offer an explication of the confession of those who have witnessed Jesus as the unique manifestation of God’s glory in human form (“we have seen his glory”), this confession finds its closest Johannine counterpart in the claim that Isaiah “saw his glory” (12:41).

Secondly, an investigation of Jewish and early Christian perceptions of Isaiah and his temple vision indicate that the prophet played a key role in the widespread debate about the possibility of seeing God. The fourth evangelist may include no more than veiled references to Exod. 33:20 (“no one shall see me [God] and live”) and Isaiah 6:1 (“I saw the Lord”) (cf. John 1:18; 6:46; 12:41), but, as I have argued elsewhere,⁵² several Jewish and early Christian traditions bring these two scriptural passages and, more importantly, the characters themselves into direct conversation with one another (e.g., *AscIs.* 3:8-10).⁵³ In particular, attempts are made in later talmudic tradition to solve the possible contradiction between the two passages: prophets like Isaiah thought they had seen God (because they looked through an unclear glass), while Moses, who had the greater authority, possessed the insight (“clear glass”) that enabled him to recognize that a visible encounter with God was impossible (b. *Yebamot* 49b). This and similar attempts to reconcile Moses and Isaiah on the subject of “seeing God” points to the significant role played by Isaiah’s call-vision in such debates, particularly in view of the

⁵¹ This accounts for the shift from “he” (God) to “I” (Jesus – ἰσσομαι) in the final line of the Isaianic quotation. On the textual form and function of the quotation of Isa. 6:10 in John 12:40, see especially Maarten J.J. Menken, *Old Testament Quotations in the Fourth Gospel: Studies in Textual Form* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 15; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), 99-122.

⁵² Catrin H. Williams, “Seeing the Glory: The Reception of Isaiah’s Call-Vision in Jn 12.41,” in *Judaism, Jewish Identities and the Gospel Tradition: Festschrift for Professor Maurice Casey* (ed. James Crossley; London: Equinox Press, 2010), 192-94.

⁵³ *Ascension of Isaiah* 3:8-10: “And Isaiah himself has said, ‘I see more than Moses the prophet’. Moses said, ‘There is no man who can see the Lord and live.’ But Isaiah has said, ‘I have seen the Lord, and behold I am alive.’ Know, therefore, O king, that they are false prophets.”

fact that his declaration, “I saw the Lord” (Isa. 6:1), amounts to one of the most unequivocal claims to have seen God in the Hebrew Bible.

It is widely acknowledged that the prophet’s vision of “the Lord” seated upon a throne (Isa. 6:1-13), which forms the broader context of the immediately preceding quotation from Isa. 6:10 used to explain the lack of belief in Jesus, provides the *setting* for the Johannine comment that Isaiah “saw (aorist: εἶδεν) his glory.” Features in both the Hebrew text and later Jewish interpretative renderings of Isaiah 6 support the view that the reference to δόξα in John 12:41 is drawn specifically from Isaiah’s call-vision. The Hebrew text of Isa. 6:1 gives expression to the prophet’s vision of God by stating that Isaiah saw the Lord (יְהוָה), followed by Isaiah’s own declaration, “My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (6:5). Nevertheless, it could be inferred from the intervening context in the Hebrew that what Isaiah sees amounts to a vision of the glory of the Lord, because the seraphim announce that “the whole earth is full of his glory” (6:3). And while the translator(s) of LXX Isaiah adjust the text so that it is God’s glory (δόξα) – rather than the hem of his robe – that fills the temple (6:1), the Targum of Isaiah even modifies Isaiah’s initial assertion that he saw “the Lord” so that the prophet in fact sees “the glory of the Lord resting upon a throne.” The reference to Isaiah having seen the King with his eyes (6:5 HT, LXX) now becomes a more indirect vision of “the glory of the Shekhinah of the eternal King, the Lord of hosts” (TIsa 6:5).⁵⁴ What becomes evident, therefore, is that these targumic renderings display an acute awareness of the problem posed by the apparent dissonance between the assertion that no one can see God and the claim made by individuals like Isaiah that they have “seen the Lord.” The reference to δόξα in John 12:41 may share the targumic emphasis upon “Glory” as the means of God’s *visible* manifestation, but its own solution to the anthropomorphic features of the Hebrew text and, in part, the LXX version of Isaiah’s call-vision is to identify Jesus as the human-like Glory seen by the prophet.

