

The ‘King of Israel’ in the Gospel of John

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Abstract

The Gospel of John attributes the title ‘King of Israel’ to Jesus twice (John 1:49; 12:13). Both occurrences are unique to John’s Gospel and are placed at key points in the overall narrative. Although ‘King of Israel’ is a commonly used title in Israel’s Scriptures, designating Saul, David, Solomon, and kings of the Northern Kingdom, only twice does it identify YHWH as the true King of Israel, namely in Isaiah 44:6 and Zephaniah 3:15. This article argues that the references to Jesus as ‘King of Israel’ in John 1:49 and 12:13 allude to precisely these two texts, implying that this Johannine designation portrays Jesus as uniquely representing YHWH’s kingship on earth.

1. Introduction

The Gospel of John provides a unique use of the title ‘King of Israel’ (ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ; John 1:49; 12:13).¹ The two occurrences of this title are unparalleled in the Synoptic Gospels. Whereas the latter use the designation in mockery of Jesus (Matt 27:42; Mark 15:32), John uses it as a title of honour. The first time, the phrase occurs on the lips of Nathanael (John 1:49); the second time, the crowd proclaims Jesus ‘King of Israel’ as he enters Jerusalem (John 12:13). Both stories feature at crucial points in the Gospel narrative. Nathanael’s confession precedes Jesus’s sign at Cana and the crowd’s confession follows Jesus’s final public sign – the resurrection of Lazarus. Together, they enclose Jesus’s public ministry.

1. The exact phrase ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ is found in John 12:13 and in 1:49 according to $\mathfrak{P}^{66}$, $\aleph$, K, M, U, Δ , Θ , Λ , Π , S, f13, 2, 28, 69, 118, 124, 157, 565, 700, 788, 1071, 1346, 1424, and $\mathfrak{M}$. Other ancient manuscripts of John 1:49 read οὗ βασιλεὺς εἶ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ.

This unique use of the title ‘King of Israel’ in combination with its strategic positioning begs the question of what the Evangelist seeks to communicate through this double designation. The significance of this question is heightened by the fact that ‘King of Israel’ is a distinct title in Israel’s Scriptures and other Second Temple Jewish literature. In Israel’s Scriptures, it designates David, Solomon, the kings of the Northern Kingdom,² and twice it refers to YHWH.³ In the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha it occurs only once. Psalms of Solomon 17 uses it in reference to an anticipated messianic figure from the line of David who, so the author hopes, will forcefully defeat the enemy.⁴

Considering all this, what does John’s Gospel aim to convey by attributing this distinct title to Jesus? This is the central question this article seeks to answer. In conjunction with examining John’s use of the title ‘King of Israel’ in the two relevant passages, I will discuss how a better understanding of this phrase contributes to the discussion about Davidic and divine kingship in John’s Gospel.⁵

2. ‘King of Israel’ in the Nathanael Narrative (John 1:45-51)

The title ‘King of Israel’ first occurs on the lips of Nathanael, one of Jesus’s first followers, according to John’s Gospel. The confession occurs towards the end of the story of Nathanael’s call (John 1:45-51). Nathanael addresses Jesus as ‘rabbi’ before declaring him to be both ‘the Son of God’ and ‘the King of Israel’ (John 1:49). Because of this dual declaration, many Johannine scholars contend that these titles convey a similar message. Both are understood as messianic titles for Jesus.⁶ ‘Son of God’ is commonly perceived to derive from texts like

2. E.g. 1 Sam 24:14; 1 Kgs 15:9; 2 Chron 8:11; Neh 13:26; Prov 1:1; Pss. Sol. 17:42.

3. Isa 44:6; Zeph 3:15.

4. Pss. Sol. 17:22-25.

5. This essay confines itself to discussing the title ‘King of Israel’ in John, leaving out other texts about Jesus’s kingship (e.g. John 6:15; 18:37), although the discussion here has ramifications for the wider discussion of kingship in John.

6. E.g. John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 346, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199297610.001.0001>; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1978), 185–186; Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 159; Rudolph Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, and J. K. Riches (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 104; Ulrich Busse, *Das Johannesevangelium: Bildlichkeit, Diskurs und Ritual* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 87; C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 228, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511520334>; Andrew Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 121; Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998),

2 Samuel 7:14, Psalm 2:7, and Psalm 89:26. Each of these texts describes the bond between the Davidic monarch and God as a father-son relationship. Nathanael's claim that Jesus is the 'Son of God' is therefore a confession that Jesus is a royal messianic figure. In keeping with this interpretation, 'King of Israel' is simply understood as a different way for Nathanael to communicate that Jesus is this anticipated messianic figure.

Another common explanation, not necessarily incommensurate with the first one, is that 'King of Israel' is an idiomatic variation on the title 'King of the Jews' (ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων; cf. John 19:19,21).⁷ The assumed reason for this variation is that Palestinian Jews in the first century would refer to each other not as 'Jews' but 'Israelites'.⁸ 'Jews' is the way gentiles would refer to the Jewish inhabitants of the region or the way Israelites would refer to themselves when speaking to gentiles. As Nathanael is an Israelite speaking to a fellow Israelite, 'King of Israel' would be the correct designation rather than 'King of the Jews'. This explanation holds up for the limited data John's Gospel offers on the use of the noun 'Israel' or 'Israelite' (John 1:31,49; 3:10; 12:13).

A variation on this second explanation is that, in contrast to the noun 'Jew' (Ἰουδαῖος), the noun 'Israel' (Ἰσραήλ) merely has positive connotations in John's Gospel. As some scholars contend, the difference between 'Jew' and 'Israel' is more than simply an idiomatic variation.⁹ 'Israel' has a religious dimension in John: it refers to the true people of God – those that, like Nathanael, accept the

56; J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 132, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001452466707800606>; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John* (London: Burns & Oates, 1968), 1: 317–318. Urban von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 2:65, <https://doi.org/10.5040/bci-0018>.

7. E.g. Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 159; 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), 303–304.

8. For a detailed argument on this particular point, see Lars Kierspel, *The Jews and the World in the Fourth Gospel*, WUNT 220 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 69–73 and John McHugh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1–4*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 163–164.

9. For a detailed treatment of this point, see Christopher M. Blumhofer, *The Gospel of John and the Future of Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 11–28, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108656122>.

revelation of Jesus as the Father's agent.¹⁰ They are the 'Israel' to whom Jesus is revealed (John 1:31).¹¹

Yet another variant on the meaning of 'Israel' in John 1:49 is that 'Israel' is a means for John to emphasise that Jesus is the king *from* the Northern Kingdom and *over* the Northern Kingdom as well.¹² At the outset of the Nathanael narrative, Philip declares Jesus to be 'Son of Joseph' (John 1:45); Joseph is the father of Ephraim, whose name becomes a shorthand for the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom (e.g. Jer 31:9). John's emphasis on Jesus's ancestry from Joseph in combination with the title 'King of Israel' may thus serve to emphasise his kingship not just over Judah but over all the tribes of Israel.¹³

Lastly, a small number of commentators contend that, although 'King of Israel' may simply be a messianic title when uttered by Nathanael, it attains a deeper meaning in the context of the entire Gospel.¹⁴ For John, Jesus is not simply a human king but also the divine king whose kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). For the Evangelist and for the attentive reader, the title is therefore ultimately an expression of Jesus's divine kingship.

