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Recommended Citation

de Waal, K. (2013). Principles and criteria for the use of the Old Testament in the book of Revelation. *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary*, 16(1), 69-85.

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Principles and Criteria for the Use of the Old Testament in the book of Revelation

The book of Revelation continues to inspire and challenge the contemporary reader with its poetic language and vexing symbolism. Its literary dynamics and visionary encounters trigger the imagination and deepen the desire to understand this enigmatic book better. Part of the complexity of Revelation is found in its indebtedness to antecedent literature, especially the Old Testament, which is woven into the very fabric of the book.¹ John's mind is saturated with the stories of the Old Testament and the book breathes the atmosphere of its ideas and language.

In fact, according to Gregory Beale, "the Old Testament in general plays such a major role that a proper understanding of its use is necessary for an adequate view of the Apocalypse as a whole."² It is therefore unsurprising that a whole host of studies have emerged that have demonstrated the fertile soil Revelation provides for the interpreter to carefully dig and uncover new facets of meaning and meaning potential when the book is studied in relationship with the Old Testament.³

This article will address three matters. First, I will propose four principles that can aid the interpreter in studying this book; second, I will examine the criteria of Richard Hays and Jon Paulien that they enlist for interpreting the Old Testament in the writings of Paul and John respectively; and third, I will discuss the debate surrounding the literary construct of echo and its implications for interpreting Revelation.

¹ Henry B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (New York: Macmillan, 1906; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), cxi-clviii, suggested that out of the 404 verses in Revelation, 278 contain references or allusions to the OT.

² G. K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, JSOTSup 166 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 61.

³ A number of important monographs have been written: Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and their Development*, JSNTSup 93 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994); Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in Revelation*, JSNTSup 115 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995); David Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21.1-22.5* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003) and Marko Jauhiainen, *The Use of Zechariah in Revelation*, WUNT 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). There is an immense range of secondary literature on the use of the Old Testament in Revelation. For example see Jon Paulien, "The Book of Revelation and the Old Testament," *BR* 43 (1998): 61-9; Steve Moyise, "Intertextuality and the Book of Revelation," *ExpTim* 104 (1993): 295-98.

Principles

Firstly then, tracing the symbols of Revelation to the Old Testament means that John views the current situation he and the church is faced with from a typological-prophetic perspective.⁴ The typological-prophetic interpretation of the Old Testament was the most popular way to interpret the Scriptures by the early Christians. In fact it was the method used by Jesus.⁵ Jesus saw Himself as a New Jonah and a New Solomon (Matt 12:40-41), however, what Jesus went through as the New Jonah far exceeded what Jonah went through. Jonah died the first death while we know that Jesus experienced the second death. The anti-typical fulfillment therefore is greater and more intense than the initial historical reality.

Furthermore, the broad typological sweep of Old Testament self-understanding is evident in how Moses functioned as a type for both Joshua and Josiah.⁶ The prophets continually portray the eschatological future with motifs and imagery derived from the Genesis tradition (compare Gen. 2 with Isaiah 11:6-9, 35; 65:23-25; Ezekiel 34:25-30; 36:35). Isaiah predicts the coming deliverance of Israel from the Assyrian-Babylon captivity in terms of a new and greater exodus (Isaiah 43:16-19; 51:10-11).⁷

This typological-prophetic perspective is also evident in Old Testament apocalyptic. It

⁴ The term “typological-prophetic” is from G. K. Beale, *Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 94. The notion of typology and especially its predictive dimension has not received good press in recent scholarly literature. See David L. Baker, “Typology and the Christian Use of the Old Testament,” in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 324, 326). Baker lists in his article several other scholars who hold this position. See also R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College, 1998), 38-43; Gerhard von Rad, *The Theology of Israel’s Prophetic Traditions*, *Old Testament Theology 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 319-87; C. A. Evans, “New Testament Use of the Old Testament,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S Rosner (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 76.

⁵ L. Goppelt emphasizes that typology “is the central and distinctive NT way of understanding scripture,” see Typos, antitypos, typikos, hypotypos in G. Friedrich, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 8, 255, 256. E. Ellis, *History and Interpretation in New Testament perspective*, *Biblical Interpretation Series 54* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 115, states that “typological interpretation expresses most clearly the basic approach of earliest Christianity toward the Old Testament.” For the most comprehensive analysis of the typological interpretation of the Old Testament in the New Testament see L. Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

⁶ Dale Allison, Jr., *A New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 23-25, 45-46. For a fruitful discussion of the typological understanding of the Old Testament see G. von Rad, *Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament*, *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation*, ed. Claus Westerman (London: SCM, 1963), 17-39.

