

PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is a publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2066/162899>

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2019-06-18 and may be subject to change.

The spatial dynamics of Jesus as King of Israel in the Gospel according to John

**Author:**Jan Van der Watt¹**Affiliation:**

¹Department of New Testament Studies, University of the Free State, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Jan G. Van der Watt,
janvanderwatt@kpnmail.nl

Dates:

Received: 22 Apr. 2016

Accepted: 16 Aug. 2016

Published: 31 Oct. 2016

How to cite this article:

Van der Watt, J., 2016, 'The spatial dynamics of Jesus as King of Israel in the Gospel according to John', *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72(4), a3446. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3446>

Copyright:

© 2016. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

The presence of the kingdom of God is usually associated with the theology of the Synoptic Gospels, but this article describes how the concept of kingdom also plays an important role in the Gospel of John, as Busse also argues. It is argued that the Johannine group identify themselves as children of the King and regard themselves as members of the kingdom, of which Jesus, the Messiah, is the major representative on Earth. What is expected of a king in ancient Hellenistic times is true of Jesus. He has power, gives and interprets commandments, judges, saves and protects. Although these events are historically set in a politically tense situation between the Jews and Romans, Jesus' kingship is from above, revealing God's narrative of salvation and eternal life in the world below. In this way God's transcendental narrative of love, life, truth and light serves as a heuristic tool to understand and interpret events in the world below.

Introduction

The metaphors of family and temple have received due attention in analyses of the imagery in John (see Busse 1996; Coloe 2001; Van der Watt 2000). Lately, the concept of kingdom as a central metaphorical network has come into focus, especially through an article by Ulrich Busse (2006) on the concept of kingship in John. He argues that if one reads John against the conceptual framework of *inter alia* Hellenistic kingship, the underlying imagery of kingship used by John is illuminated.

Obviously, the expression *kingdom of God* lacks the frequency and apparent prominence it has in the synoptic gospels (Brown 1972:868), but Busse (2006) illustrates that the imagery of kingship in John indeed is one of the major metaphorical networks in John. It is first mentioned in John 3:3, 5, after which John prefers to describe and unfold the identity of believers in terms of the concept of a family that shares eternal life (3:16 and further). Nevertheless, the conceptual elements of the kingdom of God are present throughout the Gospel in the form of typical royal actions like judgment, protection and salvation; moreover there are sporadic direct references to *kingship* or *kingdom* in 1:50; 3:3, 5; 6:15; and 12:13, 15, with the climax in Chapters 18–20. To set the tone at the outset of the Gospel, Jesus is called *Messiah, King of Israel* by his disciples (Nathanael, in 1:49), is identified as the *king of the Jews* by Pilate (19:19–22) and is identified as the *king of the daughter of Zion* (12:15), according to the scripture (Zech 9:9).

By using this imagery, John creates a fictive space that heuristically aids in explaining the identity of the Johannine group in their relation to Jesus, their messiah and king; the role and function of Jesus as messiah are explored briefly in this article.

John as transcendental narrative

The complex nature of the plot of John must first be noted – through the idea of incarnation, John expands the spatial possibilities of his narrative. What he calls *heaven* or *the above* is incarnated, that is, 'given flesh' in the below, the created world. He is not arguing for two spatial realities functioning in parallel, that is, heaven parallel to the earthly reality, but he is merging the heavenly and earthly spaces (although they remain qualitatively different), resulting in a 'new reality' in which an ordinary earthly human being may share in the divine eternal life of God and be part of the family of the King – these are the implications of incarnation according to John.

Let us briefly consider this process of merging these two realities. There is the above, heaven, the space occupied by God and the divine. The transcendental narrative is related to this divine reality, the divine transcendental space of the unseen God, the Creator and King and what transpires there. However, what does John's transcendental narrative involve? Through this

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

transcendental narrative the reader learns about what takes place in the unseen divine sphere, heaven, the above, namely, what happens between the Father and his Son, the pre-existent Logos (1:1), who is in a communicative and loving relationship at the bosom of the Father, knowing him intimately (1:18). Out of love the Father equipped his Son for his mission by showing him everything (5:19–23) and sent him to the world to gather God's family (3:16), a family who will share his spirit of truth on Earth and for whom a place is prepared in the house of the Father (14:1–2), where they will spend eternal life. This whole 'narrative' transpires in the divine realm independently of human involvement.