Pinpointing the event that provides the setting for Isaiah’s vision of glory is clearly not the primary purpose of the clarificatory aside in John 12:41, but rather explaining how Isaiah’s visionary experience and his resulting words can be interpreted with reference to Jesus.⁵⁵ The conciseness of the comment, ὅτι εἶδεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, has prompted much debate as to how the prophet could be regarded as having seen Jesus’ glory during his temple vision. The widely accepted view that Isaiah is understood to have seen the glory of the pre-existent Jesus undoubtedly agrees with christological statements made elsewhere in the Gospel (cf. 1:1-2;

⁵⁴ On the affinities between John 12:41 and the targumic renderings of Isa. 6:1-5, see, e.g., Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 486-87 (n 1); Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 432 (n 1); Evans, *Word and Glory*, 162-63 (n 12).

⁵⁵ The textual variant ὅτε (D f 565 VetLat Vg sy) focuses on the occasion of Isaiah’s temple vision, whereas the more difficult ὅτι (P⁶⁶ P⁷⁵ & A B) also point to its consequences.

8:58; 17:5, 24), but no firm distinction between Jesus' pre-existent and incarnate δόξα is intended, in all likelihood, by the remark that "he saw his glory."⁵⁶ In fact, there are several textual indicators that the comment focuses heavily, if not primarily, on the notion that Isaiah "saw" the manifestation of divine glory in Jesus' earthly life.

First, given that John 12:41 operates as an explanatory aside in a narrative unit that forms the conclusion to the first major section of the Gospel and which reflects on the negative response to Jesus' public ministry (12:37-43), the function of v. 41 within this unit becomes more evident if attention is paid to the structure of John 12:37-43.⁵⁷ The first part, 12:37-41, is bound together by its three overt references to the prophet Isaiah. On the third occasion (12:41a) the evangelist elaborates upon the earlier two references to the words of Isaiah (12:38, 39) in order to introduce his christological assessment of those words (12:41bc). The clause "Isaiah said these things" (ταῦτα) does not, in this respect, refer solely to the immediately preceding quotation from Isa. 6:10, but draws together and reflects on both quotations.⁵⁸ Thus, Isaiah's prophetic testimony (Isa. 53:1; 6:10) results from his vision of Jesus as the embodiment of God's glory, a vision that also embraces Jesus' future glory. This is what enabled Isaiah to speak as he did about Jesus' mission in the world (12:41b: "he saw his glory") and to predict the unbelief that he would encounter during his earthly life (12:41c: "and he spoke about him").⁵⁹

Secondly, and closely related to the first point, that what is seen by Isaiah is not restricted to Jesus' pre-existent glory is further suggested by the deliberate juxtaposition of two quotations from Isaiah (53:1; 6:10) in John 12:37-40(41). As has been noted by some scholars, this juxtaposition prompts the identification of several distinctive verbal and thematic links between the wider contexts of these quotations, both in the opening verses of Isaiah's call-vision (6:1-13) and in the introduction to the fourth Servant Song (52:13-53:12).⁶⁰ With regard

⁵⁶ See also Nils A. Dahl, "The Johannine Church and History," *The Interpretation of John* (2nd edition; ed. John Ashton; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 154-55.

⁵⁷ See further Roman Kühschelm, *Verstockung, Gericht und Heil: Exegetische und bibeltheologische Untersuchung zum sogenannten "Dualismus" und "Determinismus" in Joh 12,35-50* (Bonner Biblische Beiträge 76; Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain, 1990), 45.