⁷ Hans La Rondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1983), 52.

seems possible to see in Dan.7 a *midrash* on the creation account of Gen. 1. The literary links include the following:

Table 1	
Comparison of Daniel 7 and Genesis 1	
Daniel 7	Genesis 1
Winds churning up the sea (Dan.7:2)	Spirit moving on the waters (Gen. 1:2)
Beasts appear (Dan.7:3 ff)	Animals appear (Gen.1:24-25)
Son of Man follows (Dan.7:13-14)	Adam follows (Gen.1:26-28)
Dominion granted (Dan.7: 13-14)	Dominion granted to Adam (Gen.1:26-28)

Here is an example of “second Adam typology,” in which an end-time Adamic figure defeats God’s enemies and takes possession of God’s kingdom on behalf of his people (Dan.7:13-14, cf. 7:27).⁸ Similarly in Revelation, the visions of Christ use the language of John’s past, the Old Testament, as the primary source for its symbolism. According to Ranko Stefanovic,

The prophecies of Revelation are especially built on the greatest and key events from sacred history: the creation, the flood, the exodus, God’s covenant with David and the exile to Babylon. These events are intended to build the readers faith on the grounds that God’s acts of salvation in the future will be very much like God’s acts of salvation in the past.⁹

God is consistent in his dealings with the human family.

A notable contribution to understanding the typological approach to Revelation is the research of J. S. Casey.¹⁰ Casey contends that the exodus typology can be discerned in three inter-related themes which include redemption (Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10), judgment (Rev. 15-16)

⁸ Jacques Doukhan, *Daniel: The Vision of the End* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1987), 122-23; Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St John’s Apocalypse* (Glasgow: University Press, 1949), 52, who writes: “Daniel VII is of course a spiritual exposition of Genesis 1:20-28. There is the age in which the image of Leviathan reigns; the age is coming when the image of Adam will reign, and Adam is the image of God.” See also Andre Lacocque, “Allusions to Creation in Daniel 7” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, vol. 2, eds., John Collins and Peter Flint (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 114-131; Tremper Longman III, *Daniel*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 181, 183; G. W. Buchanan, *The Book of Revelation*, The Mellen Biblical Commentary, New Testament Series 22 (Lewiston: Mellen, 1993), 16, who writes: “Since Joseph had once saved Israel during its Egyptian diaspora, enabling the Israelites to escape and return at a later time, Daniel was intentionally caricatured to be a new Joseph...” and John Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1989), 37, 43.

⁹ Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2002), 19.

¹⁰ J. S. Casey, “Exodus Typology in the Book of Revelation” (Ph.D. diss.; Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, 1982).

and inheritance (Rev. 7:1-17; 14:1-5; 15:1-5; 20-22). Just as God delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage so now Jesus has freed us from the curse of sin and death by His blood. He has ransomed us to be a kingdom of priests to serve Him. Just as God judged Pharaoh and the Egyptians so God will judge the enemies of His people. And finally just as God provided an inheritance for Israel in the Promised Land so Jesus has provided an inheritance through His death and resurrection. John offers a new exodus theology based on the central promise of the reign of God from Exod. 19:5-6.¹¹ Thus John actualized the Exodus experience through his understanding of the redemption purchased by Christ and made available to believers.¹²

The second key point to consider is that the Old Testament context must be taken into account in the interpretation of Revelation.¹³ Since John was part and parcel of the first-century world he undoubtedly used the exegetical practices of his contemporaries. David Instone-Brewer has demonstrated that the rabbi's in pre-70 Palestine studied their sacred texts with due consideration for the literary and thematic context. Brewer summarizes the conclusions to his research: "The predecessors of the rabbis before 70 CE did not interpret Scripture out of context, did not look for any meaning in Scripture other than the plain sense, and did not change the text to fit their interpretation, though the later rabbis did all these things."¹⁴

Richard Bauckham maintains that the multiplicity of allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation is meant to "recall the Old Testament context, which thereby becomes part of the meaning the Apocalypse conveys, and to build up, sometimes by a network of allusion to the

¹¹ Ibid., 236.

¹² Ibid., 239.

¹³ Contra Steve Moyise who questions any reading of Revelation that attempts to take into account the intention of John. He also questions whether the Old Testament context in which an allusion emerges is important for interpretation. See Steve Moyise, "Does the Author of Revelation Misappropriate the Scriptures?" *AUSS* 40 (2002): 3-21 and Idem., "Authorial Intention and the Book of Revelation," *AUSS* 39 (2001): 35-40.

