

Revelation: The Church Triumphant Through Christ the Lamb of God

Based upon Jim McGuiggan's work on the book of Revelation

The Book of Revelation: The Old Testament

Lesson Two

In this lesson, we will learn that ...

- John had several good reasons for using the Old Testament in his Revelation.
 - There are three types of OT references used in Revelation.
 - Seven Old Testament books make up a majority of the references used by John.
 - Many of the names for Christ used by John originated in the Old Testament.
 - John also used OT events, characters, and objects to illustrate his Revelation visions.
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Why use the Old Testament?

There are more than 400 Old Testament (OT) references in Revelation. Now why do you think John would make such a heavy use of the OT? One reason would be that the OT phraseology was familiar to John's audience. He knew his Scriptures well and the writings would give comfort to those who were being persecuted. Is that not what Romans 15:4 teaches? Secondly, several of the OT books used by John are written in the same apocalyptic literary style as Revelation. So, John would naturally borrow from their OT imagery and symbols. Finally, many events recorded in the OT are strikingly similar, whether in reality or symbolically, to the experiences the Christians of that day were about to endure. Bringing those events to memory would serve to drive home the messages of Revelation.

The types of references

Oddly enough, out of the more than 400 OT references in Revelation there is not one direct citation with a statement that it is quoted from a given passage. However, there are a significant number of allusions that are traceable by verbal resemblance and by contextual connection to the Old Testament.

The difference between a citation, a quotation, and an allusion might be profitable here. A citation is a fairly exact reproduction of the words of the original text, accompanied by a statement of the fact that they are quoted and by identification of the source. A quotation is a general reproduction of the original text, sufficiently close to give the meaning of its thought and to establish unquestionably the passage from which it is taken. An allusion consists of one or more words that by their peculiar character and general content are connected to a known body of text, but which do not constitute a complete reproduction of any part of it.

The seven major OT books used in Revelation

Most of the OT references in Revelation come from seven books: Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Zechariah, Psalms, and Exodus. What follows is a brief description of each of these books, especially, as they relate to the context of Revelation.

Daniel

Since Daniel has only twelve chapters and is used 53 times there are a lot of similarities between it and Revelation. Daniel lived during the Babylonian period of the 6th century BC. He was a member of the royal family and while in captivity was educated according to the Babylonian king's decree. Daniel does well and is blessed by God. The book of Daniel shows that God with His divine foreknowledge, power, providential guidance, and omniscience directs the affairs of nations. The four major lines of prophecy are culminated in these verses: 2:44 when a kingdom shall be set up that is never destroyed; 7:13-14 when the Son of Man

receives everlasting dominion; 8:25 when the opposition to the Prince of Princes is broken without a hand; and, 12:1 when God's people are delivered from oppression.

The similarities are many and here are just a few: both authors were in exile; the people of God were oppressed by the ungodly; and, both spoke of the overthrow of the evil power. Conversely, notice that there is a difference ... Israel was oppressed as punishment for its sins; the Church was oppressed as a test of its faithfulness.

Ezekiel

The last years of the kingdom of Judah were full of problems. Daniel and other royal personages were taken captive in 605 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar's army enters Jerusalem. Later, in 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar's army again invades Jerusalem. The Judean king Jehoiachin was taken prisoner with 10,000 others. In that group was Ezekiel. Subsequently, Judah again rebels under Zedekiah and Jerusalem is totally destroyed along with the Temple. Jeremiah was left to the Jews in the desolated Jerusalem, Daniel to the Babylonian royal court, and Ezekiel to those in captivity. The larger section of Ezekiel's book is addressed to those exiled to the river Chebar in Babylon. This larger section was written before the destruction of the Temple. Ezekiel spoke judgments against the nations around them and shows that God was still in control. After the destruction of the Temple, Ezekiel wrote to counteract the waves of despair the Jews felt.

With this background, John is provided with expressions like the "Son of Man", symbolic figures, actions and visions, and judgments against nations around them. The sealing of God's people finds a place in Ezekiel 9:1-7 and Revelation 7:1-4.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah prophesied under five kings: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Jeremiah stayed with those left in Jerusalem. He was later taken to Egypt. The majority of the 22 references from Jeremiah in the book of Revelation are found in the section describing the overthrow of Babylon (chapters 16-19).