With the incarnation of Jesus as pre-existent Logos (1:14), this transcendental narrative was integrated or merged with earthly human events. Through the incarnation of Jesus, coming to his own, the transcendental narrative is introduced in and integrated with the earthly reality and its narrative, impacting directly on the understanding and interpretation of the existing earthly narrative. The relevance of the transcendental reality gradually unfolds within the events, actions and lives of people on Earth and heuristically enlightens what is happening there. This integration means that physical events are explained in light of the transcendental narrative. For instance, Jesus dying on the cross is an (earthly) event in history, but this event's real meaning is explained in the light of transcendental narrative: Jesus fulfils the mission of his Father by powerfully occupying the cross as the throne of the King of the Jews – the nature of the divine reality 'exposes' Golgotha as being the divine throne room. From this throne room the power and nature of divine salvation and protection becomes evident. Indeed, the cross-events can only be understood in light of the transcendental narrative.

Obviously the Jewish opponents also had their own transcendental fictive narrative, explaining why they went to temple (2:11–25), why and how they read their scriptures (5:39) and washed themselves for purification (2:1–11). This narrative was also inspired by the God of Israel, but with a prophetic and spatial open-endedness – the hour would come, the Messiah–King would arrive – the throne was still empty or at least occupied by oppressing powers.

What happens in the engagement of Jesus with his fellow Jews is that his transcendental narrative engages with the existing narrative of the Jews; in other words, these two views or transcendental narratives of God's presence on Earth are interrelated, thus integrating these two narratives on several levels, for instance, on the level of expectations of the prophets, the presence of the kingdom of God and the Messiah, scriptures being fulfilled, the power of God being illustrated anew. These antennas of traditional Jewish tradition and expectations that were waiting for and seeking (1:19ff.) prophetic fulfilment were actively engaged by Jesus' transcendental narrative – two spaces merged, one with an open space for the Messiah to fill, and the other filling that space with Jesus. These two transcendental presentations do not seem to clash or stand in opposition to each other but fuse into one another as the continuing

presence of the King among his people. The integration of and interaction between these two narratives 'refreshes' and 'adjusts' and even reorganises the existing Jewish religious space related to the presence of God among his people. God's spatial presence among his people should now be perceived differently – it should now be perceived in terms of the incarnated Messiah, King of the Jews, who is humanly accessible through Jesus. God is now present through Jesus even when thinking of spaces like the temple (the temple space becomes Jesus' space), scripture (the scriptural witness becomes a witness to Jesus), festivals and the like. By accepting the presence of this transcendental space and accepting it as the new space to be inhabited through faith, the identity of believers is redefined, leading to a new evaluation especially of their religious space in relation to God. Those who accept the incarnated reality with its enlightening narrative will answer the question, 'where can one find the God of Israel?' differently from their Jewish opponents, since the incarnate presence of Jesus makes the Father known and spatially present (Ch. 14:6–15). That is why Jesus is able to say that he who has seen him, has seen the Father.

In John's Gospel this is the major difference between the Jewish opponents and the Johannine believers – they shared the traditional Jewish narrative space (i.e. of the temple, important ancestors in the history of Israel, etc.) but differed in the way they saw the impact of the incarnated transcendental narrative of Jesus on their reality. The Jewish opponents did not all accept Jesus and that caused considerable discussion and conflict among the Jews. Jesus' Jewish opponents still zealously held to their understanding of their traditional narrative of the transcendental reality as expressed in the temple, cultic rituals, scripture and the like, whereas the transcendental narrative as revealed by the Son formed the existential narrative of the disciples of Jesus, realising the presence of God through Jesus. In light of this narrative, the nature of not only the temple changed (2:13–25), but also that of scripture (5:39–40), religious feasts (7:39), prayer (16:25–28) and so on. The two groups' spatial perceptions therefore differed radically – in the end they 'inhabited' two separate realities according to John (see Bultmann 1986:506).

The King is here

Before continuing with a brief survey of the imagery of kingship in John, a methodological remark is important. Metaphors, symbols and imagery are social phenomena that should be interpreted within their original sociocultural contexts (see Van der Watt 2000:12–13). Obviously, they could be applied to new contexts, but if we are busy with historical efforts to understand ancient texts, the original context of a metaphor is crucial, no matter whether one uses a linguistic or conceptual approach to figurative language – some form of mapping or application of common places must still be done and for that purpose sociocultural information is indispensable. If we therefore want to say anything meaningful about kingship in John, the relevant sociocultural

and historical knowledge should form the backdrop of our understanding. Obviously, we cannot even begin to attempt a comprehensive description of kingship in the ancient world in this article (for several reasons, i.e. the limits in space and time – cf. however Busse 2006).