Of course, one can imagine various combinations of the interpretations just described. They are not all mutually exclusive and offer various conceivable ways to interpret the title 'King of Israel' in John 1:49. However, I contend there are good reasons to pursue yet another explanation. I believe there are persuasive arguments to interpret the unique occurrence of the title 'King of Israel' in the Nathanael narrative as an example of scriptural reuse in John's Gospel. That

10. Johannes Beutler, *Das Johannesevangelium: Kommentar*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 2016), 115–116; Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 1:87; Ernst Haenchen, *John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1–6*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 166; McHugh, *John*, 164; Udo Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998), 56.

11. Although I contend John is familiar with the idea of a remnant *within* the people of Israel (cf. section 2.3), equating the term 'Israel' with this believing remnant in John is problematic. The purpose of Jesus's signs in John is to *publicly* reveal his identity as the one sent by the Father, even if not all perceive this (cf. John 12:37). 'Israel' in John 1:31 is therefore best understood as a collective term for those people to whom Jesus will soon begin to reveal his identity, not just those who respond positively.

12. Michael A. Daise, *Quotations in John: Studies on Jewish Scripture in the Fourth Gospel* (LNTS 610; London: T&T Clark, 2020), 189–191, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780567681812>; Günter Reim, 'Nordreich-Südreich: der vierte Evangelist als Vertreter christlicher Nordreichstheologie', *BZ* 36/2 (1992): 235–236.

13. Reim offers a brief overview of how John emphasises the theology of the Northern Kingdom in his Gospel. 'Nordreich-Südreich', 235–240.

14. McHugh, *John*, 164; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1:514; Michael Theobald, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes: Kapitel 1–12* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2009), 194–195.

is, the title is best explained as a literary allusion, an unmarked reference,¹⁵ to specific scriptural subtexts. This interpretative strategy itself is not surprising given John's dense use of literary allusions elsewhere.¹⁶ Furthermore, the literary context of the Nathanael story gives reason for pursuing an intertextual explanation of the title 'King of Israel'. First, Nathanael's confession forms the conclusion to a succession of titles attributed to Jesus in John 1:29-49.¹⁷ These titles are frequently explained with reference to their scriptural subtexts.¹⁸ Moreover, scholars commonly seek to explain ostensibly puzzling elements in the Nathanael narrative with reference to Israel's Scriptures. The enigmatic fig tree, for instance, has been the subject of several scholarly articles examining its scriptural background. The proposed backgrounds include the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17), the fig tree as a symbol for Israel (Hos 9:10), and the fig tree related to the eschatological age (Zech 3:10 and Mic 4:4).¹⁹ Finally, the Nathanael narrative explicitly directs the reader to Israel's Scriptures: 'We have found him about whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote ...' (John 1:45).²⁰ Israel's Scriptures are marked as the source for discovering Jesus's identity. Given all these reasons, it is perhaps surprising

15. Earl Miner, s.v. 'Allusion' in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 38-40.

16. Cf. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 281-345.

17. Jesus is confessed to be 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (1:29), 'the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit' (1:31), 'the Chosen One of God' according to $\mathfrak{P}^{106}$, $\mathfrak{P}^{5\text{vid}}$, the original hand of Sinaiticus and the old Latin and old Syriac translations, or 'the Son of God' according to the other major manuscript traditions (1:34), 'Rabbi' (1:38), 'the Messiah' (1:41), 'Jesus, Son of Joseph' (1:45), 'Son of God' (1:49), and 'King of Israel' (1:49). Jesus uses the self-designation 'Son of Man' (1:51).

18. For example, although the exact scriptural texts are debated, the title 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29) is typically explained as deriving from several scriptural texts at once. Richard Bauckham proposes a combination of Gen 22:8, Exod 12:3, and Isa 53:7b,11b,12c, *Gospel of Glory*, 153-157. Likewise, as already observed, the title 'Son of God' is commonly understood to originate from various scriptural passages (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7; 89:26).

19. C. R. Koester, 'Messianic Exegesis and the Call of Nathanael (John 1.45-51)', *JSNT* 39 (1990): 23-34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X9001203902>; Tobias Nicklas, 'Unter dem Feigenbaum: Die Rolle des Lesers im Dialog zwischen Jesus und Natanael (John 1.45-50)', *NTS* 46.2 (2000): 193-203, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688500000126>; J. Ramsey Michaels, 'Nathanael under the Fig Tree', *ET* 78 (1967): 182-183.

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that a thorough intertextual explanation of the title ‘King of Israel’ in John 1:49 has not been significantly pursued in modern scholarship.²¹

2.1 Interlude: Literary Allusions in John

Before proceeding to exploring the possible scriptural background of the title ‘King of Israel’ in the Nathanael narrative, it is useful, given the argument advanced in this article, to briefly consider how one might identify a literary allusion from one composition to another, in this case, from John’s Gospel to various texts in Israel’s Scriptures. First, an allusion should be distinguished from a quotation. In John, the latter is typically preceded by an introduction formula such as ‘it is written’ (ἔστιν γεγραμμένον – John 2:17; 6:31,45; 10:34; 12:14) or ‘so that the scripture may be fulfilled’ (ἵνα ἡ γραφή πληρωθῇ – John 13:18; 17:12; 19:24,36). And, even when a quotation is not marked, such as in John 12:13, it may still be identified as such because of its ‘word-for-word agreement, and a certain discreteness between the cited material and its surrounding frame’.²² In contrast, a literary allusion is not only unmarked but also lacks the discreteness that characterises a quotation. Allusions are incorporated into the alluding text.²³ Yet the ways allusions are integrated in the Johannine text varies. Sometimes a couple of key words is enough to signal a connection to a specific subtext. For example, the nouns ‘flesh’ (σὰρξ) and ‘glory’ (δόξα) in John 1:14 arguably signal a connection to Isaiah 40:5, which depicts the ‘glory’ of Israel’s God becoming visible to all ‘flesh’.²⁴ In other cases, John uses a string of words, or a phrase, to evoke a specific scriptural story. A good example is a phrase from John 1:51: ‘You will see the heaven

21. The one exception is Daise, who discusses the connection between John 1:49 and Zeph 3:13 in *Quotations in John*, 184–185, 189–191.