Isaiah

This is the most cited book in Revelation. Some of Isaiah's contemporaries were Amos, Hosea, and Micah. This time period in Israel's history is marked with division within the nation: The Egyptian party, the Assyrian party, and those who served God.

The book of Isaiah is cited around five major places in the book of Revelation: the throne scene in Revelation 4 & 5 and Isaiah 6; the conduct of the wicked when the seals were opened in Revelation 6 and Isaiah 2; the garments of Jesus being dipped in the blood in Revelation 19:13 and Isaiah 63; the fall of Babylon in Revelation 18 and Isaiah 13, 14, 21, 47 & 48; and, the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21 & 22 and Isaiah 65. Please notice as you study these passages how they also use "signs" to show God's judgments (*I will shake the heavens and the earth will move out of its place, Isaiah 13:13*). This did not literally happen, but it did happen figuratively! The same is true in Revelation. Read Isaiah 34:9-15 and see if all this literally happened.

Zechariah

Zechariah deals with the return of the faithful remnant from captivity, the rebuilding of the Temple and the reconstruction of the Jerusalem city walls. There are at least four symbols that John borrows from Zechariah: the lamp stands, the seven eyes, the two olive trees, and the four horsemen.

Exodus

Exodus provides objects and events for John's use. The 10 plagues provide a dynamic background for the punishment of Rome described in the seals, trumpets, and bowls. The song of Moses seems to match Revelation 15 with Exodus 15. There is heavy symbolic use of the Temple and some of the Temple furniture, as well as, the Ark of the Covenant in Revelation.

Psalms

Much of this book's illustrations are just words themselves. As examples, Psalm 119:137 with Revelation 16:7 and Psalm 79:3 with Revelation 16:6 are for praise or description of Christ. Therefore, John uses them as words of comfort for God's people and praise of God Himself.

Places, Characters, and Objects

Let us look at some of the places that are named and used from the Old Testament.

Jerusalem

Jerusalem, of course, is prominently mentioned throughout the Old Testament, and especially in the seven books briefly described above. However, this place is referred to only three times in Revelation: 3:12, 21:2, and 21:10. Two other references are made to the holy city in Revelation chapters 11 and 22, and Revelation 11 mentions the great city that crucified the Lord. But we must make note that these Revelation references are just for the New Jerusalem. The word for "new" here means new in nature, better than the old. John does not see a restoration of the old Jerusalem, but a New Jerusalem, very much like that heavenly city mentioned in Hebrews 12. This New Jerusalem stands in opposition to the Harlot, Babylon (that is, Rome) - the former a spiritual place, the latter an earthly and carnal place. Quite related to John's use of Jerusalem, is his use of Mount Zion. This place, where David's palace was located, is mentioned most frequently in Psalms and Isaiah. It finds fitting use in Hebrews 12:22 and Revelation 14:1.

The River Euphrates

This is the longest river in western Asia, and figures prominently in our news today. Over the many centuries so many kingdoms had been formed around it. In John's day, it was the threat of the Parthians from the region of the Euphrates that the Romans feared most. They had lost significant battles with the people of this region prior to the writing of Revelation. We find judgment and punishment originating from the Euphrates in Revelation chapters 9 and 16.

Armageddon

At the sixth bowl of wrath we are introduced to Armageddon. We will spend a major portion of one lesson on this place because it figures so prominently in premillennial and denominational theology. For now, we will just mention that Megiddo, the place that is referenced here, was the famous battleground of many Israelite conflicts, some recorded in Judges and I & II Kings.

Let us now look at some of the objects that are named and used from the Old Testament.

The Golden Lampstand

In the tabernacle the only light in the Holy Place would have come from the golden lampstands. We find the details for the lampstand listed in Exodus 25. And we find symbolic use both in Zechariah 4 and Revelation 1. In the case of the Revelation reference, the churches are light-bearers with Christ among them as the source of their light. Zechariah uses the lampstand in a similar manner, as Jehovah God is the light source.

The Tabernacle and the Temple

In Old Testament history the tabernacle was the dwelling place of God while His people wandered in the wilderness. Later, after they had established themselves in the Promised Land, the temple was built as the intended permanent dwelling place for God among His people. Revelation 21:3 uses the tabernacle to reaffirm God's existence among His people. In Revelation, the temple is where God issues his decrees from as we can see in 7:15, 11:19, 14:15, etc. Conversely, though, the New Jerusalem has no temple because God is with his people as we see in Revelation 21:22.