In research the synoptic gospels, not John, are usually associated with the centrality of the kingdom of God in their theological structure. However, as will be seen, the theme is not absent from John but forms part of its general theological argumentation.

Divine space: Space created by historical and traditional expectations

The politically loaded remarks in John that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the King of Israel and the Jews (for instance, 1:41, 49; 12:13–15; 18:33–37; 19:14–15, 19–22) are made in a politically sensitive environment (see Brown 1971:86–87; Schnackenburg 1968:310, 318). These terms are all political concepts that reflect the history, expectations and political aspirations of the Jews, who were under Roman rule (Kaiser 2014:67). Within this world the narrative of John unfolds. Jesus and his group are linked to the major historical expectations and tradition related to the Jews, as Kaiser (2014:67) remarks when he says that the *Word* refers to the ‘Gesalbten und meint damit im vorliegenden Zusammenhang den König der Heilszeit aus Davids Geschlecht’.

Part of this history may be described as follows. In the sixth century BCE the Judeans were exiled and lost their national and religious space, namely, their temple and their political autonomy (following the line of argument of Kaiser 2014:64). In their dire situation of being dispersed among other nations, they measured their situation in exile spatially against what were once the kingdoms of David and Solomon – through memory, not least fuelled by their prophets, expectations of a new temple, a new Jerusalem, a new king on the throne and peace in the land were driving forces in their expectations. As they regarded themselves as the elected people of God, their hope was focused on the liberating actions of God, who would return their promised space to them with a new Jerusalem, a new temple and a peaceful land where the lamb and wolf could lie together. In spite of a variety of views of the expected messiah (see Boyarin 2014:41–63; Brown 1971:235; Collins 2014:17–40; Keener 2003:284–289 for overviews), a strong conviction existed that the messiah would come to restore the kingdom of God and would then rule in righteousness over his freed people and country, as well as over the nations that would be subjected to him (Brown 1971:462–463). Boyarin (2014:62) argues that the concept of messiahship was so well developed by the time of Jesus that ‘[a]lle Vorstellungen über Christus sind altvertraut; [das (der) Neue ist Jesus.] Es gibt nichts in der Lehre des Christus was neu ist, außer der Ausrufung dieses Menschen als Menschensohn’ (see also Keener 2003:289–291).

Noteworthy in this regard, and perhaps another way of expressing the above, is Gottwald’s (2001:15) description

of the history of Israel represented by ‘a trajectory through three political horizons’. Obviously each of these horizons is characterised by a specific view of space, but that will not be developed further here:

1. The *first horizon* includes the beginnings of Israel, during which they practised a form of decentralised politics embedded and diffused throughout its social institutions (approximately 1250–1000 BCE).
2. The *second horizon* refers to the ‘midlife’ of Israel, during which they adopted centralised autonomous politics in a double sense: specialised state institutions were developed with a monopoly of domestic power that was also autonomous over other states (1000–586 BCE).
3. The *third horizon* represents the reconstituted life of Israel after the loss of statehood (except for the Hasmonian period). ‘They were forcibly subjected to a colonial form of centralized politics dictated by foreign sovereignties with which a native Israelite or Judahite hierarchy was empowered to act in local matters subject to the limits imposed by imperial powers ...’.

Spatially the situation of the Jewish people during the time of Jesus falls during the *third horizon*. Within the Johannine narrative the Jews were politically as well as spatially embedded in Roman rule, having accepted and confessed that they were inherently part of this space (11:48) and also claiming that Caesar as ruler of this space is their king (19:15). They were allowed a measure of autonomy, which was politically possible in the Roman Empire, but their state and freedom were lost (Gottwald 2001:15). This clearly was enough reason for the Jews in John to await and expect the Messiah, the King of Israel, as the First Testament promised (12:12–19).