22. Susan Docherty, ‘Crossing Testamentary Borders: Methodological Insights for OT/NT Study from Contemporary Hebrew Bible Scholarship’, in *Methodology in the Use of the Old Testament in the New: Context and Criteria*, ed. David Allen and Steve Smith, LNTS 579 (New York: T&T Clark, 2020), 16, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780567678065.0008>; cf. William Tooman, *Gog of Magog: Reuse of Scripture and Compositional Technique in Ezekiel 38–39*, FAT 2/52 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 5, <https://doi.org/10.1628/978-3-16-151752-5>.

23. Christopher A. Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 17, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004170810.i-344>.

24. LXX: καὶ ὁφθήσεται ἡ δόξα κυρίου, καὶ ὄψεται πᾶσα σὰρξ τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅτι κύριος ἐλάλησεν / MT: וְרָאוּ כָּל-בָּשָׂר יְהוָה יִחְדָּו כִּי פִי יְהוָה דִּבֶּר. John here inverts the Isaian logic. Rather than YHWH’s glory becoming visible to all flesh, YHWH’s glory becomes visible in the ‘flesh’ of the Logos. This allusion is also observed by Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 51 and Martin Hengel, ‘The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth’, in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 269.

opened and *the angels of God ascending and descending* on the Son of Man.²⁵ This phrase clearly alludes to Genesis 28:12. According to this text, Jacob sees '*the angels of God ascending and descending*' on a ladder (Gen 28:12).²⁶ Yet in other cases, Johannine allusions to a specific scriptural narrative can be scattered throughout a larger portion of the composition. Nicholas Schaser recently offered a compelling example by showing how various allusions to Genesis 1–3 are found across the Johannine passion narrative.²⁷ These allusions are seamlessly incorporated into the alluding text. Because of these varied forms in which allusions appear, they are harder to identify than citations. In fact, identifying an allusion has an inevitable subjective element to it. While one can objectively identify the lexical correspondences between two compositions, this does not resolve the question of whether this overlap is intentional by the author or not.²⁸ Therefore, New Testament scholars often revert to certain criteria to determine the plausibility of an allusion. Regularly employed criteria include *availability* (whether the proposed source is available to the author and original audience), *volume* (the degree of explicit repetition of words, phrases or syntactical patterns), *recurrence* (how often the same passage or larger compositional context is alluded to elsewhere), *thematic coherence* (how well the reading fits within the overall argument of the author), and *history of*

25. καὶ τοὺς ἀγγέλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἀναβαίνοντας καὶ καταβαίνοντας ἐπὶ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (John 1:51).

26. καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ ἀνέβαινον καὶ κατέβαινον ἐπ' αὐτῆς (Gen 28:12 LXX).

27. Nicholas J. Schaser, 'Inverting Eden: The Reversal of Genesis 1–3 in John's Passion', *Word & World* 40 (2020): 263–270. To name two examples, after a life of obedience Jesus is given a crown of 'thorns' (ἄκανθα; John 19:2), recalling the thorns growing out of the ground following Adam's disobedience (Gen 3:18 LXX). After Jesus's death, his 'side' (πλευρά; John 19:34) is pierced and water and blood – two substances John associates with 'life' (ζωή) (cf. John 4:14; 6:53–54) – flow out. Correspondingly, in LXX Genesis 'Eve' (Ζωή = life) is created from Adam's 'side' (πλευρά; Gen 2:21). Through these and other allusions, John crafts an elaborate inversion of Gen 1–3.

28. The discussion about authorial intent in relation to allusions is a complex one. Ultimately, questions of intentionality are by nature inferential and conjectural. One can show the degree of textual correspondence between two texts and discuss the possible function of an allusion in the alluding composition, but intentionality is hard to prove. A further complicating factor is that John's Gospel could be – in the view of some scholars – a composite text with multiple authors who could have had different 'intents'. Alexander Nehemas offers a pragmatic way forward in this regard by his model of the 'postulated author' – an author inferred from the text and constructed by the reader, to be distinguished from the historical author(s). This construct may change when the reader encounters new information. Alexander Nehemas, 'The Postulated Author: Critical Monism as a Regulative Ideal', *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981): 133–149, <https://doi.org/10.1086/448144>.

interpretation (whether ancient and modern readers have picked up the same correspondences).²⁹ Together this may lead the interpreter to an informed judgement on the *historical plausibility* of the allusion, answering the question of whether the author could have intended the alleged meaning and whether it would have been understandable on the part of the original audience. Based on the interpreter's judgement an allusion may be labelled as *possible*, *plausible* or *almost certain*.

2.2 Nathanael's Confession and Isaiah 44:1-8

Returning to the Nathanael narrative, I propose that the title 'King of Israel' (John 1:49) is one of the lexical signals that connects this passage to two specific scriptural subtexts that both contain this title. The first of these is Isaiah 44:1-8.³⁰ To summarise this passage:

- YHWH offers a message of comfort to his chosen servant Jacob/Israel (Isa 44:1-2).
- YHWH promises to pour out his Spirit on the descendants of Jacob/Israel (Isa 44:3).
- These descendants, in turn, 'shall spring up like a green tamarisk, like willows by flowing streams' (Isa 44:4).
- They will profess that they belong to Israel's God (Isa 44:5) and will 'adopt' (יִכְנֶה) the name of Israel (MT). Or, as the ancient Greek versions put it,³¹

29. The five criteria mentioned here are a selection from the seven offered in the landmark work on this subject by Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (London: Yale University Press, 1989), 26–27. For a recent discussion of Hays's criteria and the current *status quaestionis* on such criteria see David Allen, 'The Use of Criteria: The State of the Question', in *Methodology in the Use of the Old Testament in the New: Context and Criteria*, ed. David Allen and Steve Smith, LNTS 579 (New York: T&T Clark, 2020), 129–141, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780567678065.0018>.

30. The potential connections between the Nathanael narrative and Isa 44 were noted by Marie-Émile Boismard as early as 1956 (*Du baptême à Cana (Jean 1,19-2,11)*, LD 18 (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1956), 96–98). Boismard tried to explain Jesus's characterisation of Nathanael as a true 'Israelite' and identified Isa 44:5 as its potential scriptural subtext. His suggestion was discussed by Raymond Brown (*John*, 1:87) and Severino Pancaro (*The Law*, 303–304), both of whom ultimately dismissed it. Boismard did not, however, identify all the textual connections between John 1:45–51 and Isa 44:1–8. Importantly for our purposes, he does not propose the phrase 'the King of Israel' (Isa 44:6) as a significant subtext for Nathanael's confession in John 1:49.