The Altar

In the Old Testament, the altar is where burnt offerings were made as we see in Exodus 27 & 38:1-7. Consequently, John used the altar symbolically of Christian sacrifice and martyrdom, vividly portrayed in Revelation 6:9. It was from this same altar that Revelation 8:3-5 records the offering up of the prayers of the saints.

We will be spending a major portion of our class looking at the major characters in Revelation. So at this point in our study let's look at just a couple of the minor characters in Revelation that are named and used from the Old Testament.

Balaam

Here is one who taught others to sin as indicated in Revelation 2:14. He stands for one who is filled with covetousness and greed. We read Balaam's story in Numbers 22 – 24, where Israel's enemies use him in an attempt to deceive and destroy them. The church at Pergamum probably had the same kind of spirit.

Jezebel

More than one-third of the letter to Thyatira is given to deal with this character (reference Revelation chapter two. There must have been a false prophetess who had the same moral depravity as the OT woman we read of in I Kings. Jezebel brought in Baal worship when she married Ahab, king of Judah. In like manner, the woman of Thyatira must have induced Christians to compromise with the world around them.

Descriptions of Christ from the Old Testament

When we are introduced to Christ in Revelation chapter one, many dramatic and descriptive phrases are used to identify Him and establish His authority. These phrases are steeped in Old Testament symbolism. We have just a few listed below:

The faithful witness - Psalm 89:37; Isaiah 55:4

The firstborn from the dead - Psalm 89:27

The ruler over kings of the earth – Jeremiah 10:7; Psalm 47:7-8; Daniel 4:17

The Alpha and the Omega (or the first and the last) – Isaiah 41:4; 44:6

Son of Man – Daniel 7:13

Head and hair white like wool – Daniel 7:9

Voice as the sound of many waters - Ezekiel 43:2

Exercises for Lesson Two

Complete the following statements.

1. He knew his Scriptures well and the writings would give comfort to those who were being persecuted.

2. An allusion consists of one or more words that by their peculiar character and general content are connected to a known body of text, but which do not constitute a complete reproduction of any part of it.
3. Most of the OT references in Revelation come from seven books: Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Zechariah, Psalms, and Exodus.

4. The book of Daniel shows that God with His divine foreknowledge, power, providential guidance, and omniscience directs the affairs of nations.

5. There are at least four symbols that John borrows from Zechariah: the lamp stands, the seven eyes, the two olive trees, and the four horsemen.

6. When we are introduced to Christ in Revelation chapter one, many dramatic and descriptive phrases are used to identify Him and establish His authority.

Check off each of the following references after you have read it.

_____ Revelation 1:4-8,12-16 <small>Figurative description of Christ New heavens, new earth, New Jerusalem</small>	_____ Psalm 119:137 with Revelation 16:7 <small>God's judgments are upright, righteous and true Balaam and Jezebel in the local church</small>
_____ Isaiah 65:17-25 with Revelation 21:1-7 <small>The Ancient of Days gives the Son of Man an eternal kingdom</small>	_____ Revelation 2:14,20-23 <small>The Song of Moses</small>
_____ Daniel 7:9-10,13-14	_____ Exodus 15:1-18 with Revelation 15:3-4

Underline the Old Testament scripture that ...

1. Tells of the Son of Man receiving everlasting dominion.
Daniel 4:17 Daniel 7:13-14 Daniel 7:2-6
2. Tells of the sealing of God's people.
Psalm 89:37 Isaiah 44:6 Ezekiel 9:1-7
3. Describes the symbolic use of the lamp stand.
Numbers 22:5-6 Zechariah 4:1-14 Exodus 38:1-7
4. Describes Christ as the faithful witness.
Psalm 89:37 Psalm 119:137 Psalm 79:3
5. Sees Christ as the ruler over kings of the earth.
Jeremiah 10:7 Daniel 4:17 Psalm 47:7-8
6. Mentions the voice as the sound of many waters.
Exodus 25:31 Zechariah 14:16-17 Ezekiel 43:2

List three reasons John used Old Testament references in the writing of his Revelation.

1. _ OT phraseology was familiar to (John and) John's audience. _____
2. _ Some of the OT books used by John are written in the same apocalyptic literary style as Revelation.
3. _ Many events recorded in the OT are strikingly similar, whether in reality or symbolically, to the experiences the Christians of that day were about to endure.