Jesus as Messiah is described in John as fulfilling this role – salvation of the Jews (4:22) and the King of the Jews who is the Saviour of the world has come (4:42). Those who believed in Jesus as Messiah were given the right to become children of God (1:12–13) and thus part of the kingdom of God. In political terms this determined the Johannine group’s ‘national identity’ as the people of God, who find themselves within the perceived traditional space occupied by Jews like Moses or Abraham and was prophesied by their prophets. By integrating their own self-perception with the historical tradition of the Jews, presenting themselves as the children of the King, they spatially entered the remembered world of the Jewish people, sharing direct contact with their major traditional figures, like Abraham, who knew about Jesus, and Moses, who witnessed to him. They were now on their way to the house of God, the King (14:1–6). Their whole space was thus redefined in terms of the perceptions of what they believed the promised Jewish prophetic future to hold.

Although the Johannine group believed that they stood in continuation of the people of God and what was promised to them, John makes clear that Jesus fills this role in his own transcendental way (Keener 2003:487–488). His kingdom is not of this earth (18:36) and therefore something more than

mere earthly expectations are going to be fulfilled (Barrett 1978:536; Keener 2003:1112–1113; Schnackenburg 1968:310).

Spatially they saw themselves as moving from a position of subjugation and loss of freedom as Jews (i.e. the *third horizon*), re-establishing their position as the people of God 'as it was' during the *second horizon*, that is, from being dominated by an external power to becoming part of the fictive space of the independent and victorious kingdom of God, where love and peace reigns. They redefined themselves spatially as the family of God within this world, having eternal life and belonging to the kingdom of God, which is not of this world. Although our focus here is not to develop this spatial aspect with its implications further, it should be noted that the cognitive reflection of the Johannine group about their own spatial orientation was dominated by the transcendental narrative that was incarnated through and revealed by Jesus. For instance, finding themselves as children within the fictive family of God the King, they responded by living in loyalty and obedience toward that family, even though it might place their ordinary earthly relations under tension. Though still in this world they shared in the realities described in the transcendental narrative. This aspect is mainly developed further by John through his use of the filial language and metaphors.

Instead of exploring this aspect further, I would like to consider one aspect of the presence of Jesus in this world, namely, him being the Messiah. By taking the transcendental narrative seriously, Jesus as human being is identified and interpreted as the promised divine king who came to save his people. By offering them eternal life, he introduces believers into the family of God, the King, thus making them participants in this transcendental narrative.

Space created by the presence of the King

Kingship and kingdom are indeed central metaphors in John (Busse 2006:279–317). The Johannine group identified themselves as part of the kingdom with Jesus as the Messiah, King of Israel. Arguing that such a metaphorical network exists, use is made not only of direct references to king or kingdom, but also of conceptual material related to kingship, as will become evident below. As was stated earlier, it is of major importance to identify the proper socio-historical framework for understanding these metaphorical expressions.

Kaiser's (2014:107) analysis of the concept of the Messiah in the First Testament conceptually largely corresponds to that of Busse (2006; cf. also van der Watt 2016), although with some differences since Busse also pays attention to the Hellenistic royal situation (cf. Brown 1972:851 who notes that the term *King of the Jews* was first used by Hasmonian priest kings). Kaiser's analysis convinces him that the Messiah-King, who was the mediator between God and his people (Kaiser 2014:69), was expected to perform four major actions: (1) he should serve as cultic mediator between God and his people, saving them from their sin and praying for them in

times of need (pp. 72–73); (2) he should be a just regent who protects righteousness, *inter alia* by looking after the poor and powerless (Ps 72; 1 Kings 3:5–9) (p. 73); (3) he should be a wise teacher of his people, since through the Spirit of God he possesses knowledge of God, which empowers him to rule with insight and resolve (pp. 75, 80–81); and (4) he should defend his country (pp. 77–80). As such the Messiah will be the universal 'Prince of peace'; as Kaiser (2014:81) remarks, 'der Sohn (Gottes) aus Davids Geschlecht (wird) als wahrer Friedenfürst herrschen'. These qualities are all integrated in the Johannine description of Jesus that conceptually enhances his role as Messiah. As Messiah, Jesus displays the qualities of a true king in the Gospel: all power is given to him (3:35; 5:20) to fulfil the tasks of an ideal (vassal) king, like caring (Ch. 6), shepherding and protecting his own (10:28–30), giving and interpreting the law (Zumstein 2004:324–325), as well as judging the world (5:19–24, 30; see also 10:17–18; 9:31–34; 8:16), ensuring the presence of God, the King, *inter alia* by being the symbolic temple (2:18–21). Some of these aspects will now be briefly considered individually.

