

# ‘I am a king’ (John 18:37b)

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**Abstract:** Nestle-Aland punctuate Jn. 18.37b σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεύς εἰμι. The present paper argues that the text was probably intended to be voiced rather with the pause one word later: σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ. This voicing resonates with the Johannine ἐγώ εἰμι sayings, which, together with the theme of Jesus’ kingship, form a significant part of how John conveys who Jesus is throughout the gospel narrative. If John 18.37 is voiced as proposed here, then the effect is to yoke together two christologically significant expressions on Jesus’ lips, but in a way that teases the reader semantically and contributes to the challenge of Pilate’s question – what is truth?

**Keywords:** ego eimi, I am, kingship, punctuation, John, truth, christology

## 1. Introduction

This paper is chiefly about a question of punctuation – and its implications. In John 18:37, at Pilate’s second time of asking whether Jesus is a king, Jesus’ reply is printed as follows in Nestle Aland:

σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεύς εἰμι. ἐγὼ εἰς τοῦτο γεγέννημαι καὶ εἰς τοῦτο ἐλήλυθα εἰς τὸν κόσμον, ἵνα μαρτυρήσω τῇ ἀληθείᾳ· πᾶς ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας ἀκούει μου τῆς φωνῆς.

‘You say that I am a king. I was born for this and for this have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is from the truth hears my voice.’

(Jn. 18.37)

It is well known that ancient manuscripts included little if any punctuation; the punctuation in Nestle Aland depends on relatively modern tradition and interpretation. My first question is whether it is possible to put the first full stop later in the sentence by one word, so as to read:

σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ. εἰς τοῦτο γεγέννημαι καὶ εἰς τοῦτο ἐλήλυθα εἰς τὸν κόσμον, ἵνα μαρτυρήσω τῇ ἀληθείᾳ· πᾶς ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας ἀκούει μου τῆς φωνῆς.

‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is from the truth hears my voice.’

(Jn. 18.37)

The difference this punctuation makes is that it turns the unremarkable βασιλεύς εἰμι into βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ, which resonates verbally and syntactically with the ἐγώ εἰμι sayings that mark Jesus’ discourses in the fourth gospel. My first questions are whether this punctuation is possible and whether it is plausible that the text was voiced with this punctuation in antiquity. If so, then further questions arise as to whether the resonance with the ἐγώ εἰμι sayings is likely to have been heard in antiquity, whether it was intended by John, and what its significance is in the context of the fourth gospel. This has implications for our understanding both of John’s presentation of Jesus’ kingship and of his use of ἐγώ εἰμι.

## 2. Grammar and Manuscripts

Grammatically, there is no reason not to place the period after ἐγώ in John 18.37. It could be argued that the word order of the Greek sentence is more standard with the pronomial subject placed first in the following sentence (ἐγώ εἰς τοῦτο γεγέννημαι) than with it placed last in the indirect statement (βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ). However, Greek grammar allows the latter formulation and the frequency and prominence of ἐγώ εἰμι + predicate in John makes it plausible that the intended way of reading this sentence was to pause after ἐγώ, not before.

The evangelist’s own manuscript does not survive, so cannot be checked for punctuation. However, the extant manuscripts of this portion of John’s gospel can be studied for indications as to how early readers voiced the text. The John Rylands papyrus, P52, has often been dated palaeographically to only a few decades after the date at which the autograph was probably composed, thus making it one of the very earliest extant NT papyri (although this dating has become rather controversial).<sup>1</sup> It is a tiny fragment, but it just so happens to show on the verso

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<sup>1</sup> Debate about the date: Nongbri 2005.

John 18:37-8, the very verses in question in this essay. Unfortunately, however, the papyrus turns out to be disappointing for determining the way βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγὼ was voiced: these words are lost; the fragment of v. 37 begins with τοῦτο γεγέννημαι. It is not even possible to tell whether the scribe used punctuation at all, although he does place spaces between some words, suggesting that he would have had a way of indicating voicing had he so desired. There is a similar problem with P90 (= POxy 3523), which is also second century and just so happens to be a fragment of John 18.36-19.7; it has a lacuna beginning in the middle of βασιλεύς and including all the words relevant to our question about punctuating John 18.37.

Codex Sinaiticus preserves the text, but becomes is rather difficult to read at the point where ἐγὼ εἶς occurs.<sup>2</sup> Powerful magnification does not reveal any clear punctuation, nor does the transcription on the Codex Sinaiticus website give punctuation. The most visually striking feature of this part of the text is the change in writing style to economise on space at the end of the line; thus εἶς, after ἐγὼ, is written with very diminutive epsilon and sigma.

Vaticanus is much easier to read.<sup>3</sup> It is also slightly more helpful. Whereas Sinaiticus does not clearly mark punctuation or spaces in this passage, Vaticanus does leave some spaces. Some of these have no obvious explanation: there is a space in the middle of γεγε—ννημαι (did the scribe like the double γε in γεγε and double ν in νν and wish to draw attention to them?) and in the middle of του—το εληλυθα. However, the scribe is clearly familiar with the idea of using spaces to guide the reader: there are slight, helpful spaces after the end of Jesus' and Pilate's direct speech (Jn. 18.36-7). There is, however, absolutely no space in writing βασιλευς ειμι εγω εις. Thus there is no indication through use of space (or punctuation) as to how to voice this, *even though* the scribe was used to the idea of using space where appropriate to indicate pauses in speaking.

It would be otiose to run through all the major witnesses to this portion of John's gospel. The most interesting positive manuscript evidence concerning the way John 18.37 was interpreted is the variant reading that doubles the ἐγὼ. Codex Alexandrinus reads βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγὼ, followed by a paragraph break, then ἐγὼ εἶς τοῦτο γεγέννημαι.<sup>4</sup> The repetition of the ἐγὼ makes it impossible to read

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<sup>2</sup> [http://codexsinaiticus.org/en/manuscript.aspx?Submit=Submit](http://codexsinaiticus.org/en/manuscript.aspx?Submit=Submit&book=36&chapter=18&lid=en&side=r&verse=37&zoomSlider=0)  
Query&book=36&chapter=18&lid=en&side=r&verse=37&zoomSlider=0 (Sinaiticus)

<sup>3</sup> [http://images.csntm.org/Manuscripts/GA\\_03/GA03\\_074a.jpg](http://images.csntm.org/Manuscripts/GA_03/GA03_074a.jpg) (Vaticanus)

<sup>4</sup> [http://images.csntm.org/Manuscripts/GA\\_02/GA\\_02\\_0056b.jpg](http://images.csntm.org/Manuscripts/GA_02/GA_02_0056b.jpg) (Alexandrinus)

βασιλεύς εἰμι rather than the full phrase βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ; the paragraph break reinforces this reading. The variant of the double ἐγώ is also found in the ninth century Codex Koridethi, which is written by a scribe who did not know Greek; in the miniscules 0109 and 0250, and in some Latin manuscripts. By comparison with the manuscript attestation for the single ἐγώ, which is found in Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, the Western text, L and W, as well as the families 1 and 13 and various other witnesses, the external evidence for the double ἐγώ is weak. However, while it could arise from a technical error, the literary context makes it very plausible that there were some readers who found the single ἐγώ ambiguous, and who responded to the ambiguity by doubling it, so that it went *both* with βασιλεύς εἰμι *and* with εἰς τοῦτο γεγέννημαι. The careful paragraphing in Alexandrinus strongly suggests reflective, literary reading rather than a mere technical error of reduplication.