31. One way to tell John is familiar with the LXX (which itself is a heuristic designation for the plethora of ancient Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures) is by examining the Gospel's explicit quotations of scripture. The majority of these are closer to the LXX than the MT. For a schematic overview see Bruce G. Schuchard, 'Form versus Function: Citation Technique and Authorial Intention in the Gospel of John', in

they will 'be called by the name Israel' (LXX).³²

- This transformed community is called to be a witness to YHWH ('You are my witnesses', Isa 44:8), who is described as the only God (Isa 44:6), the omniscient God (Isa 44:7), and the true King of Israel (Isa 44:6).

In John 1:29-51, one can detect various narrative connections to this passage. Isaiah 44 and John 1 share the motif of Spirit-baptism (John 1:33). But whereas Isaiah presents YHWH as the one who pours out his Spirit (Isa 44:3), John presents Jesus as the one baptising with the Holy Spirit (John 1:33). In like manner, Isaiah envisions the descendants of Jacob/Israel professing allegiance to YHWH (Isa 44:5). In John, the burgeoning ministry of Jesus attracts descendants of Jacob/Israel to profess their allegiance to him (John 1:35-51). Finally, in Isaiah some of the transformed descendants of Jacob will 'adopt' or 'be called by' the name 'Israel'. In John, Jesus calls Nathanael, one of Jacob's descendants who pledges allegiance to him, 'truly an Israelite' (John 1:47). The most overt textual correspondence between the two text segments, however, is the designation 'King of Israel' shared by Isaiah 44:6 and John 1:49. Again, whereas Isaiah attributes the title to YHWH, John uses it with reference to Jesus. Furthermore, Isaiah uses this royal title in connection to YHWH's omniscience; he announces 'the coming things before they happen' (Isa 44:7 LXX).³³ And he then calls Jacob/Israel to witness that he is the one true God (Isa 44:8). Analogously, Nathanael's confession of Jesus as 'King of Israel' also happens in the context of an encounter in which Jesus displays his omniscience: 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you' (John 1:48). This supernatural display of knowledge transforms Nathanael from a reluctant character ('Can anything good come out of Nazareth', John 1:46) to an overt witness of Jesus as 'King of Israel' (John 1:49). Comparing these two passages, the most conspicuous difference is that Jesus assumes the role that YHWH performs in Isaiah. *Jesus* is the one who baptises with the Spirit, *Jesus* is the one displaying divine omniscience, and *Jesus* is the true 'King of Israel'. This

Abiding Words, the Use of Scripture in the Gospel of John, ed. Alicia D. Myers and Bruce G. Schuchard, RBS 81 (Atlanta: SBL, 2015), 42-43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt155jm87.6>. This is not to say John did not know or use the Hebrew text of Israel's Scriptures. For a specific example where John's dependence on the MT is clear, see Bauckham's discussion of John's use of MT Isaiah in John 12:38-41, *Gospel of Glory*, 53-55.

32. οὗτος ἐρεῖ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰμι καὶ οὗτος βοήσεται ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰακωβ καὶ ἕτερος ἐπιγράψει τοῦ θεοῦ εἰμι ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰσραὴλ (Isa 44:5 LXX). The translation is my own. I take the middle-passive verb βοήσεται to be implicit in the final phrase.

33. τὰ ἐπερχόμενα πρὸ τοῦ ἐλθεῖν (Isa 44:7 LXX). The translation is my own.

specific example of intertextuality is one way, then, that John tightly binds the role and identity of Jesus to that of Israel's God.³⁴

In summary, there are good reasons for interpreting Nathanael's confession of Jesus as 'King of Israel' (John 1:49) as an intertextual reference to Isaiah 44:6. In addition to the overlapping phrase 'King of Israel', the larger text segments (Isa 44:1-8 and John 1:29-51)³⁵ share various plot elements (Spirit-baptism, allegiance to YHWH/Jesus, Israel/Israelite as a name, omniscience by the protagonist). Together, they offer an example of a Johannine allusion that is both signalled by a specific phrase, and by various plot elements incorporated in a larger text segment. In my opinion, this is a *plausible* allusion.³⁶

2.3 Nathanael's Confession and the Remnant in Zephaniah 3

There is yet another intertext with substantial relevance to the Nathanael narrative. Whereas on one level Jesus's description of Nathanael as an Israelite 'in whom there is no deceit' sets up a comparison between Nathanael and Jacob,³⁷ who is renamed 'Israel' (Gen 32:22-32) and presented as a deceitful character (e.g. Gen 27:35), I propose that this phrase also forges a connection between this Johannine pericope and the description of the faithful Israelite remnant and the jubilant daughter Zion in Zephaniah 3:11-20.³⁸ The description 'in whom there is no deceit' (ἐν ᾧ δόλος οὐκ ἔστιν, John 1:47) is, with some

34. Another example is John 1:23, which quotes Isa 40:3 and implicitly casts Jesus in the role Isaiah reserves for YHWH.

35. There are other literary signals that show John 1:29-51 forms a coherent text segment. John closely links the baptiser's testimony of Jesus and Nathanael's confession through various structural parallels: just as John the baptiser 'sees' (βλέπει) Jesus 'coming towards him' (ἐρχόμενον πρὸς αὐτόν) 'and says behold' (καὶ λέγει ἴδε) before confessing Jesus to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, so Nathanael 'sees' (εἶδεν) Jesus 'coming towards him' (ἐρχόμενον πρὸς αὐτόν) 'and says behold' (καὶ λέγει ἴδε) before designating him as an Israelite in whom there is no deceit; cf. Boismard, *Du baptême à Cana*, 98. Another way the Evangelist ties this literary unit together is by the repetition of the noun Israel (John 1:31, 47): John baptised so that Jesus 'may be revealed to Israel' (John 1:31), Nathanael functions as a paradigmatic Israelite to whom Jesus is now revealed (John 1:47).

36. A more detailed rationale for this classification will be given in the conclusion of this article.

37. E.g. Brown, *John*, 1: 87; Keener, *John*, 485-486; Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 52.

38. A few other scholars make note of this possible connection, e.g. Daise, *Quotations in John*, 184-185, 189-191; Theobald, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 193; Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 169-170.

variation, only used at a few other places in Israel's Scriptures.³⁹ One of them is the idealistic characterisation of the Israelite remnant in Zephaniah 3:13, of whom it is said 'There will not be found a deceitful tongue in their mouth (οὐ μὴ εὐρεθῇ ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν γλῶσσαι δολία).'⁴⁰

In Zephaniah, the formation of this ideal remnant is the result of YHWH's transforming work. The Israelite community will be purged of those that are proud and haughty (Zeph 3:11); instead, YHWH will leave a people that are humble and lowly (Zeph 3:12); this remnant-without-deceit will live without fear in their land (Zeph 3:13). Because of this, the city of Jerusalem/Zion and the Israelite remnant are called to rejoice, for YHWH, 'the King of Israel', is in her midst (Zeph 3:15), granting her his presence and peace (Zeph 3:16-20).