The King as lawgiver and judge

A major function of a king was to ensure peace and stability in his kingdom. This happened through him not only being the military leader but also being and giving the law, as well as obviously applying the law through example and judgment. Both these aspects are well developed in John in relation to Jesus as Messiah.

Let us first consider the aspects of law and judgment (see Lincoln 2000; Neyrey 1987). Jesus is not only the one who gives and interprets the law, but he is also the one who judges people according to the law (Lincoln 2000; Loader 2005). This has definite spatial implications in the Johannine narrative. As illustrated briefly below, large sections in the narrative are presented as fictive judicial spaces or courtrooms where issues related to Jesus are argued and judgments are made. The final eschatological judgment inevitably also plays a role (12:44–50).

Let us first focus on judgment – the issue of judgment cannot be discussed in detail here, but some points will be briefly outlined.

As a starting point, the description of the intimate relationship between Jesus and his Father (Jesus being like his Father) in 5:17ff. is *inter alia* explained by Jesus' saying: οὐδὲ γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ κρίνει οὐδένα, ἀλλὰ τὴν κρίσιν πᾶσαν δέδωκεν τῷ υἱῷ (v. 22). Within a Jewish framework, God, as King (3:3, 5), is the lawgiver and judge (Ex. 20). In John he gives the power of judgment to Jesus, as his vassal king. John thus defines the relationship between Jesus and the people in juridical terms, namely, that the people relate to Jesus as they would relate to a judge in a courtroom (i.e. a fictive judicial or court space; Lincoln 2015; see also Brown 1972:868). Following this remark by Jesus in Chapter 5 a fictive courtroom is presented where Jesus defends his own position as Son of God. In 5:30–47 Jesus calls several witnesses to himself,

namely, John (the Baptist), God, scripture and even his works. An issue at stake here is that the judge's authenticity is defended, since in 5:30, Jesus calls himself the *one who judges*. In Jesus' case there are witnesses to prove the authenticity of Jesus as judge.

The Johannine view of realised (realising) eschatology is well known, as is the presentic view on judgment. In the presence of Jesus and his message (words), judgment takes place: those who do not accept his message are judged and those who accept him will not come under judgment (12:46–50). The space Jesus creates through his presence corresponds to a fictive courtroom in which judgment is pronounced immediately (realised vs. realising judgement). From the perspective of the narrative nobody in the cosmos is excluded from this space; all have to face Jesus as judge. This 'courtroom' that spans the cosmos as a whole is determined by the transcendental narrative and should be understood from there. Although the high priest and Pilate are presented as judges, they also ultimately stand under the judgment of the supreme judge, the King of Israel. This is developed in several places in the Johannine 'passion narrative', for instance, where Jesus reminds Pilate that he would have no power if it had not been given to him by the supreme King, God (19:11). Jesus' judicial power spans the cosmos.

The King and his power

In John the promised Messiah-King (1:41, 45) confronts the world with the reality of the presence of the incarnated eschatological kingdom of God, of which he is the King. He challenges the Jewish opponents, who are convinced that they are the authoritative and legal representatives of God's people and through whom the Romans rule. He further challenges the cosmic and transcendental powers that stand in opposition to his eternal kingdom. The 'terrain of war' is spatially envisaged – the devil is described as the ruler of this world, but is judged and thrown out by Jesus (*νῦν κρίσις ἐστὶν τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, νῦν ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου ἐκβληθήσεται ἔξω* – 12:31). He has no power over Jesus (*ἔρχεται γὰρ ὁ τοῦ κόσμου ἄρχων· καὶ ἐν ἐμοὶ οὐκ ἔχει οὐδέν* – 14:30). Tension is created by this evaluation of the 'military conflict' in the sense that according to normal human criteria the presence of this kingdom is not politically or physically all that evident. Jesus does not arrive with a huge army of soldiers – Peter makes a small effort by using his sword but is immediately rebuked by Jesus for not seeing the conflict in larger transcendental perspectives (18:10–11). People are invited to a kingdom that, humanly speaking, is evidently without power, since the King dies on the cross and members of the kingdom will be persecuted, murdered, hated (15:18–16:4; 17:14) – not a very likely perspective for a group who claim to be political victors and to represent the most powerful kingdom of God.