The extant textual witnesses, then, do not supply strong positive evidence for the early punctuation of John 18:37, but their ambiguity, and the perception of that ambiguity in some parts of the manuscript tradition, do validate the question as to how this verse was voiced. There is neither textual tradition nor grammatical reason to prefer the Nestle Aland reading to one that places the period after ἐγώ.

### 3. Syntactic Sense and Synoptic Comparisons

Grammatically, there is no problem with placing ἐγώ at the end of a sentence, even if it is more common to place it at the start. Syntactically there is a little, but only a little, difference between the two versions of John 18:37 offered here. If the verse is printed as it is in Nestle Aland, with the period before ἐγώ, then that brings out contrast between the two pronouns, σύ and ἐγώ, each at the start of their clauses:

σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεύς εἰμι. ἐγώ εἰς τοῦτο γεγέννημαι καὶ εἰς τοῦτο ἐλήλυθα εἰς τὸν κόσμον, ἵνα μαρτυρήσω τῇ ἀληθείᾳ

You say that [I] am a king. I was born for this and for this came into the world, to bear witness to the truth

If the *ἐγώ* is placed before the period, then the balanced construction of the second sentence is more immediately apparent, with its twofold *εἰς τοῦτο* + first person perfect indicative, pointing forward to *ἵνα* clause that defines *τοῦτο*:

σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ. *εἰς τοῦτο γεγέννημαι καὶ εἰς τοῦτο ἐλήλυθα εἰς τὸν κόσμον*, ἵνα μαρτυρήσω τῇ ἀληθείᾳ

You say I am a king; for this I was born and for this I came into the world, to bear witness to the truth

The main comparison here is between the definitions of Jesus' role, that which 'you say' and 'this that follows', which Jesus explains. The phrase *βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ* also answers exactly to Pilate's word order in the question to which Jesus is responding: *οὐκοῦν βασιλεὺς εἶ συ*; -- again with the pronoun placed last:

εἶπεν οὖν αὐτῷ ὁ Πιλάτος· οὐκοῦν βασιλεὺς εἶ σύ;

ἀπεκρίθη ὁ Ἰησοῦς· σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ.

The alternative, *σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεύς εἰμι*, produces a slightly less concordant antiphony (Jn. 18.37).

Another approach to this question might be to compare the Synoptics. There are two Synoptic scenes that are potentially relevant. The first is the trial in the praetorium. Pilate's question, *σὺ εἶ ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων*; is identical in all four canonical gospels (Mt. 27.11/Mk. 15.2/Lk. 23.3/Jn. 18.33). In the Synoptics, Jesus' response is simply *σὺ λέγεις* (Mt. 27.11/Mk. 15.2/Lk. 23.3). John has extra material between Pilate's question and the response that begins *σὺ λέγεις*, and he also extends the response to *σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεύς εἰμι (ἐγώ)*, with further dialogue to follow. In general, John's extra material in the scene in the praetorium is not just a more complete version of the Synoptic exchange between Pilate and Jesus, but is distinctively Johannine in character.<sup>5</sup> Terms central to Johannine thought, 'world', 'truth' and 'testify', are prominent, used to distinguish sharply between Jesus or his followers and the opposition to both. This Johannine character of the redaction at this point encourages punctuation that would allow a resonance with the Johannine formula, *ἐγώ εἰμι*, to be heard.

The second Synoptic scene to be compared with John is the trial in the Sanhedrin. John included a trial in the Sanhedrin, but rather briefly and without recording in detail dialogue with the High Priest (Jn. 18.19-24). However, his presentation of the trial at the praetorium resonates with the Synoptic accounts of the trial at the

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<sup>5</sup> Meeks 1967: 63; Blank 1981: 169-96; Bickermann 1986: 122-5.

Sanhedrin.<sup>6</sup> John thus concentrates on just one dialogue challenging Jesus under arrest about the role he claims and he shifts the emphasis concerning the title for which Jesus was tried and killed from ‘Christ, Son of God’ to ‘King of the Jews’. His version of Jesus’ response to the challenge, *σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ*, is closer to Luke 22.70 and to the longer version of Mark 14.62 than it is to Jesus’ response to Pilate in Mark 15.2 parr:

Matthew 26.63-4	Mark 14.61-2	Luke 22.70
<p><b>A.</b> ἐξορκίζω σε κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος ἵνα ἡμῖν εἴπῃς εἰ <b>σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ;</b></p> <p><b>I.</b> <i>σὺ εἶπας.</i> πλὴν λέγω ὑμῖν· ἀπ’ ἄρτι ὄψεσθε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καθήμενον ἐκ δεξιῶν τῆς δυνάμεως καὶ ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ</p>	<p><b>A.</b> <i>σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ εὐλογητοῦ;</i></p> <p><b>I.</b> <b>ἐγὼ εἰμι</b>, καὶ ὄψεσθε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκ δεξιῶν καθήμενον τῆς δυνάμεως καὶ ἐρχόμενον μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ</p> <p><i>or:</i></p> <p><b>I.</b> <i>σὺ εἶπας ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι</i>, καὶ ὄψεσθε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκ δεξιῶν καθήμενον τῆς δυνάμεως καὶ ἐρχόμενον μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ</p>	<p>[Πάντες.] <i>σὺ οὖν εἶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ;</i></p> <p><b>I.</b> <i>ὕμεις λέγετε ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι</i></p>

Even if Mark and Luke did not regard *ἐγὼ εἰμι* as theophanic in the dialogue with the High Priest, Mark did use it with great christological significance, for it is Jesus’ first and only express acknowledgement of the key claims that otherwise constitute the messianic secret in the first gospel. Luke, by placing it in indirect speech, distances Jesus slightly from this acknowledgement.<sup>7</sup> John picks up both the

<sup>6</sup> Hengel 1991: 165.

<sup>7</sup> Williams 2000: 242-54.

Christological significance and the formal distance, but alters the nuance in reframing the narrative and transposing it to the literary context of his own gospel.