John's characterisation of Nathanael as an Israelite 'in whom there is no deceit' (John 1:47) and Nathanael's confession of Jesus as 'King of Israel' (John 1:49) thus create two textual connections to Zephaniah 3 spanning both Zephaniah's description of the ideal remnant (Zeph 3:11-13) and that remnant's response to the presence of their divine king, YHWH (Zeph 3:14-20). Reading John 1:45-51 in light of Zephaniah 3:11-20 offers the reader yet another perspective on the Nathanael narrative: John portrays Nathanael as a representative of the Israelite remnant 'without deceit' and Jesus embodies the presence of YHWH, 'the King of Israel', with this remnant.⁴¹

Additionally, as Richard Bauckham argues, the keyword 'deceit' (δόλος) may already forge a connection between Isaac's characterisation of Jacob/Israel who came with 'deceit' (Gen 27:25) and Zephaniah's characterisation of the Israelite remnant without 'deceit' (Zeph 3:13).⁴² On this reading, John picks up on an already existing textual connection between Genesis 27 and Zephaniah 3 in his description of Nathanael. Be that as it may, the overlapping phrase 'King of Israel' (Zeph 3:15; John 1:49) and the corresponding characterisation

39. A similar phrase is used in LXX Ps 31:2 to describe a righteous man (οὐδὲ ἔστιν ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ δόλος) and in Isa 53.9 to describe YHWH's servant (οὐδὲ εὐρέθη δόλος ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ).

40. Zeph 3:13 LXX; translation is my own.

41. Nathanael's initial response, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth' (John 1:46), creates another possible point of connection between the two passages. Whereas his initial response may be characterised as 'haughty', he is then characterised as someone 'in whom there is no deceit' (John 1:47). This would create a parallel with the transformation among the Israelites described in Zeph 3:11-13. First YHWH declares 'You shall no longer be haughty' (vs. 11); then the remnant is described as being without deceit (vs. 13).

42. Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 169-170.

of the ideal remnant/Nathanael (Zeph 3:13; John 1:47) also make this proposed allusion one that is, in my opinion, *plausible*.

2.4 Summary and Caveat

In the above, I have argued that the Nathanael pericope contains numerous literary allusions to Israel's Scriptures. By means of these unmarked references, the Evangelist (1) portrays Nathanael as a representative of the transformed offspring of Jacob called by the name 'Israel' (Isa 44:5) and (2) depicts Nathanael as a representative of the Israelite remnant 'without deceit' (Zeph 3:13). Significant for my main argument, one way John connects the Nathanael pericope to Isaiah 44 and Zephaniah 3 is through the phrase 'King of Israel' (Isa 44:6; Zeph 3:14; John 1:49). As I set out in the introduction, Isaiah 44:6 and Zephaniah 3:15 are *the only two passages in Israel's Scriptures that attribute this title to YHWH*. This then strongly suggests the Evangelist seeks to make a point about the nature of Jesus's kingship through this title: Jesus is not merely a human king; rather, Jesus's kingship uniquely represents the presence and reign of Israel's divine King, YHWH, among his people.

My argument requires one crucial caveat. I do not wish to argue that, within John's narrative world, Nathanael was aware of all the theological implications of his confession of Jesus as 'King of Israel'. To the contrary, Jesus's reply suggests that he did not comprehend the full extent of his own confession: 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these' (John 1:50).⁴³ At this point in the narrative, Nathanael may well have understood Jesus to be the anticipated Davidic messiah, someone like the hoped for 'King of Israel' of Psalms of Solomon 17.⁴⁴ But did this not preclude the Evangelist from communicating a more profound understanding of Jesus's kingship by means of the title 'King of Israel'. In fact, it is a very Johannine idea that a true understanding of Jesus's identity is not yet attainable for the characters in the narrative prior to Jesus's exaltation. Only from a post-resurrection perspective and under the guidance of the Spirit can one grasp the truth of who Jesus is (cf. John 2:22; 12:16; 14:26). Furthermore, Nathanael would not be unique in failing to comprehend the full extent of his own words. John elsewhere offers the example of Caiaphas, who unwittingly prophesied about Jesus's death (cf. John 11:49-52). Although Nathanael might think of Jesus as merely a human king when he confesses Jesus as 'the King of Israel', John draws the attentive audience by means of

43. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *John and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 69–70, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198792505.001.0001>.

44. Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 159–161.

literary allusion to Israel's Scriptures where they might discover the true nature of Jesus's kingship.

3. The Triumphal Entry (John 12:12-16)

The phrase 'King of Israel' next occurs as an utterance of the crowd that welcomes Jesus as he enters Jerusalem. This pericope contains two of the Gospel's scriptural quotations (John 12:13,15) that shed further light on John's presentation of Jesus's kingship.⁴⁵

Although all four Gospels render the story of Jesus's triumphal entry, the Johannine version differs from the Synoptic account in almost every detail.⁴⁶ The composition of the crowd is different. In John, the crowd consists of people who heard Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead (John 12:18), as narrated in John 11. The actions of the crowd differ. They 'go out to welcome' Jesus,⁴⁷ recalling the contemporary custom for welcoming a high official, king, or emperor to a city.⁴⁸ John uses a distinct phrase for the palm branches, τὰ βᾶῖα τῶν φοινίκων, which resembles the phrases used in 1 Maccabees 13:51 and 2 Maccabees 10:7.⁴⁹ In 1 Maccabees 13:51 the palm branches feature in a triumphal procession after Simon Maccabeus has regained the citadel at Jerusalem. In 2 Maccabees 10:7 the branches are used in the context of the rededication of the temple after the enemy has been violently defeated. The final difference with the Synoptic tradition is the utterance of the crowd: after

45. These scriptural quotations – though it should be noted that verse 13 is not introduced by a typical quotation formula – have been the subject of close scholarly scrutiny in a number of studies: Andrew Craig Brunson, 'The Coming One: An Intertextual Study of Psalm 118 in the Gospel of John,' PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 2001, 167–267; Daise, *Quotations in John*, 157–199; Edwin D. Freed, *Old Testament Quotations in the Gospel of John* (NovTSup 11; Leiden: Brill, 1965), 61–81, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004265882>; Maarten J. J. Menken, *Old Testament Quotations in the Fourth Gospel: Studies in Textual Form*, CBQ 15 (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1996), 79–97; Bruce G. Schuchard, *Scripture Within Scripture: The Interrelationship of Form and Function in the Explicit Old Testament Citations in the Gospel of John*, SBLDS 133 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 71–84; Catrin Williams, 'Composite Citations in the Gospel of John', in *Composite Citations in Antiquity, Volume Two: New Testament Uses*, Sean A. Adams and Seth M. Ehorn, ed. (New York: T&T Clark, 2018), 104–110.