John makes sure that no misunderstanding is created – Jesus' kingdom should not be confused with the expected earthly kingdom or measured against those criteria – that is why he withdrew when the crowd wanted to make him king (6:13)

and refused to be defended by the sword (18:10–11). His kingdom differs spatially as well as qualitatively from that of Pilate. The power of Jesus' kingdom should not be confused with ordinary earthly power. He uses spatial language originating from the transcendental narrative to explain that his kingdom is not of this world and therefore does not use the force and power associated with this world (18:36; see 18:10–11; see also Schnackenburg 1982:250). The kingdom of Jesus is not of this world, unlike that of Caesar. The power of the kingdom elsewhere becomes spatially identifiable in active dynamics like love, care and creating life but ultimately in the final and powerful judgment of God of those who did not want to accept the reality of this kingdom (12:47–50). This does not put the two opposing political groups on a physical collision course but rather on an ethical one. Pilate asks what truth is while the Truth (14:6) is standing in front of him. Although Pilate and Jesus shares the same physical space, Pilate does not share the space occupied by the Truth, Jesus, since he does not stand in a relation of acceptance to Jesus. Relational presence is in many cases constitutive for identifying space in John.

Because this heavenly kingdom, which is not of this world, represents a different (transcendentally related) space, it is manifested, as briefly mentioned above, in different ways – for instance through love; loyalty; commitment; obedience to Jesus' commandments and friendship to the point of giving your own life; living a life of honesty, righteousness and purity (1 John); protecting tradition and ethos (14:26; 1 John 2:20–25; 2 John 10–11), all this in honour of God the King (15:1–17). All these qualities are associated with the transcendental divine world and mark the presence of this reality in the cosmos (Van der Watt 2007). Through this behaviour of members of God's kingdom the presence of the kingdom is established and made visible and open to experience in this world. In 13:35 Jesus says, 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another'.

From the perspective of Jesus' followers, how does John visualise the spatial 'confrontation' between Jesus and the opposing powers? John notes that God loves the world (3:16) and that the Messiah was sent to this world to bring eternal life, making it possible for all people to see and enter the kingdom (3:3, 5) through faith. Within John's perspective, this missional love becomes the means by which the power and existence of the other political powers are confronted, challenged and penetrated. In this way the transcendental kingdom is 'incarnated' into this world. The ethical argument is that, once a person becomes part of the family of the King, he or she shares in that space and the ethos of the love and life of this kingdom and is guided by the Spirit on the basis of the mimetic relationship with Jesus (14:26). Through the active presence of these members of the kingdom in and among this world, the kingdom is indeed proclaimed and manifested in the cosmos.

Within the concept of kingship, the central expectation also stands that a king should be victorious and should bring peace.

This also forms part of John's description of the presence of the kingdom. John indeed describes the contact and interface between God's kingdom and the opposing earthly powers – including the Romans and even transcendental evil – in clear terms.¹ His kingdom is the victorious kingdom that was hoped for by the Jews, as Jesus claims in 16:33: 'But take courage; I have conquered the world' (ἀλλὰ θαρσεῖτε, ἐγὼ νενίκηκα τὸν κόσμον); Jesus has proven himself to be the Savior of the world (οὗτός ἐστιν ἀληθῶς ὁ σωτὴρ τοῦ κόσμου – 4:22). In the cross and resurrection narrative (Chs. 18–20) the superiority of Jesus is expressed through political concepts, like kingdom (18:36–37), Caesar (19:12); power (19:10–11) and judgment (18:31; 19:10–11), and should be interpreted in terms of an (also political) victory.

The aim of crucifixion in Roman history was to totally destroy the crucified, physically and otherwise. In spatial language that means that all evidence of Jesus occupying any space, both physically and in memory, should have been erased. Crucifixion therefore has an important spatial dimension. In Jesus' case he thwarted this aim by rising from death, which stands as victory over the worst the Roman powers could present. Through his resurrection he creates eternal space, since he lives and those who believe in him also live and will share this new reality, within which they will have rooms in the house of their Father, the King. Apart from, but also based on, the titles used for Jesus, like *Lord*, *God*, *King of Israel*, *King of the Jews* and so on, he proclaims and reveals with moral power and occupies the moral high ground, associated with the kingdom of God. In the earthly courtroom the heavenly Judge acts with power. A few examples suffice. To Pilate he says that he came into the world to bear witness to the truth (18:37) and he challenges the officer of the high priest who struck him to indicate what he said wrong (18:23). The (military) power of this world also falls down when he, as the 'I am' addresses them (18:6). The King and his kingdom occupy a superior and victorious position towards the opposing political powers and from this position the interrelations are negotiated.