⁵⁸ Although ταῦτα can be used in John's Gospel to refer to an earlier single statement (e.g., 9:22, 40), it is more commonly used to denote a series of preceding statements (e.g., 6:59; 8:30; 12:16; 13:21; 14:25).

⁵⁹ This also aligns the presentation of Isaiah in John 12:37-41 with the Jewish understanding of his role as a visionary prophet who can see the future. Particularly relevant in this respect is the description of Isaiah in *Sira* 48:24-25: "By a spirit of strength he saw the future (εἶδεν τὰ ἔσχατα), and comforted the mourners of Zion. He declared what shall be (τὰ ἐσόμενα) until eternity, and hidden things (τὰ ἀπόκρυφα) before they come to pass." The final clause in particular points to Isaiah as the prophet who was privileged to see and to disclose divine secrets (cf. 3:22; 42:19). On this passage, see further Williams, "Seeing the Glory," 191-92 (n 52).

⁶⁰ See especially Craig A. Evans, "Obduracy and the Lord's Servant: Some Observations on the Use of the Old Testament in the Fourth Gospel," in *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis: Studies in Memory of William Hugh Brownlee* (ed. Craig A. Evans and William F. Stinespring; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 230-32; Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 49-

to the Hebrew text, the most remarkable verbal connection between the two passages is the use of the words “high and lifted up” to describe the divine throne in the temple (Isa. 6:1: רם ונשא) and the future exaltation and lifting up of the Servant (Isa. 52:13: ירום ונשא). Furthermore, according to the LXX, Isaiah sees the “glory” (δόξα) that fills the temple (6:1 LXX) and speaks of the glorification (δοξασθήσεται) of the Servant (52:13 LXX).⁶¹ Of particular significance for this essay is the fact that both Isaianic passages contain strong visual emphasis, and one of their most striking connections is the link between Isaiah “seeing” the Lord (6:1, 5 LXX: εἶδον; cf. 6:9-10 LXX) and the “seeing” of the glorification of the Servant (52:13 LXX: ἰδοῦ, cf. 52:15 LXX: many nations and kings will see [ὄψονται] the Servant).⁶² If John 12:41, as seems likely, acts as a commentary on both Isaiah quotations (ταῦτα), two “events” or “acts” of seeing are subsumed under the single reference to glory, namely, Isaiah’s vision of Jesus as the glorious figure in the temple, which the fourth evangelist then views as the occasion for the prophet having seen, ahead of time, the glory manifested by Jesus during his earthly life,⁶³ and whose rejection ultimately leads to his enthronement and glorification on the cross.⁶⁴

Further support for this interpretation of John 12:41 is afforded by the earlier description of Abraham as a witness to Jesus: “Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad (καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐχάρη)” (John 8:56). There is striking resemblance between the structure of the final clause about Abraham and the remark about Isaiah (ὅτι εἶδεν ... καὶ ἐλάλησεν), and a similar interpretative pattern also emerges in that the use of the aorist εἶδεν to denote Abraham’s and Isaiah’s acts of “seeing” points to a specific event as the narrative-historical context for their respective “visions.” In the case of Abraham, the most likely setting is the so-called covenant of the pieces (Genesis 15), which, according to several Jewish traditions, becomes the occasion for the patriarch to receive visions of the future and of the end times.⁶⁵ Admittedly, some of the Jewish traditions relating to Genesis 15 state that

51; Jörg Frey, “‘...dass sie meine Herrlichkeit schauen’ (Joh 17.24): Zu Hintergrund, Sinn und Funktion der johanneischen Rede von der δόξα Jesu,” *NTS* 54 (2008): 385-86.

⁶¹ See Nicole Chibici-Revneanu, *Die Herrlichkeit des Verherrlichten: Das Verständnis der δόξα im Johannesevangelium* (WUNT 2.231; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 196-98.

⁶² On the importance of visibility in the text and reception of Isa. 52:13-53:12, see, most recently, Jane M.F. Heath, *Paul’s Visual Piety: The Metamorphosis of the Beholder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 228-31. On the importance of “seeing” in Isa. 52:13-15 LXX, see Eugene Robert Ekblad Jr., *Isaiah’s Servant Poems According to the Septuagint: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 23; Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 192-93, 204.