46. Dodd, *The Interpretation*, 152–156.

47. ἐξῆλθον εἰς ὑπάντησιν αὐτοῦ; John 12:13

48. Thompson, *John*, 264.

49. 1 Macc 13:51 uses βᾶῖον; 2 Macc 10:7 uses φοῖνιξ. John uses both words. In contrast, the Synoptics use respectively κλάδος (Matt), στιβάς (Mark), while the Gospel of Luke does not mention the branches at all.

the quotation from Psalm 118 (117 LXX),⁵⁰ the Evangelist adds the phrase ‘even the King of Israel’ (καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ). This combination of distinctive elements, particularly the use of the palm branches, suggests that, at this point in the narrative, the crowd perceives Jesus as a king who will bring victory in the manner of the Maccabean victories over the occupying forces.⁵¹ In other words, the ‘King of Israel’ the crowd expects looks similar to the ‘King of Israel’ of Psalms of Solomon 17: ‘And gird him with strength, that he may shatter unrighteous rulers, and that he may purge Jerusalem from nations that trample her down to destruction.’⁵² Indeed, many commentators have interpreted this scene as a nationalistic misinterpretation of Jesus’s kingship.⁵³ However, a close examination of the scriptural background of John 12:13 and 15 directs the reader to a radically different conclusion about the nature of Jesus’s kingship.

3.1 The Composite Nature of John 12:13 and 15

Like many other early Christian writings, John’s Gospel contains several composite citations.⁵⁴ These citations are composed of several scriptural texts at once. John 12:13, although not introduced by a typical citation formula, combines the words from Psalm 118 (117 LXX) with the phrase καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ. In similar vein, John 12:15 is composed of various scriptural subtexts. Zechariah 9:9 is of primary influence on John 12:15.⁵⁵ The shared vocabulary between these texts is as follows:

50. Ps 117:26 (LXX) is quoted at first: ὡσαννὰ εὐλογημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου.

51. Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture*, 77.

52. καὶ ὑπόζωσον αὐτὸν ἰσχὺν τοῦ θραῦσαι ἄρχοντας ἀδίκους, καθάρισαι Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἀπὸ ἐθνῶν καταπατούντων ἐν ἀπωλείᾳ. The title ‘King of Israel’ (βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ) is used in verse 42.

53. E.g. Brown, *John*, 1: 462; Keener, *John*, 2: 868–869; Von Wahlde, *The Letters and the Gospel of John*, 2: 540–541. Brunson, ‘The Coming One’, 251–267 and Daise, *Quotations in John*, 192–194 argue against the view that the crowd misunderstood Jesus’s kingship. Although I am sympathetic to most of their concerns, I still contend that the allusions to 1 and 2 Macc in combination with the title ‘King of Israel’ make a strong case for a nationalistic misunderstanding.

54. E.g. John 6:31, 7:37–38, 12:15, 15:25, 19:36; for a full overview, see Williams, ‘Composite Citations’, 94–127.

55. So also Daise, *Quotations in John*, 167–180; Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 79–82; Freed, *Old Testament Quotations*, 67–69; Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture*, 73–74; Williams, ‘Composite Citations’, 106–107.

Zechariah 9:9 (LXX):

Χαῖρε σφόδρα, **θύγατερ Σιων**, κήρυσσε, θύγατερ
Ιερουσαλημ,
ἰδοὺ ὁ βασιλεὺς σου ἔρχεται σοι, δίκαιος
καὶ σῶζων αὐτός, πραῦς καὶ ἐπιβεβηκὼς ἐπὶ
ὕποζυγιον καὶ **πῶλον** νέον.

John 12:15:

μὴ φοβοῦ, **θυγάτηρ Σιών**
ἰδοὺ ὁ βασιλεὺς σου ἔρχεται,
καθήμενος ἐπὶ **πῶλον** ὄνου.

The verse in Zechariah is part of a more extensive section describing the arrival of a humble king bringing righteousness, salvation, and peace to Zion and the nations. The exact identity of this king remains unclear, but he acts in close relation with YHWH, the divine protector of Daughter Zion/Jerusalem.⁵⁶

Besides Zechariah 9:9, the contribution of Zephaniah 3:14-15 (LXX) to the wording of John 12:15 (and 13) is also widely recognised.⁵⁷ Greek Zephaniah 3:14 starts with precisely the same words as Greek Zechariah 9:9: Χαῖρε σφόδρα, θύγατερ Σιων, κήρυσσε, θύγατερ Ιερουσαλημ ('Rejoice greatly, daughter Zion, proclaim, daughter Jerusalem'). This textual correspondence is not found in the Hebrew versions of Zephaniah and Zechariah. As Dogniez has argued, this suggests these texts were read and interpreted in light of each other at an early stage of the tradition history (although the direction of influence is unclear).⁵⁸ Following this observation, John's Gospel is likely not the first to combine these two texts. Although the shared vocabulary between Zephaniah 3:14 and John 12:15 merely consists of the phrase θύγατερ Σιων, Zephaniah 3:15 contains the phrase βασιλεὺς Ἰσραήλ ('King of Israel'), which closely corresponds to the Evangelist's addition to the citation of Psalm 118 (117 LXX) in John 12:13: καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ.⁵⁹ Furthermore, it is worth noting that the MT of Zephaniah 3:16 contains the phrase **אַיִן פֶּחַד** ('do not be afraid'), which may have influenced the opening phrase of John 12:15: μὴ φοβοῦ.⁶⁰ Together, it is

56. Zech 9:14-17; Cf. Beth M. Stovell, *Mapping Metaphorical Discourse in the Fourth Gospel: John's Eternal King*, Linguistic Biblical Studies 5 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012), 127-130.

57. Daise, *Quotations in John*, 167-180; Freed, *Old Testament Quotations*, 67-68; Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 84; Schuchard, *Scripture Within Scripture*, 75-76; Williams, 'Composite Citations', 104-110.

58. C. Dogniez, 'L'intertextualité dans la LXX de Zacharie 9-14', in *Interpreting Translation: Studies on the LXX and Ezekiel in Honour of Johan Lust*, ed. F. Garcia Martinez and M. Vervenne (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 90.

59. So also Daise, *Quotations in John*, 184-195; Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 84; Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture*, 75-76; Williams, 'Composite Citations', 107-108.

60. The Greek of Zephaniah 3:16 renders the Hebrew phrase **אַיִן פֶּחַד** with the imperative θάρσει ('take courage'). Another option is that the phrase 'there shall be none to make them afraid' (οὐκ ἔσται ὁ ἐκφοβῶν αὐτούς) of Zephaniah 3:13 (LXX) has influenced the opening of John 12:15.

likely that Zephaniah 3:14-15 influenced the wording of both John 12:15 and 13. This is significant, because, unlike Zechariah 9, the identity of the king is clear in Zephaniah: it is YHWH. In the context of the book of Zephaniah, the presence of this divine 'King of Israel' ushers in an era of peace, forgiveness, and restoration, linked to the conversion of the nations (Zeph 3:9-10) and the formation of the faithful remnant of Israel (Zeph 3:11-13).