The arguments so far, then, suggest that it is strongly plausible that the reading βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ, with the period after rather than before ἐγώ, was both intended and received. Reception in the manuscript tradition; semantics and syntax; the literary form in comparison with the Synoptics and with other Johannine phrases, all support this. But does it matter? Markus Bockmuehl, in his *Refocusing New Testament Study*, quotes Terry Eagleton's caricature of a Cambridge supervisor who, 'was as allergic to ideas as a wrestler or a stockbroker. If you had presented him with a text containing the secret of the universe, he would have noticed only a displaced semi-colon'.<sup>8</sup> A misplaced full stop has been the whole substance of discussion so far in this essay; is concern for such things unimaginative and more misplaced than the punctuation itself? Like the hypothetical text presented to the Cambridge don, the passage in John claims to hold truth for those who can hear it. Moreover, the punctuation is anachronistic, and the meaning of punctuation has a complicated history of its own.<sup>9</sup>

Yet the matter of the dot on the page cannot be dismissed quite so lightly. Punctuation is a visual signpost that marks out the architecture of a passage, both in its meaning and in its syntax. In the case of John 18.37, there is a reference to 'kingship' no matter how one punctuates the text, but if the period falls after the ἐγώ then the reference to 'kingship' resonates with the Johannine usage of ἐγώ εἰμι. This potentially alters its nuance. The remainder of this essay will explore the nature and extent of the significance of this in John. First it will consider John's presentation of Jesus' kingship, both in the wider context of the gospel as a whole and in the accounts of trial and crucifixion that constitute the immediate literary context of John 18.37. Then it will study the ἐγώ εἰμι sayings, and consider 18.37 in relation to them. Finally, the contribution that βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ makes to our understanding of Johannine use of language and imagery will be discussed.

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Bockmuehl 2006: 52.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Treip 1970; Beckwith Parkes 1992.

## 4. Kingship in John

From a political perspective, Jesus was put to death as a criminal largely because he was regarded by the Roman authorities as claiming kingship.<sup>10</sup> The ‘scandal of the cross’ was grounded in this historical fact; consequently, the kingship of Jesus was integral to Christian meditation on his cross and death. The Synoptic presentation also suggests that Jesus had built his ministry around the proclamation of the kingdom of God. Thus both Jesus’ ministry and his death made the themes of kingship and kingdom important topics for early Christians.

John shares these wider Christian concerns, but handles them in a distinctive way.<sup>11</sup> By comparison with the frequent mention of the kingdom of God in the Synoptics, the terms kingdom and kingship are not very prominent in John’s narrative of Jesus’ ministry nor in his farewell speeches. However, John draws attention much more than the Synoptics do to *Jesus’* kingship; this is particularly evident in the words and actions of the passion narrative, but the theme is also evoked in a number of other titular, symbolic and narrative images throughout the gospel. The next two sections of this essay will discuss the most relevant passages in literary sequence in order better to understand the place that John 18.37 has in the development of this theme.

### 4.1 Kingship Before the Passion

Prior to the passion, the terms βασιλεύς and βασιλεία occur only a few times. First there are private encounters with Nathanael, a ‘true Israelite’, and Nicodemus, who but ‘calls himself a teacher of Israel’. Nathanael, finding that Jesus ‘knows’ him, forsakes the doubts that he had expressed to Philip and hails him king of Israel<sup>12</sup> and son of God. Jesus indicates that he has seen nothing in comparison with what he will one day behold (Jn. 1.49-51).

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<sup>10</sup> Mt. 27.37; Mk. 15.26; Lk. 23.38; Jn. 19.19-22; Bickermann 1986: 124-5, 130; Hengel 1991: 165; Carroll and Green 1995: 173-5.

<sup>11</sup> Hengel 1991; Stegemann and Stegemann 1993; Kvalbein 2003; Busse 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Pancaro 1969-70: 123-4 and 1974-75: 400-1 argued that the term βασιλεύς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ means something different from the more ethnically focused βασιλεύς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, which is first used on Pilate’s lips. However, his arguments have been thoroughly refuted by Painter 1979; see also: Kierspel 2006: 70-74.



This is the very first time Jesus is referred to as ‘king’; the dialogue in the praetorium is the last. Jesus tells Pilate, those who are of the truth hear his voice. Nathanael was able to say ‘thou art a king’, in recognising truth; Pilate says it in the interrogative, not knowing what truth is (Jn. 18.37-8).

Nicodemus addresses Jesus as ‘rabbi’ (so did Nathanael) and as ‘teacher from God’, but Jesus talks to him of the kingdom of God and he does not understand. Only here in the gospel is the ‘kingdom of God’ is mentioned explicitly. Jesus’ deflects emphasis from the political idea of kingdom to the notion of a special kind of birth, for he says that seeing or entering the kingdom of God depends on rebirth (Jn. 3.2, 5).<sup>13</sup> Nicodemus, however, does not understand.

These early encounters with Israelites give prominence to ‘king’ as a christological term and to ‘kingdom’ as part of Jesus’ teaching, but they do so in ways that baffle the expectations of the Israelites themselves. The so-called teacher of Israel is perplexed by Jesus’ imagery of rebirth; even Nathanael’s faith in Jesus as ‘king’ is destined to be trumped when the heavens open (Jn. 1.50-1). ‘King’ and ‘kingdom’ are thus significant categories, but ones that are not to be understood in worldly ways. In the dialogue with Nicodemus, Jesus elaborates by alluding to his own crucifixion, glorification and to the judgement on the world (Jn. 3.14-21).

The problematisation and transfiguration of the imagery of Jesus’ kingship continues when the crowds see the ‘sign’ of the feeding miracle. They interpret Jesus as ‘truly the prophet who is coming into the world’ and Jesus withdraws to the mountain on his own, knowing that they intend to seize him and make him a king (βασιλέα, Jn. 6.14-15). In the very next episode, the disciples behold in terror Jesus walking on water, and he responds, ἐγώ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε (‘I am; do not be afraid’ (Jn. 6.20).

This juxtaposition of episodes does not bring βασιλεύς and ἐγώ εἰμι together in a single declaration such as ἐγώ εἰμι βασιλεύς, but the two are introduced consecutively in a way that exposes tensions in the possible interpretations of Jesus’ royalty and relation to God. Jesus does not decline to demonstrate his sovereignty, but he does it in a way that rejects it as made by human hands (ἀρπάζειν αὐτὸν ἵνα ποιήσωσιν βασιλέα, Jn. 6.15), and underscores that he simply ‘is’ (ἐγώ εἰμι, Jn. 6.20). The crowds who would seize him and make him

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<sup>13</sup> van der Watt 2000: 170-8. Cf. in the dialogue with Pilate Jesus again deflects emphasis from the political idea of his kingship to that of his own special birth (Jn. 18.37).

king are disappointed, but to the terrified circle of disciples is vouchsafed the sight of him as the one who walks on water and says, ἐγὼ εἰμι. The absolute ἐγὼ εἰμι is characteristic of the divine self-declaration in Deutero-Isaiah, where God is also portrayed as the one who makes for his people a path through the sea and who will be ‘with them’ when they pass through the waters.<sup>14</sup> There God’s sovereignty above all kings is declared,<sup>15</sup> and he is contrasted repeatedly with idols made by human hands.<sup>16</sup>

Like Jesus’ response to Nathanael, this story shows that in John the kingship of Jesus bursts ordinary human bounds. The potential tensions between βασιλεύς and ἐγὼ εἰμι that are first evoked here will be picked up in dialogue with Pilate. Jesus’ observation, σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεύς εἰμι (ἐγὼ), gives way to his claim to testify to the truth, and to be heard by those who are of the truth (Jn. 18.37-8). He thus encourages deconstruction of Pilate’s formula in the light of ‘the truth’.