Jesus indeed brought peace to his followers, as is often stressed in John. In 16:33 Jesus ensures them that they will have peace in spite of persecution, since he conquered the world (ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν ἵνα ἐν ἐμοὶ εἰρήνην ἔχητε. ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ θλίψιν ἔχετε· ἀλλὰ θαρσεῖτε, ἐγὼ νενίκηκα τὸν κόσμον – see also 14:27). After his resurrection Jesus also greets his disciples regularly with the words 'Peace [p]eace be with you' (εἰρήνη ὑμῖν – 20:19, 21, 26). The presence of the resurrected Messiah-King is directly associated with the presence of peace.

The King as protector and sustainer of his people

The cultural perceptions about a king being somebody who takes care of his people is evident in 6:1–15, where the people end up trying to make Jesus king, because they regard his euergetic behaviour as echoing that of a king. According to

¹These research results were also used in developing my argument in my 2016 article.

their perceptions, he was indeed a charismatic person who cared for his people. This also seems to lie behind the crowd's reception of Jesus in Jerusalem as King of the Jews in 12:9–19 in the light of his charismatically powerful deed of raising Lazarus. As Chapter 6 unfolds, Jesus claims to be greater than the great Jewish prophet and leader Moses, as he is the bread of life, sent by the Father (6:25–40). Again we see the influence of the transcendental narrative about Jesus on earthly events. The earthly events are only signs (*sēmeia*) of who Jesus is and what he brings.

The presence and effects of Jesus' royal power are most clearly illustrated in the 'passion narratives'. The complete narrative space is coloured by the power of the King, Jesus. Two kingdoms, one of this world and one not of this world (18:36–37), meet, with ironic results. From an earthly perspective the picture looks significantly different than from a transcendental perspective. What seems to be a damning cross from the one perspective is clearly a throne (with the title of *King* mentioned on the throne in 19:19–22, namely, the King of the Jews – ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων) from the other; the guards and soldiers that come to take Jesus captive (by some estimates it could have been hundreds of armed men) look powerful from one perspective, but powerless when they fall down in front of Jesus. They are also powerless when Jesus tells them to let his followers go (18:3–11). The most powerful character in the Gospel from an earthly perspective, namely Pilate, only has power from a transcendental perspective, because it was given to him by God (19:10–11), and so we can continue. The narrative space created here is characterised and interpreted by the transcendental perspective. The transcendental perspective serves as a heuristic instrument in explaining the meaning and significance of earthly events. Using the concept of Jesus as king in the 'passion narrative' sets the stage and creates the space for the royal and divine power of Jesus to become evident (8:28; 10:17, 18; 11:25, 26). The power of Jesus overarches the events in an umbrella-like way.

The above examples illustrate how the concept of kingship in ancient times resonates in the description of Jesus as Messiah in John. Both the qualities and actions expected of an ancient king are to be found in Jesus. Obviously this picture can be developed further with numerous further examples, but within the confines of this article this illustration suffices.

Conclusion

It is worthwhile to reflect briefly on the process described above in terms of metaphor and space. The focus in John seems to fall on the presence of the incarnated Jesus within this cosmos. This presence is *inter alia* expressed in terms of the conceptual world of kingship or, stated differently, through the imagery of kingdom and kingship. This imagery creates specific spatial and qualitative expectations – Jesus is a king who rules a kingdom, which suggests spatiality of a certain quality. In John this spatiality forms a basis for the description of the qualitative relationship between Jesus and humans. As King, Jesus offers what a king would offer,

for instance, protection, judgment, life and so on. The presence of Jesus as king therefore suggests a certain 'type' of presence that should be conceptualised in terms of royal space. Thinking of spatiality in terms of influence or power means that whoever finds himself or herself in the presence of Jesus automatically finds himself or herself in the space of influence and actions of Jesus as Messiah, judge and protector. The response of a person to this influence and actions of Jesus will determine the status of the person within this spatial framework. As such this transcendental narrative serves as a heuristic device in interpreting and understanding earthly events.

Relationships that create qualitative space related to influence and acceptance of what is offered within that particular conceptual framework are in essence invisible. However, being determined by the confines of that particular space finds expression in behaviour. Children of the King will follow him; he proclaimed a royal space where love is the basic ethical requirement. Wherever love is actively expressed, the kingdom comes – the world will know that those who love like Jesus are the family of the King, the disciples of Jesus (13:34–35).