In addition to Zechariah 9 and Zephaniah 3, there are also good reasons to assume Isaiah 44 is part of the scriptural subtext of the composite citations in John 12:13 and 15.⁶¹ Not only does the Greek text of Isaiah 44:6 contain the phrase ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ, the exact phrase John 12:13 adds to the citation of Psalm 118 (117 LXX); Isaiah 44:2 also contains the phrase μὴ φοβοῦ, corresponding to the opening words of John 12:15. In fact, as Schuchard has noted, Isaiah 44:6 and John 12:13 are the only two places in Israel's Scriptures and the New Testament where the exact phrase ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ occurs.⁶² The possible influence of Isaiah 44, then, can plausibly account for the added phrase 'the King of Israel' in John 12:13 and the phrase 'do not be afraid' of the composite citation of John 12:15. There are compelling reasons as to why the Evangelist would draw on this Isaianic tradition. First, Isaiah frequently uses the phrase μὴ φοβοῦ to denote the comfort YHWH's presence brings to God's troubled people.⁶³ Given the historical situation of the people of Israel at Jesus's royal entry in Jerusalem – being subject to the rule of a foreign empire – this expression of consolation is certainly appropriate. By means of this phrase John communicates that YHWH has not forgotten his people but has come to visit them in the person of Jesus. Second, by drawing on Isaiah 44 the Evangelist again emphasises the divine nature of Jesus's kingship. The reason Israel ought not to be afraid is that someone surpassing all human kings is here: in Jesus, Israel's divine king is truly among his people.

The final scriptural subtext that is widely recognised to underlie John's scriptural quotation in John 12:15 is Genesis 49:11.⁶⁴ In contrast to Zechariah 9:9 and the Synoptic Gospels, John 12:15 describes the animal Jesus is seated

61. For this view, see also Daise, *Quotations in John*, 172, 184; Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture*, 77–78, and Williams, 'Composite Citations', 104–109.

62. Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture*, 77–78.

63. E.g. Isa 40:9; 41:10; 43:1-2; cf. Williams, 'Composite Citations', 109. More broadly, this phrase is common to introduce divine visitations in Israel's Scriptures (e.g. Gen 15:1; Judg 6:23).

64. See Daise, *Quotations in John*, 177–178, 194–196; Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 91–95; Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture*, 80–84; Williams, 'Composite Citations', 110.

on as 'a donkey's colt' (πῶλον ὄνου).⁶⁵ Among Israel's Scriptures, this unique phrase only appears in the Greek of Genesis 49:11: τὸν πῶλον τῆς ὄνου.⁶⁶ Genesis 49:11 is part of Jacob's blessing on Judah, which envisions a future ruler who is the expectation of the nations. Ample evidence for a royal messianic interpretation of this verse can be found among the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Targum traditions.⁶⁷ By using this specific phrase John joins this tradition by linking the royal entry of Jesus to Jacob's blessing on Judah.

Considering the textual evidence, the Johannine account of Jesus's triumphal entry in Jerusalem evokes a plethora of scriptural material. Together, the combination of these texts offers a multidimensional portrayal of Jesus's royal identity: Jesus is the anticipated ruler from the line of Judah; he is the coming king who ushers in a time of worldwide peace as described in Zechariah; he is the coming one anticipated in Psalm 118; and, finally, with reference to Isaiah 44:6 and Zephaniah 3:15, Jesus uniquely represents the presence of 'the King of Israel', YHWH, among his people.

3.2 Misunderstanding and Reinterpretation

In conclusion, John 12:12-16 presents both a radical misunderstanding and revolutionary reinterpretation of Jesus's kingship. Whereas the crowd misinterprets Jesus's royal entry and the disciples cannot yet grasp the true nature of Jesus kingship, John 12:16 explicitly redirects the reader to Israel's Scriptures to elucidate the true significance of the events just described: 'His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him' (John 12:16).

As mentioned before, it is an integral part of the Fourth Gospel's hermeneutical strategy that the true identity of Jesus can only fully be grasped from a post-resurrection point of view, under the guidance of the Spirit, and in light of Israel's Scriptures.⁶⁸ Only this way can one grasp the true identity of the King who entered Jerusalem. Through this brief narrative of Jesus's royal entry, the Evangelist tells its attentive reader that extraordinarily, this man,

65. Zech 9:9 (LXX): πῶλον νέον; Matt 21:5: ἐπὶ ὄνον καὶ ἐπὶ πῶλον υἱὸν ὑποζυγίου; Mark 11:2: πῶλον; Luke 19:30: πῶλον.

66. Cf. Freed, *Old Testament Quotations*, 67; Menken, *Old Testament Quotations*, 91–95; Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture*, 80–84.

67. J. Blenkinsopp, 'The Oracle of Judah and the Messianic Entry', *JBL* 80 (1961): 55–64, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3264566>.

68. Cf. John 2:13–22. For this point, see also Barrett, *John*, 185; Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 311–312; Thompson, *John*, 177.

Jesus, uniquely represents the personal presence of YHWH, the King of Israel, among his people.

4. The Literary Position of 'King of Israel'

The title 'King of Israel' first occurs at the outset of Jesus's public ministry (John 1:49), just before the first of his signs. The second occurrence (John 12:13) is positioned towards the end of Jesus's public ministry, just after Jesus's final public sign, the raising of Lazarus.⁶⁹ In literary terms, the title forms an *inclusio* around Jesus's public signs. John uses this device more than once. For example, the quotations of Isaiah also form an *inclusio* around Jesus's public ministry (John 1:23; 12:38,40), which, as Catrin Williams argues, highlights John's presentation of Jesus's identity as 'the visible manifestation of God'.⁷⁰ Michael Daise, in addition, identifies a 'remembrance' *inclusio* (John 2:22; 12:12-16), which, in his understanding, looks ahead to Jesus's death and resurrection as the erection of the true sanctuary of God by Israel's king.⁷¹ The double designation of Jesus as 'King of Israel' plausibly functions as yet another example of Johannine *inclusio*. Having argued that both occurrences of the title 'King of Israel' in John's Gospel are intertextually linked to Zephaniah 3:15 and Isaiah 44:6, the theological significance for this *inclusio* is evident. It is a literary means for John to presents Jesus as the visible manifestation of Israel's divine king, YHWH.