Jesus’ metaphorical, ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός (Jn. 10.11, 14), has also sometimes been interpreted as an image of Jesus’ own royalty, or at least of his rule.<sup>17</sup> Shepherd imagery was common for many kinds of ruler in antiquity, both in and outside biblical literature, though no biblical kings except David are portrayed in this way. Ezekiel prophesied about God promising a good shepherd for Israel. John’s imagery of Jesus as good shepherd recalls some aspects of Ezekiel’s prophecy, especially the emphasis on the goodness of the shepherd and the ambiguity about whether it is God himself or king David or both (Ezek 34). Jesus’ metaphorical ‘I am the good shepherd’ is a much less overtly political image than ‘I am a king’ would be, but Jesus makes clear that it has implications for society, as the good shepherd will unite a single flock (Jn. 10.16). As good shepherd, Jesus says that his own know him (Jn. 10.14); this reality was shown vividly when Nathanael recognised Jesus at once as ‘king of Israel, son of God’ (Jn. 1.49); similarly, when challenged with a claim to kingship in the praetorium, Jesus claims to testify to the truth and affirms, ‘all who are from the truth hear my voice’ (Jn. 18.37).<sup>18</sup> The title of king is not embraced, but the role of king is hinted at.

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<sup>14</sup> Isa. 43.2, 16; 51.10. Williams 2000: 221.

<sup>15</sup> Isa. 43.15; 44.6; 45.1, 13; 47.5; 51.4; 52.7.

<sup>16</sup> Isa. 40.18-20; 41.6-7; 44.9-20; 45.16; 46.5-7 cf. 45.12, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Barrett 1978: 373-4; Kügler 1999: 109-27; Schreiber 2000: 62; Keener 2003: 800-1. Others dispute whether there are connotations of the role of ruler at all: Jeremias 1968: 496; Schnackenburg 1979: 2.295. Bultmann interpreted the image as a gnostic figure for a saviour and revealer, similar to that found in some Mandaean texts, but these texts are much later than John (Bultmann 1971: 367-70).

<sup>18</sup> Meeks 1967: 66.

The good shepherd, however, is distinguished above all by laying down his life for the sheep. It is at the transition of the narrative from Jesus' ministry to his passion that the title 'king' again appears, and it does not reappear after that until the passion itself. When Jesus enters Jerusalem, the crowds hail him as king of Israel in the words of Psalm 118.25-6, and John interprets Jesus sitting on a donkey with Zechariah 3.15, 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, *your king* is coming, seated on a donkey'. Here it is scripture that calls Jesus king; the scripture is taken up on the lips of the crowds and the evangelist. But John also emphasises that these things were not understood until Jesus was glorified: his disciples did not 'know' them at first (Jn. 12.13-16). The significance of the title is underscored, but so are both its elusiveness and its integral connection to the passion and glorification.

The literary shaping of the narrative enhances the emphasis on Jesus' kingship: by contrast with the Synoptic versions, in John the anointing precedes the royal entry, suggesting that Jesus is anointed as king. The lavish amount of ointment is consistent with this. However, the literary shaping of the narrative also draws attention to interconnection between Jesus assuming kingship and Jesus raising Lazarus, an episode that foreshadows his own passion and resurrection. It is at the house of Mary and Martha that he raised Lazarus, and it is there that he is anointed. Mary was described even in the Lazarus episode as the one who anointed him; in subsequently performing the act that justifies and explains that epithet, she wipes his feet, evoking her prostration at his feet when she said, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died' (Jn. 11.32).<sup>19</sup> At Bethany, fragrance of the oil that anoints Jesus fills the whole house (Jn. 12.3), contrasting with the stench of Lazarus' corpse before Jesus raised him (Jn. 11.39), and looking forward to the aromatic spices brought for Jesus' own burial (Jn. 19.40). Crowds gather not only for Jesus' entry to Jerusalem, but also, both before and after that, they gather on account of Lazarus, whom he raised from the dead, and many believe because of him (Jn. 12.9-11 cf. 11.45-6; 12.17-19). At the royal entry, the crowds wave palms and 'cry out' (ἐκράυγαζον) the blessing and acclamation as king of Israel (Jn. 12.13). Palm branches are a symbol of life, and the word for 'cry out' is the same that John used when Jesus 'cried out' (ἐκράυγασεν) in a loud

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<sup>19</sup> At the Last Supper, it is Jesus who is at the feet of his disciples, washing them in the role of the servant who lays down both his garments and his life (Jn. 13.4-20). Like God in Deutero-Isaiah who proclaims himself ἐγὼ εἶμι and challenges other gods as to which of them ever predicted anything ahead of time, so Jesus at the Last Supper predicts ahead of time the fulfilment of scripture by his being betrayed, so that the disciples may believe, when it happens, that ἐγὼ εἶμι (Jn. 13.18-19).

voice' for Lazarus to 'come out' of the tomb alive (Jn. 11.43). When John interprets the royal entry by citing Zechariah 9.9, he adds at the beginning of the citation, μὴ φοβοῦ (Jn. 12.15), which is characteristic of an epiphany and in John appears only here and when Jesus pronounces ἐγὼ εἰμι, μὴ φοβεῖσθε to his disciples in the storm (Jn. 6.10).<sup>20</sup> The divine role of bringing life to the dead is the one to which Jesus testified in regard to Lazarus and that will be proved again when he is himself raised from the dead (cf. Jn. 12.16).

In the broader context of the gospel, then, John emphasises that Jesus is king, but he underscores also that this is not a title or role that is readily understood in the usual political or religious categories. The king of Israel will properly be seen only with angels ascending and descending on him; 'kingdom of God' is reinterpreted in terms of rebirth; he whom the crowds would snatch to make a king, eludes them but declares 'I AM' to close disciples who are afraid; the good shepherd will lay down his life for the sheep then all will hear his voice and gather them into one; crying out and waving palm branches as a symbol of life is understood in relation to the raising of Lazarus and the glorification of Jesus. The term 'king' taken by the evangelist as christologically significant, but also as elusive, requiring redefinition in association with his passion, his revelation of deity and the new life that he proffers.<sup>21</sup>

## 4.2 Jesus' Kingship in the Passion Narrative

The emphasis on kingship increases in the passion narrative itself. The Jews hand Jesus over to Pilate to try him in the Roman praetorium. Pilate's charge to Jesus is that he is 'King of the Jews'. The brief exchange is brimming with irony; Jesus challenges Pilate at least as much as Pilate challenges Jesus.