In light of the argument above, it is clear that metaphors or imagery indeed make it possible to cognitively grasp and understand the interchange between the transcendental and earthly realities.

I conclude with a quotation from Busse's (2006) seminal article on kingship in John.

Die Rekonstruktion des hellenistischen Königsbildes in seinen wesentlichen, die Zeit überdauernden Attributen hat im Rahmen von Einzelerzählungen auf dessen charismatische Individualität verwiesen, die auf militärische Erfolge und sozialstaatliche Wohltaten, legislative und juristische Kompetenz, diplomatische Weisheit und politisch erforderliche, bisweilen atemberaubende Selbstdarstellung beruhte. Alle diese Fähigkeiten sind wichtige Hinweise auf die gesellschaftlich-kulturelle wie religiöse Bedeutung des Königs. Die in den berichtenswerten Anekdoten aus römischer Zeit (u. a. Polybios, Plutarch, Diodor) noch greifbaren Erfahrungen setzen eine noch lebendige, sogar frische Erinnerung voraus. Der Autor des vierten Evangeliums konnte sie deshalb nutzen, um seinen

Lesern in Spiegelungen und Umkodierungen eines allgemein vorausgesetzten Königsbildes die Bedeutung der Jesusgestalt für sie selbst aufzuzeigen. (p. 316)

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

References

- Barrett, C.K., 1978, *The Gospel according to St John*, SPCK, London.
- Boyarin, D., 2014, 'Der Menschensohn in 1. Henoch und 4. Esra', *BThZ* 31(1), 1–63.
- Brown, R.E., [1966] 1971, *The Gospel according to John*, vol. 1, Chapman, London.
- Brown, R.E., 1972, *The Gospel according to John*, vol. 2, Chapman, London.
- Bultmann, R., [1978] 1986, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen.
- Busse, U., 1996, 'Tempelmetaphorik als ein Beispiel von implizitem Rekurs auf die biblische Tradition im Johannesevangelium', in C.M. Tuckett (ed.), *The scriptures in the Gospels*, pp. 395–428, Peters, Leuven.
- Busse, U., 2006, 'Metaphorik und Rhetorik im Johannesevangelium: Das Bildfeld vom König', in J. Frey, J.G. van der Watt & R. Zimmermann (eds.), *Imagery in the fourth Gospel*, pp. 279–317, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.
- Collins, J.J., 2014, 'The Messiah in ancient Judaism', *BThZ* 31(1), 17–40.
- Coloe, M.L., 2001, *God dwells with us. Temple symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN.
- Gottwald, M.K., 2001, *The politics of ancient Israel*, Westminster John Knox, Louisville, KY.
- Kaiser, O., 2014, 'Der Messias nach dem Alten und Neuen Testaments', *BThZ* 31(1), 64–107.
- Keener, C.S., 2003, *The Gospel of John*, vols. 1 and 2, Baker, Peabody, MA.
- Lincoln, A.T., 2000, *Truth on trial. The lawsuit motif in the fourth Gospel*, Hendrickson, Peabody, MA.
- Lincoln, A.T., 2015, 'Life of Jesus as testimony: The divine courtroom and the Gospel of John', in A. Mermelstein & S.E. Holtz (eds.), *The divine courtroom in comparative perspective*, pp. 145–166, Brill, Leiden.
- Loader, W.R.G., 2005, 'Jesus and the Law in John', in G. Van Belle, J.G. van der Watt & P. Maritz (eds.), *Theology and Christology in the fourth Gospel: Essays by the members of the SNTS Johannine writings seminar*, pp. 135–154, Peters, Leuven.
- Neyrey, J.H., 1987, 'Jesus the Judge: Forensic process in John 8:21–59', *Biblica* 68, 509–542.
- Schnackenburg, R., 1968, *The Gospel according to St John*, vol. 1, Herder and Herder, New York.
- Schnackenburg, R., 1982, *The Gospel according to St. John*. vol. 3, Burns & Oats, London.
- Van der Watt, J.G., 2000, *Family of the King. Dynamics of metaphor in the Gospel according to John*, Brill, Leiden.
- Van der Watt, J.G., 2007, *Introduction to John's Gospel and Letters*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh.
- Van der Watt, J.G., 2016, 'Are John's ethics apolitical?', *NTS* 62(3), 484–497.