5. Jesus's Davidic and Divine Kingship in John

The proposed interpretation of the title 'King of Israel' significantly contributes to the discussion about Davidic kingship in John.⁷² The remarkable absence of

69. That is not to ignore how Jesus's death and resurrection are also marked a 'sign' (cf. John 2:18-21).

70. Catrin Williams, 'Isaiah in John's Gospel'. in *Isaiah in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 116.

71. Daise, *Quotations in John*, 198-199.

72. For some recent discussions on this topic see e.g. Beth Stovell, 'Son of God as Anointed One? Johannine Davidic Christology and Second Temple Messianism', in *Reading the Gospel of John's Christology as Jewish Messianism: Royal, Prophetic, and Divine Messiahs*, ed. Gabriele Boccaccini and Benjamin E. Reynolds (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 151-176, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004376045_008; Joel Willitts, 'David's Sublation of Moses: A Davidic Explanation for the Mosaic Christology of the Fourth Gospel', in *Reading the Gospel of John's Christology as Jewish Messianism: Royal, Prophetic, and Divine Messiahs*, ed. Gabriele Boccaccini and Benjamin E. Reynolds (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 203-225, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004376045_010.

explicit Davidic traditions in John has long been noted.⁷³ In contrast to the Synoptics, which identify Jesus as the 'Son of David' (Matt 21:9; Mark 10:47; Luke 18:39) and his birth town as Bethlehem (Matt 2:1; Luke 2:4-7), John traces Jesus's origin back to 'the beginning' and firmly grounds it in his unique relationship with God the Father (John 1:1-18). The only time the Fourth Gospel mentions David is in a dispute among the crowd about the origin of the messiah (John 7:40-44). John here records the opinion of some that the messiah ought to be a descendant of David born in Bethlehem, whereas others believe that when the messiah appears, no one will know where he came from (John 7:25-27). The narrator documents these various voices rather than picking a side in the debate.⁷⁴

This certainly does not mean that Davidic traditions are absent from the Fourth Gospel. As argued earlier, the composite citation in John 12:15 contains a reference to Genesis 49:11 about the promised ruler from the tribe of Judah, the ancestor of David. Additionally, John's passion narrative contains several allusions to the Davidic Psalms which are linked to Jesus.⁷⁵ The Good Shepherd discourse in John 10 is another example of a passage with clear Davidic resonances.⁷⁶ Rather than arguing Davidic traditions are non-existent in John's Gospel, I assume that by the distinctive portrayal of Jesus's kingship John seeks to drive home a theological point: Jesus's kingship is first and foremost grounded in his divine descent and his unique relationship to the Father. Because of this, Jesus's kingship exceeds that of any human king, including David. Jesus alone is the visible manifestation of YHWH – the true 'King of Israel'.

6. Evaluation and Conclusion

This article has argued that the two occurrences of the title 'King of Israel' in the Gospel of John (1:49; 12:13) are deliberately connected to the two times YHWH is designated as such in Israel's Scriptures (Isa 44:6; Zeph 3:15). I have

73. E.g. Matthew V. Novenson, *The Grammar of Messianism: An Ancient Jewish Political Idiom and Its Users* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 87–89, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190255022.001.0001>.

74. Novenson, *The Grammar of Messianism*, 87.

75. E.g. John 15:25 (Ps 38:19; 69:5); John 19:36 (Exod 12:10; Ps 34:31; Num 9:12); cf. Margaret Daly-Denton, *David in the Fourth Gospel: The Johannine Reception of the Psalms*, AGJU 47 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 318, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004332409>.

76. Recalling both Ezek 34 and Jer 23:3-6; cf. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 318–320, 327. Cf. Also Daise's discussion about the allusions to Ezek 37 in John 10, *Quotations in John*, 196–197.

also discussed how this argument contributes to the discussion about the role of David in the Fourth Gospel.

The arguments presented in support of the literary allusions to Isaiah 44:6 and Zephaniah 3:15 are by nature arguments of plausibility. Yet I believe there are good reasons to regard these proposed allusions as being at least *plausible*. They satisfy many of the evaluative criteria discussed in section 2.1.

First, I have identified various shared lexemes, phrases, and plot elements between John 1:29-51 and 12:12-16 on the one hand and Isaiah 44:1-8 and Zephaniah 3:11-20 on the other. These shared lexemes, phrases, and motifs fulfil the criterion of *volume* (the degree of explicit repetition of words, phrases, or syntactical patterns). Second, the criterion of *availability* (whether the proposed source is available to the author and original audience) is also met. In the case of Isaiah, it is clear this prophetic composition serves as an important intertext for John's Gospel in general. Isaiah is cited and alluded to at various places throughout the Gospel.⁷⁷ As for the short composition of Zephaniah, the two proposed allusions would establish this composition as a significant intertext for John relative to its size. The *availability* also impinges on the criterion of *recurrence* (how often the same passage or larger compositional context is alluded to elsewhere). In the case of Isaiah, it is clear the author of John is familiar with the part of the composition that contains the phrase 'King of Israel' (Isa 44:6). John 1:23 quotes Isaiah 40:3 and John 12:38 quotes Isaiah 53:1. In the case of Zephaniah, the proposed allusions in the Nathanael narrative and John's account of the triumphal entry would offer two references to the part of Zephaniah that uses the phrase 'King of Israel', but the validity of this evidence is dependent on whether one is persuaded by the argument presented in this article. As for the criterion of *thematic coherence*, both thematically and rhetorically the proposed interpretation of the title King of Israel fits well within the Gospel of John: rhetorically, because it fits within the recurring Johannine pattern of misunderstanding and reinterpretation, and thematically, because it fits well within John's portrayal of Jesus's kingship as being grounded in his divine identity. The criterion of *thematic coherence* is thus also satisfied. Finally, as for the *history of interpretation*, this article has not engaged in a comprehensive quest for the interpretation of the Nathanael narrative and the story of the triumphal entry in ancient commentaries on John. Yet, in modern interpretations the possible references to Isaiah 44 in the Nathanael narrative were noticed by Marie-Émile Boismard⁷⁸ and references to

77. Catrin Williams, 'Isaiah in John's Gospel', 101–116.

78. Cf. p. 38, n. 30.

Zephaniah 3 are discussed by multiple authors including Richard Bauckham, Michael Daise, and Michael Theobald.⁷⁹ The references to both Isaiah 44 and Zephaniah 3 in John 12:13,15 are noted by multiple scholars as well, including Catrin Williams and Bruce Schuchard.⁸⁰ This article has thus expanded on the insights of other Johannine scholars and has joined the dots with regards to the interpretation of the Johannine title 'King of Israel' as deriving from the only two passages in Israel's Scriptures that designate YHWH as such: Isaiah 44:6 and Zephaniah 3:15. Given this cumulative evidence, I contend my proposed interpretation of the Johannine title 'King of Israel' (John 1:49 and 12:13) as a literary allusion to both Isaiah 44:6 and Zephaniah 3:15 is a plausible reading of this phrase.

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79. Cf. p. 40, n. 38.

80. Cf. p. 46 n. 61.

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