Jesus' first challenge to Pilate about whence he heard the title, 'King of the Jews', is, 'Do you say this of yourself (ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ) or did others tell you about me' (Jn. 18.34). Throughout the gospel Jesus has emphasised that he himself does nothing

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<sup>20</sup> Von Gemünden 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Stegemann and Stegemann 1993; Schreiber 2000. Busse 2006 finds a number of connections between John's imagery of Jesus' kingship and hellenistic ideology of kingship, including his charisma, his dynastic co-regency, and his circle of friends like the *amici Caesaris*. However, these common elements in the imagery help convey Jesus' peculiar role as saviour of the world.

and says nothing ‘of himself’, but only what he sees and hears from the father.<sup>22</sup> Once, the high priest is said to predict Jesus’ death but not ‘of himself’ (οὐκ ἄφ’ ἑαυτοῦ) – he has been made an unwitting prophet (Jn. 11.50-1). Meeks points out the possible *double-entendre* in the question Jesus puts to Pilate also. Unwittingly, Pilate proclaims Jesus as the king he really is.<sup>23</sup>

Pilate meets Jesus’ challenge with a riposte, ‘Am I a Jew? (μήτι ἐγὼ Ἰουδαῖός εἰμι;)’ (Jn. 18.35). This is one of the many phrases in John’s gospel that on the one hand is not an ‘I am saying’, on the other hand it resonates with them.<sup>24</sup> Placed near σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ, the dialogue appears to be a jousting over claims of identity; neither of the interlocutors is prepared to state outright, ‘I am ...’, but both utter statements of identity that are ironic.

Pilate does intend irony, but for the Johannine reader there is also dramatic irony in what this Roman official fails to hear in his own words. Pilate uses ‘Jew’ to refer to the race of the Jews and their religious establishment: ‘Your race (τὸ ἔθνος τὸ σόν) and the chief priests handed you over to me; what did you do?’ (Jn. 18.35). His understanding is built around temporal, this-worldly structures of flesh, blood and power, just as when he asks Jesus if he is a ‘king’, he means it in a this-worldly, political sense.

Jesus’ response shows that he is thinking of both ‘king’ and ‘Jew’ in a different way:

‘My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would have entered the contest to prevent me being handed over to the Jews; but now my kingdom is not from here’ (Jn. 18.36)

From Jesus’ perspective, he is not standing before Pilate as a Jew, but as one who has been handed over to the Jews who delivered him to Pilate. The Jews are of the same worldly system as is Pilate; it is not Pilate who is ‘outside the system’ looking in on Jewish politicking, but Jesus who is outside the system to which he has been handed over, the worldly system that Pilate and the Jews share. Pilate’s words, ‘Am I a Jew?’ highlight for the reader of the gospel that he *is* a Jew, not in the ethnic, worldly sense but spiritually, even if he does not recognise this himself.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> E.g. Jn. 5.19, 30; 7.17-18, 28; 8.28, 42; cf. 10.18.

<sup>23</sup> Meeks 1967: 63.

<sup>24</sup> See n. 30, below.

<sup>25</sup> The close parallel between the Jews and the world runs throughout the gospel, conveying the universal scope of opposition to Jesus: Kierspel 2006.

Pilate drops the point about Jesus being a Jew, but he catches at Jesus' reference to his kingdom and returns to the other part of the original challenge: 'So you are a king, then,' he asks. It is to this that Jesus replies, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is from the truth hears my voice' (Jn. 18.37). The meaning of 'kingship not of this world' is defined by the gospel context. Jesus has been portrayed and recognised as a king many times in the gospel, and the passion narrative will cast the theme in high relief, as Jesus is first mocked as a king by being dressed up and hailed as one, then beaten (Jn. 19.1-5); then denounced to Pilate by the Jews for 'making himself a king'; enthroned by Pilate on a judgement seat and presented to the Jews as their king, only to be rejected, before he is finally raised on the cross. Although Pilate never acknowledged to Jesus that he said 'Thou art a king', on the cross he goes to the trouble of writing 'King of the Jews' in three different languages. The Jews object, saying, 'Do not write "King of the Jews", but that he said "I am king of the Jews"' (ἐκεῖνος εἶπεν ὅτι βασιλεὺς εἰμι τῶν Ἰουδαίων) (Jn. 19.21).

There is thus great emphasis on Jesus' non-worldly kingship throughout the scene of the passion. The exchange between the Jews and Pilate at the cross recalls Jesus' exchange with Pilate in the praetorium. Who is it who calls Jesus king of the Jews, in the end? Pilate blames it on the Jews, but Jesus says to *him*, 'You say that I am a king' (Jn 18.37); Pilate insists on writing it for the Jews, but they seek to disown it by having it written instead, *He said* "I am king of the Jews" (Jn. 19.21). Writing apparently fixes the statement: Pilate's ὁ γέγραφα, γέγραφα has the perfective finality of Jesus' own perfect tense, τέτελεσται, which he speaks on the cross, and fulfils scripture (Jn. 19.28-30). Who is it who says, 'Jesus is King'? Does anyone ever say it? Is it ultimately what God says, perhaps through scripture (Jn. 12.13-16)?

Pilate's closing question to Jesus in the praetorium is 'What is truth?', which responds to Jesus' assertion that he has come 'to bear witness to the truth' (Jn. 18.37-8). The question brings out not just that Pilate is missing something fundamental in the context of a trial (the whole point of a trial is to discover the truth about a case!),<sup>26</sup> but, beyond that, he is missing something fundamental to understanding Jesus. Jesus says, 'Those who are of the truth hear my voice;' 'hearing Jesus' voice' is something that Pilate simply cannot do. The encounter in the praetorium shows that truth is not merely a matter of right or wrong, but of

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<sup>26</sup> Köstenberger 2005: 58.

actually hearing and rightly making sense of Jesus, as a person and as a figure who reveals God's kingship within the world.<sup>27</sup>

#### 4.3. Conclusion

Although the terms for 'king' and 'kingdom' appear little in the gospel, John does give attention to royalty as a way of interpreting Jesus. He emphasises that it is best understood in the light of the passion, of Jesus' messianic role and of his sheer other-worldliness and relationship to God. It is not understood by people like Nicodemus or the crowds or the disciples before the passion, it is not understood by Pilate or the Jews and it divides them amongst themselves, but it is in part perceived in the adornment of this figure for mockery and death.

#### 5. *Ego eimi* sayings in John

In this treatment of the theme of kingship, the *ἐγὼ εἰμι* sayings have had some relevance, especially the absolute formula, 'I am', pronounced by Jesus on the lake in the storm; his discourse to the disciples stating, 'I am a good shepherd', with its likely allusion to Davidic kingship; and the teasing evocations of 'I am' formulae in the praetorium, where Pilate says μήτι ἐγὼ Ἰουδαῖός εἰμι; and Jesus says σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεὺς εἰμι ἐγὼ (Jn. 18.35, 37).

John's use of *ἐγὼ εἰμι* has been much studied.<sup>28</sup> For the purposes of analysis a distinction is frequently drawn between the metaphorical *ἐγὼ εἰμι* sayings (e.g. 'I am the bread') and the absolute *ἐγὼ εἰμι* sayings, ('I am').<sup>29</sup> The distinction is

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Schlier 1956: 61-4; Meeks 1967: 67; Blank 1981: 170-2.