⁶³ Menken, *Old Testament Quotations in the Fourth Gospel*, 119 n. 77 (n 51), points to another reason for the possible merging together of the pre-existent and earthly δόξα of Jesus in John 12:41: it accords with the Jewish apocalyptic notion that things to be revealed at the end times already exist in heaven with God.

⁶⁴ Cf. Frey, “‘...dass sie meine Herrlichkeit schauen,’” 386 (n 60).

⁶⁵ According to 4 Ezra 3:14, Ezra says to the Most High on this occasion: “To him [Abraham] only you revealed the end of the times, secretly by night,” and in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* the patriarch is told, during his tour of

Abraham, during this event, sees the hidden things that already exist in heaven (2 *Bar.* 4:3-4; *ApocAbr* 9:6; 12:10; *LAB* 23:6), which could, from a Johannine perspective, have been interpreted as a vision of the pre-existent Jesus (cf. John 8:58). However, because the emphasis in John 8:56 is upon Abraham as having seen Jesus' "day," it must point to a vision of the future whereby Abraham "sees" the earthly mission of the Son.

With regard to John 12:41, interpreting its three-clause commentary as the component that brings together the first, closely intertwined, part of the passage (12:37-41) also brings to light other aspects of its function within the text. In particular, a close link can be identified between the comment that Isaiah "saw his glory" and the reflections in the preceding verses, which are underpinned by Isaiah's words (53:1; 6:10) about the relationship between signs and faith, blindness and unbelief (12:37-40). These reflections highlight the signs as the one aspect of Jesus' ministry that should have led to faith (12:37) and should have been perceived as a revelation (*ἀπεκαλύφθη*) of "the arm of the Lord" (12:38). In other words, to emphasize that Isaiah "saw" Jesus' glory is not only the consequence of the Johannine conviction that Jesus alone has seen God and can reveal him, but points to the attribution of a significant role to Isaiah in his capacity as a visionary prophet. The wider context of John 12:41 makes clear that, although a sensory experience of the signs could bring about an adequate response in faith, people's inability to believe in Jesus is because the signs have not been "seen" with real insight, due to the blinding of their eyes and the hardening of their heart (12:39-40).⁶⁶ Because the signs serve as a vehicle for the disclosure of Jesus' glory, a contrast is established between Isaiah, who truly "saw" the glory of Jesus, and those who, despite seeing the signs (with their eyes) lacked the capacity to do so at a deeper level (12:37-38).⁶⁷ Jesus' identity as the incarnate *δόξα* thus remains hidden from those who cannot see, but, according to the evangelist, Isaiah the prophet possessed the kind of sight, not only physical but spiritual sight, that enabled him to recognize Jesus' true significance as the one in whom God is seen. This understanding of "vision" in terms of spiritual perception or discovery does not necessarily point to a particular aspect of Jesus' glory as having been seen by Isaiah. That it embraces his identity and activity in the flesh is, however, strongly implied by the contrasting of Isaiah's vision of Jesus' glory with the people's inability to "see" him during his ministry. The visionary language of Isaiah's call is therefore turned on its head and takes on new meaning,

heaven, that he is seeing "what will be, and everything that will be in the last days" (24:2; cf. 9:10; 29:2; 31:1-2; GenR 44:21, 22).

⁶⁶ This explains the omission of the two lines referring to ears and hearing from the quotation of Isa. 6:10 in John 12:40.

⁶⁷ Cf. Piet van Boxel, "Die präexistente Doxa Jesu im Johannesevangelium," *Bijdragen* 34 (1973): 272-73; Kühschelm, *Verstockung, Gericht und Heil*, 202 (n 57).

for, in view of the denials expressed elsewhere in the Gospel, the evangelist asserts that it is a true “seeing” of the earthly Jesus, not heavenly ascents or visions, that is required in order to experience a true “vision” of God’s glory.