<sup>28</sup> See esp.: Schweizer 1939; Stauffer 1960: 149-59; 1964: 352-4; Harner 1970; Ball 1996; Williams 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Feuillet 1966: 5; Ball 1996: 14; Petersen 2006: 123. A variation on this is the threefold division that differentiates absolute versions of the bipartite formula from those that imply a predicate: Brown 1966: 1.533-4; Kruse 2003: 138. Williams 2001 argues against this subdivision; cf. Schnackenburg 1979: 2.79-81. Those who subordinate grammatical distinctions to theological ones find considerably more types of 'I am' saying in antiquity, and map John's onto

complicated by the fact that it does not include all the occurrences of *ἐγὼ εἰμι* in the gospel, and the degree of symbolic significance in some of the other uses of the formulae is debatable.<sup>30</sup> However, the distinction between metaphorical and absolute captures the main differentiation in the ways in which Jesus uses the formula and is a useful starting point for analysis.

Structurally, *βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγὼ* is most similar to the metaphorical *ἐγὼ εἰμι* type of saying. However, all the so-called metaphorical *ἐγὼ εἰμι* sayings on Jesus' lips are clearly metaphorical. There is no danger of 'I am the bread of life' being understood by Johannine readers as 'You can buy me at the bakery'. Scholars identify the components of a metaphor, its 'tenor' ('I am') and 'vehicle' ('bread'). The phrase 'I am a king' is different. Pilate's understanding, like the Jews', is that Jesus said, 'I am a king' understood in a literal, worldly sense. They do not appreciate any kind of metaphor. Unlike with 'I am the bread', 'I am the true vine' or any of the other such formulae in the gospel, there is no semantic reason against taking 'I am a king' in a non-metaphorical, this-worldly sense. It is only the literary context that throws that into question. The wider literary context of the gospel has shown repeatedly that Jesus' kingship baffles attempts to understand it within conventional worldly or religious categories; in the dialogue with Pilate Jesus' statements about the otherworldliness of his kingdom reinforce this. In addition, the resonance of *βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγὼ* with *ἐγὼ εἰμι* contributes another level of significance.

If 'I am a king' is considered as part of a network of metaphorical *ἐγὼ εἰμι* sayings, then the other sayings lift 'I am a king' into a different world, where the central images for who Jesus 'is' are bread of life; light of the world; door of the sheep; good shepherd; the resurrection and the life; the way, the truth and the life; and true vine. Some scholars have argued that these metaphors should be compared with the parables in the synoptics that begin, 'The kingdom of God is like...',<sup>31</sup> or, more plausibly, that they re-present in the person of Jesus motifs and

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these: Bultmann proposes a fourfold division (Bultmann 1971: 225, n. 3), which Schweizer develops into a sevenfold one (Schweizer 1939: 27-33).

<sup>30</sup> E.g. when the Jews dispute about whether or not a certain fellow is the same who used to be the blind beggar, the man under discussion interjects *ἐγὼ εἰμι*, 'It is I' (Jn. 9.8-9). John the Baptist declares, 'I am not the Christ' (see discussion in Freed 1979). Jesus himself uses expressions that do not quite fit the 'metaphorical vs absolute' distinction, for example he says 'I am the one who testifies about myself' (Jn. 8.28), which is predicative but not metaphorical; on several occasions he also refers to *ὅπου εἰμι ἐγὼ* as a place where his disciples shall be but cannot come now (Jn. 7.29, 34; 12.26; 14.3; 17.4). See Ball 1996: 21-2.

<sup>31</sup> Cerfaux 1954: 17-22; Brown 1966: 535.



teachings from his ministry as recorded in the Synoptics.<sup>32</sup> Thus the metaphorical *ἔγώ εἰμι* sayings prior to the passion already convey what the presence of the kingdom of God means in the person of Jesus. *Βασιλεύς εἰμι ἔγώ* is an appropriate consummation of that imagery.<sup>33</sup>

The relation of *βασιλεύς εἰμι ἔγώ* to the absolute *ἔγώ εἰμι* in the wider context of the gospel should also be considered, for both metaphorical and absolute formulae are central ways in which Jesus enables encounter with the divine in his words and person, and the syntactic and verbal similarities between them encourage hearing them together, and listening to the interrelationships between them.<sup>34</sup>

In John the absolute *ἔγώ εἰμι* is much more frequent than in the Synoptics and constitutes a far more substantial part of his presentation of Christology. The expression occurs eight times in total: Jn. 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:4, 8. Both in speaking to the Jews and in private to his disciples, Jesus makes clear that belief that *ἔγώ εἰμι* will not happen until the passion (Jn. 8:28; 13:19). After the passion, *ἔγώ εἰμι* is never again declared by Jesus. Catrin Williams has written the fullest and most recent study of the absolute formula.<sup>35</sup> She examined each occurrence separately in its literary context and showed that it often alludes to God's self-declaration in Deutero-Isaiah and Deuteronomy 32.39: in speaking with the Samaritan woman, Jesus' *ἔγώ εἰμι* evokes to God's ability to 'declare' things to people, celebrated in Isaiah in very similar language;<sup>36</sup> in the storm, it

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<sup>32</sup> Anderson 2006: 57-8.

<sup>33</sup> This undermines attempts to count a 'sacred number', i.e. seven, figurative 'I am' sayings (Brown 1966: 1.534; Schnackenburg 1979: 2.79-80). However, counting seven is problematic in any case, since it involves counting not the number of times figurative 'I am' sayings occur on Jesus lips (which is nearer eleven), but the number of different metaphors he uses; and of counting these in such a way as to collapse some variations into each other (e.g. 'bread of life' and 'living bread'), while differentiating others that have elements in common ('the resurrection and the life' and 'the way, the truth and the life').

<sup>34</sup> There are also some specific interconnections between absolute and metaphorical uses. It has already been pointed out that Jesus' kingship is presented in association with both the absolute 'I am' on the lake (Jn. 6.13, 20) and with the metaphorical 'I am the good shepherd' (Jn. 10.11, 14). There are other interconnections between metaphorical and absolute 'I am' sayings, building networks of imagery through the gospel. For example, 'I am' on the lake is closely followed by 'I am the bread of life' (Jn. 6.20, 35); then at the Last Supper Jesus seeks to persuade the disciples of the 'I am' by predicting the fulfilment of a piece of scripture about 'He who eats my bread' (Jn. 13.18-19). The close association between 'eating my bread' and the 'I am' recalls both the metaphorical and the absolute uses of the formula in ch.6.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. n. 28, above.

<sup>36</sup> *ἀναγγέλλω* in Jn. 4.25-26, cf. LXX Isa. 43.12; 46.10; 48.3, 5. Williams 2000: 262-6.

alludes to God making a path through the waves;<sup>37</sup> in talking with the Jews at Tabernacles, Jesus' words resonate verbally with LXX Isa 43.10, 'so that you may know and believe I am he', where God is speaking of his salvific power, revelation and proclamation.<sup>38</sup> At the footwashing, Jesus uses ἔγώ εἰμι for the content of belief revealed in the passion (Jn. 13.19); at his arrest he identifies himself with the same formula and the soldiers fall prostrate as if before a king or god (Jn. 18.4-6).

By the time Jesus reaches the praetorium, then, the phrase ἔγώ εἰμι has become familiar to readers of John's gospel as one that is richly imbued with connotations of God's self-declaration in Deutero-Isaiah and Deut 32.39. When Jesus observes, σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεύς εἰμι ἔγώ, it is plausible that the back to front ἔγώ εἰμι may evoke its significance in the rest of the gospel. Themes and scriptural texts associated with its earlier use continue to pattern the encounter with Pilate.

The twin motifs of trial and of testimony shape John's presentation of Jesus throughout the gospel and culminate in the encounter in the praetorium.<sup>39</sup> The shift in a judicial setting from a challenge to Jesus to testify about himself to the question of how he reveals truth itself (Jn. 18.37) is reminiscent of the pattern of the dialogues with the Jews in John 8:12-59 and with the way they draw on Deutero-Isaiah.<sup>40</sup> The Pharisees first asked Jesus to testify about himself (Jn. 8.13) and he says his testimony is true (Jn. 8.14, 16-17), but as the dialogue develops it is God whom he declares true (Jn. 8.26) and he correlates, 'You shall know that I AM' (γνώσεσθε ὅτι ἔγώ εἰμι, Jn. 8.28) with 'You shall know *the truth* (γνώσεσθε τὴν ἀλήθειαν) and the truth will set you free' (Jn. 8.32). In the encounter in the praetorium, Pilate asks Jesus to testify about himself and his actions, but Jesus shifts the issue: 'You say that βασιλεύς εἰμι ἔγώ; for this I was born and for this I came into the world: to testify to the truth (ἀληθεία); everyone who is from the truth (ἀληθείας) hears my voice.' Pilate said to him, "What is truth (ἀλήθεια)?" (Jn. 18.37-8). As in the dialogue with the Jews, the judicial enquiry has moved to a question about how Jesus reveals the truth, with a hint at his unusually purposeful entry into the world. In the debate with the Jews the formula ἔγώ εἰμι on Jesus' lips articulated both the content of 'truth' (Jn. 8.28 cf. 32) and his pre-existence (Jn. 8.58). It was modelled on Deutero-Isaiah, where, God's ἔγώ εἰμι forms part of the testimony to him in a trial between him and the idols of the

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<sup>37</sup> Jn. 6.20, cf. LXX Isa. 43.2, 16; 51.10. Williams 2000: 221.

<sup>38</sup> Jn. 8.24, 28 cf. LXX Isa. 43.10. Williams 2000: 271.

<sup>39</sup> See esp. Lincoln 2000.

<sup>40</sup> Excellent analysis in Williams 2000: 272-3, on which I draw extensively here.

nations; his witnesses report ‘truth’, which means knowing and understanding and believing the divine declaration, ἐγὼ εἰμι, and the promises of salvation (Isa. 43.5-13). God declares ἐγὼ εἰμι ἐγὼ εἰμι κύριος λαλῶν δικαιοσύνην καὶ ἀναγγέλων ἀλήθειαν (‘I AM I AM the Lord who speaks righteousness and declares truth’, Isa. 45.19). Jesus does not repeat the declaration ἐγὼ εἰμι when addressing the Roman, Pilate, but in rearticulating Pilate’s words to him he does so in a form that recalls it (βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγὼ), in a context that in other ways also evokes the earlier debates.

The tension between βασιλεύς understood in a worldly sense and the ἐγὼ εἰμι of the one who makes a path through the waves was explored in John 6:15-20. A similar tension remains in βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγὼ uttered in the praetorium, for βασιλεύς could be interpreted in a worldly sense, as it was by the crowds at the lake and as it is by Pilate.<sup>41</sup> By yoking it with εἰμι ἐγὼ, however, John evokes the prominence and theological profundity of Jesus’ earlier pronouncements of ἐγὼ εἰμι, and the way they tended to draw on Deutero-Isaiah’s prophecies. In Deutero-Isaiah, God is presented as a king with power over the kings of the nations, as well as power to raise up a king for Israel.<sup>42</sup> Already at his arrest, Jesus’ captors fell back prostrate at his utterance of ἐγὼ εἰμι, recalling the role that ἐγὼ εἰμι plays in God’s declaration of his complete, sovereign power over his opponents in Deuteronomy and Deutero-Isaiah,<sup>43</sup> which is also manifest in the way his anointed smites with a mere word.<sup>44</sup> In the encounter with Pilate, Jesus stops short of declaring himself king but he is presented vividly as king even as he is crucified in weakness. The Jews may claim no king but Caesar, but, as Jesus says, Pilate has no power over him but what was given from above (Jn. 19.11-12). Thus the resonance with ἐγὼ εἰμι indicates the proper direction for interpretation of the relationship of βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγὼ to the ‘truth’ made known in Jesus (Jn. 18.37-8).

In speaking to both Jews and disciples, Jesus indicates that his ἐγὼ εἰμι will not be understood until his passion and exaltation (Jn. 8.28; 13.18-19). Similarly, in Deuteronomy, God’s declaration of ἐγὼ εἰμι is established in his power to kill

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<sup>41</sup> Lincoln 2000: 128-9.

<sup>42</sup> See n. 15, above.

<sup>43</sup> Deut. 32.35-42; Isa. 43.13, 17; Williams 2000: 295-9.

<sup>44</sup> Isa. 11.4, cf. 2 Thess. 2.8; Rev. 1.16; 2.12, 16; 19.15, 21, with Schreiber 2000: 65-6.

and make alive (Dt 32.39), a power which is pre-eminently seen when Jesus, through dying, brings life to the world.<sup>45</sup>

Jesus' encounter with Pilate exposes to the reader the true judgement on the trial and on where 'truth' is in the matters discussed. The resonances of βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ recall God's declaration of ἐγώ εἰμι as judge, deliverer and sovereign in Deuteronomy and Deutero-Isaiah, and his claim to special association with the truth. Jesus, to be sure, does not use direct speech for βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ. He thus does not in words affirm or deny what Pilate says; he leaves it as a statement that *Pilate* says, or that he says Pilate says. But Pilate, we already see by now, cannot hear what Jesus means by 'king', any more than Pilate can recognise what is not of the world. Pilate will not be able to hear any resonance with Jesus' revelatory ἐγώ εἰμι. The reader is intended to be sensitive to discrepancy between Pilate's understanding of Jesus' words and Jesus' own intention. It is very plausible that not just βασιλεύς, but also εἰμι ἐγώ is intended ironically.

## 6. Conclusion

This essay has argued that the punctuation of John 18.37 in Nestle Aland does not convey the way that the verse was probably intended to be voiced, and that the full stop should be shifted from after βασιλεύς εἰμι, so as to divide the sentence instead slightly later, after βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ. It has been argued that this has implications for John's presentation of christology, especially Jesus' kingship and the significance of the ἐγώ εἰμι sayings.

Βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ is the last time that ἐγώ εἰμι (in any form) occurs on Jesus' lips; he does not use it (in any form) after the resurrection. Βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ is also integral to the way John begins his presentation of Jesus as a king in his passion, which culminates the portrayal of his kingship during his ministry. Pilate thinks that Jesus is a king in the ordinary, this-worldly sense; Jesus denies this in exactly so many words. However, his formula, σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ, deepens that denial by exposing a different *network* of signifiers and *grammar* of 'truth', distinct from the worldly, political meaning that Pilate intends and bound up with Jesus' own multifarious ἐγώ εἰμι and with John's portrayal of his royalty.

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<sup>45</sup> Williams 2000: 301-2, 304-6.

Pilate's question 'What is truth?' highlights the hermeneutical issues at stake concerning the relationship between 'truth' and linguistic forms. John's interest in such things is reflected throughout the gospel in the words he favours to describe his project. Whereas Luke advertised his gospel project in terms of its ἀκρίβεια (Luke 1.3), John never uses ἀκρίβεια but frequently mentions ἀλήθεια. John does not use παραβολή, which the Synoptics favour; his term is παροιμία, for a hidden saying that 'accompanies along the way'. He says that Jesus 'exegeted' (ἐξηγήσατο) God, because he was with God. He underscores the limitations of the written text, which cannot contain everything about Jesus (Jn. 20.30-1; 21.25).

A phrase like βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ draws attention at a micro-level what John tries to achieve on a larger scale throughout the gospel, in inventing a way of presenting his message that denies the truth to those who listen only to the words. The words βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ are simple enough, but in the context of the gospel they are a back to front form of expression, which is also transferred both in content and in speaker, inasmuch as the proper significance of βασιλεύς is shifted to a non-worldly sense and the first person is placed in indirect speech. It is an expression that takes up and helps to confirm what has been presented christologically throughout the gospel, yet at the same time it dismantles the form of expressing it such that it leaves responsibility with the reader to hear the voice and figure out what 'truth' is.

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pp6-7 Last two paragraphs in the section, together with relevant footnotes. Parts that are unchanged from the proofs are in pale blue.

Replace the whole two paragraphs ('The Latin tradition quotes ... ἐγὼ εἶμι sayings')

with 'The Latin tradition quotes Jn 18.37b more often than the Greek, but with less textual stability. Jerome's Vulgate gives a double 'ego':

tu dicis quia rex sum ego ego in hoc natus sum...

The double ego is found also in some Old Latin witnesses, but with diverse indications of voicing:

Codex Veronensis (5<sup>th</sup> century) has a punctuated pause and paragraph break:

quia rex sum ego · ¶ ego ad hoc natus sum et ad hoc in hunc mundum veni

The paragraph break may arise from a desire to please the eye: this beautiful manuscript is of purple parchment written upon in gold and silver lettering; an immediate repetition of ego in the same line may be found visually offensive. The much corrected Codex Corbeiensis (5<sup>th</sup> century) has a euphonic variant, repeating ego but avoiding placing the two beside each other: 'quia rex sum ego ad hoc ego natus sum'. Codex Brixianus (6<sup>th</sup> century), another silver on purple edition, has the double ego without only a punctuation break, but the first ego is omitted by a corrector:

quia rex sum ~~ego~~ · ego in hoc natus sum

A single 'ego', meanwhile, is found in the Codex Vercellensis (4<sup>th</sup> century) and in Codex Usserianus Primus (ca. 600). The former shows no punctuation, the latter pauses only after 'rex sum ego in hoc natus sum', indicating the pause simply by means of a space. This presentation may encourage reading that phrase chiasmically: 'rex ... sum' encloses the mention of birth 'sum...natus', centred on 'ego in hoc' at the very heart of the clause. In this way, the single ego belongs to a presentation that actually enhances rather than diminishes the suggestion that Jesus was born precisely to be a king: 'A king am I for this I am born.'<sup>1</sup>

Augustine several times quotes 'tu dicis quia rex sum ego' in isolation, breaking off to discuss it when he resumes his quotation of Jn 18.37, he repeats the 'ego' at the start of the next sentence, suggesting that he reads or remembers the text with double 'ego'.<sup>2</sup> A different tradition is attested in Cyprian of Carthage. The critical text in CCSL presents Cyprian's quotation without an 'ego' in any part of the sentence, but the manuscript tradition shows some diversity: a number of manuscripts read 'tu dicis quoniam ego rex sum' (*b W Q M T U B*), while one ninth century manuscript (*D*) arrestingly attests, 'tu dicis quoniam ego sum' – in Greek this would be the resonant ἐγὼ εἶμι (Cyprian, *Test.* 2.29.45-6, CCSL 3, 70). Ambrose quotes relevant parts of Jn 18.37 in diverse forms: 'quoniam ego rex sum' (*Exp. Luc.* 3.43.765, CCSL 14, 99); 'quia rex sum ego in hoc natus sum' (*Jos.* 12.67.10, CSEL 32.2, 114); 'ego in hoc natus sum' (*Isaac* 5.46.16, CSEL 32.1, 670), and 'in hoc sum natus' (*Fid. Grat.* 12.103.20; CSEL 78, 95). On one occasion in expounding the petition in the Lord's Prayer, 'Thy kingdom come', he comments that Jesus himself says, 'ego in hoc natus sum' (Jn 18.37c). This shows that Ambrose, like Usserianus Primus, read 'ego in hoc natus sum' closely with the words about kingship that went before, rather than the words about testimony that come afterward. He does not cite Jn 18.37b here or comment on Johannine resonances with 'ego sum' expressions, but his interpretation of the next clause suggests that he did see in this verse a claim by Jesus that linked his own person with the kingdom of God.

The early reception of Jn 18.37, then, shows a variety of ways of voicing this text, and indeed a variety of readings of the single or double 'ego', and even of its position in the verse. The Latin textual tradition of the verse as a whole appears to be much less stable than the Greek, but it does indicate some reflection on the weightiness of Jesus' words as a personal claim to royalty and relationship to the divine sovereign. The evidence of the fathers and Latin versions, however, gives little assistance in determining a fixed form of the text in the early church. Diverse patterns of citation were practised, especially in Latin. Two points lend some slight support to focusing on the longer version of Jn 18.37b: firstly, when

<sup>1</sup> These references are drawn from the manuscript transcriptions available on the ITSEE Vetus Latina Iohannes website (<http://arts-itsee.bham.ac.uk/itseeweb/iohannes/vetuslatina/>). The Vulgate reading is also found in Ulfilas Moeso-Gothorum, *Evangelia*, MPL 18, col.707, and in the *Harmony of the Gospels* by Victor of Capua, which was a Latin version of an earlier harmony by Ammonius of Alexandria: Ammonius, *Evangelicarum Harmoniarum Interpretatio* 167, MPL 68, col. 349b. These references derive from the MPL database.

<sup>2</sup> Aug., *Cons.* 3.8, MPL 34, col. 1180; 115.3, MPL 35, col. 1940 [twice]. These references derive from the MPL database.



they quote this phrase in isolation, both Cyril of Alexandria in Greek and Augustine in Latin include a closing personal pronoun; secondly, the close association of the verse with Jesus' own claim to kingship and deity may be partly explained by a tradition that did respond to resonances with Johannine  $\epsilon\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\acute{\iota}\mu\iota$  sayings.