The emphasis in John 12:41 is on what the prophet Isaiah saw. The *vocabulary* of “seeing” may be supplied by the two Isaiah quotations and the language of “glory” by statements in the wider context of both passages, but the *impetus* for the evangelist’s understanding of Isaiah as having seen Jesus’ glory is his capacity, and indeed his reputation, to be able to see what, for others, remains concealed: he gains access to the otherwise hidden God as a result of his vision of Jesus as the embodiment of God’s glory. For the fourth evangelist, the vision of glory experienced by Isaiah in the temple is not confined to the glory belonging to Jesus before his appearance in the flesh: Isaiah sees in advance that God’s glory is embodied and manifested in Jesus of Nazareth. Indeed, set within the broader framework of the Gospel, and as emphasized in the final verses of the prologue (especially in v. 18: ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο), it becomes evident that, as far as visible revelation is concerned, the fourth evangelist’s primary interest lies in the significance of Jesus’ *earthly* life and mission. It is to this, he claims, that Isaiah – like Abraham – has borne witness.

4. Concluding Reflections

This essay has examined some of the ways in which John’s Gospel presents the vision of God as concentrated in Jesus. This theme is given its most programmatic expression in the concluding part of the prologue: as μονογενὴς θεός Jesus is the earthly expression of God’s revelation (ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο) or, as phrased a few verses earlier, he is the visible manifestation of God’s glory. In contrast, therefore, to certain declarations found within the body of the Gospel (e.g., John 6:46), the emphasis in the prologue is not upon Jesus himself as the one who sees God but upon his capacity to enable others to do so through him. Among those who have experienced this vision of God are believers who confess that they have “seen his glory” (1:14), but also the prophet Isaiah, whose vision of Jesus as the embodiment of the divine glory provides a significant template for those with eyes to “see God.” For the evangelist, then, the proper way to behold Jesus’ earthly form is to see it as the locus of God’s glory – the glory that Isaiah saw ahead of time.

And where does this leave Moses? The approach adopted in this essay has, inevitably, led to the highlighting of differences, rather than similarities, between his presentation and that of Isaiah, certainly as far as the Gospel’s treatment of the theme of “seeing God” is concerned. Of course, the juxtaposition of the Johannine presentation of Moses and Isaiah, which this

essay has encouraged, can lead to the filling of the text's "open spaces" in a way that the fourth evangelist never anticipated or even perhaps intended. As one who "saw his glory," Isaiah may be counted as a paradigmatic witness to be claimed by the Johannine side, and great value is placed on his testimony in order to frame the narrative of Jesus' ministry (1:23; 12:37-40). Having said that, the reader is never told whether Moses similarly saw Jesus' glory or,⁶⁸ as in the case of Abraham, rejoiced greatly upon seeing his "day" (8:56). What cannot be denied is that the Johannine appeal to Moses as a reliable witness is more muted and more restrained (1:45; 5:45-46; cf. 3:14) than the appeal to the prophet Isaiah. This may be due to Moses' ascribed role, in both the prologue and the body of the Gospel, as the subject of competing claims to revelation that fail to place Jesus at the centre of such claims. Consequently, the fourth evangelist's comparison of Moses and Jesus largely focuses on Moses' role as the giver of the Law (1:17; 7:19, 22-23; cf. 9:28-29), which offers testimony to Jesus but, at the same time, is stripped of its significance as the locus of God's revelation (cf. 9:28). Nevertheless, in his capacity as "the one who sees," Isaiah is aligned with those who recognize Jesus as the visible manifestation of God. To that extent, at least, these two significant figures from Israel's past are allowed to stand quite far apart.

⁶⁸ Although this silence does not deter Paul Miller from stating: "John explicitly states that Isaiah and Abraham saw Christ, and the same can be inferred of Moses" ("They Saw His Glory and Spoke of Him": The Gospel of John and the Old Testament," *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament* [ed. Stanley E. Porter; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006], 146).