¹⁴ David Instone Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 CE* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992), 1.

same Old Testament passage in various parts of the Apocalypse, an interpretation of whole passages of Old Testament prophecy.”¹⁵

However, what is of concern is that the context of the Old Testament is determined by the interpreter and it is the conclusions of the interpreter that then determines how the Revelation text will be interpreted. For example Robert Wall has suggested that Job 3:21b is an echo in relation to 9:6. It reads: “To those who long for death (θάνατον) that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure” (οὐ δόμείρονται τοῦ θανάτου καὶ οὐ τυγχάνουσιν).¹⁶ The notion of a desire for death in the place of a life of torment is fairly common in the Old Testament, Jewish and Greek exegetical tradition.¹⁷

Wall asserts that the theological questions raised by Job’s response to his suffering provide another way of understanding the passage about the fifth trumpet.¹⁸ Although Job felt persecuted by God, he misunderstood his suffering. Its purpose, according to Wall, was “to disclose a reigning God in control of humanity’s existence.”¹⁹ This background clarifies “the

¹⁵ Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), xi. Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, 45, 127, also maintains that the Old Testament literary and thematic context is important for understanding and interpreting the Old Testament allusions in Revelation. Beale’s argument for the supremacy of the Old Testament context in the interpretive process is based on four presuppositions: (1) Christ corporately represents Israel of the Old Testament and New Testament, (2) because history is under the sovereignty of Christ the earlier part of canonical history corresponds typologically to latter parts of that same history, (3) Christ’s first coming has inaugurated the age of end-time fulfilment and (4) Christ is the centre of history and is the key to interpreting the Old Testament. This forms the bedrock of argumentation in his commentary as well. See Beale, *Revelation*, 81-6; 96-9. Other scholars include Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (London: SPCK, 2005), 8-10; Alan S. Bandy, *The Prophetic Lawsuit in the Book of Revelation*, NTM 29 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010).

¹⁶ This intertextual relationship is referenced by Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1971), 59; David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, WBC 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 531.

¹⁷ For the notion of a desire for death in the place of a life of torment see 1 Kgs 19.1-4; Ps 55.4-8; Jer 8.3; Jonah 4.3; *Sib. Or.* 2.307-308; *Apoc. Elijah* 2.5, 32 and *Apoc. Dan.* 12.4. For Greek texts see Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 531. One important Greek text by Ovid *Ibis* 123-24 states: “May you have cause enough for death but no means of dying; may your life be forced to avoid the death it longs for” cited in Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 531.

¹⁸ Robert Wall, *Revelation*, NIBC (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 129. Cf. J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 126, writes: “The situation is reminiscent of the book of Job, where the righteous Job suffered at Satan’s hand, but only because God permitted Satan to put him to the test (see Job 1.6-12; 2.1-6).” For more detailed discussion on the value of suffering in the first-century world see also Charles H. Talbert, *The Apocalypse: A Reading of the Revelation of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 43.

¹⁹ Wall, *Revelation*, 129.

ultimate purpose of the suffering of humanity which is to bring it to repentance.”²⁰

On the other hand, Beale maintains that the Egyptian plague background in the fifth trumpet and the trumpet septet on the whole, suggests that there is no longer opportunity to repent for the inhabitants of the earth. The Exodus plagues are not meant as warnings that could lead Pharaoh and the Egyptians to contrition but rather as judgments against the Egyptians because of their recalcitrance and to portray God’s “incomparability and glory.”²¹ Beale writes: “We have concluded above that the trumpets represent punitive judgments against hardened unbelievers instead of mere warnings to induce repentance.”²²

It is this theological interpretation that Beale applies to the Exodus plagues that is of serious concern as this in turn supplies the entire framework within which all the trumpet judgments are understood. Here two different Old Testament backgrounds, that of Job and Exodus, allow interpreters to come to very different conclusions about the purpose of the trumpet septet. So while the Old Testament context is important interpreters come to very different conclusions about what Revelation means on the basis of their Old Testament interpretations. Hence we need to proceed with caution in determining what exactly the Old Testament context is. An interpreter must not simply accept the conclusions of another interpreter as to what the Old Testament context may or may not be as often that determination can be clouded by lenses of confession or presupposition.

On the other hand assessing and implementing the implications of the wider Old Testament context can be beneficial in the interpretation of Revelation. Beale has demonstrated convincingly that John alludes to Daniel 2 in Rev 1:1, 19; 4:1 and 22:6.²³ What

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Beale, *Revelation*, 465.

²² Ibid., 471.

²³ Ibid., 137; Jacques Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 2002), 12; Michael Wilcock, *I Saw Heaven Opened: The Message of Revelation* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 32-33. According to Robert Henry Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963), 1xviii-1xxxi, John alludes to twenty-seven different verses in Daniel. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 77, states that in “proportion to its length Daniel yields the most references” in Revelation to the Old Testament.

is most striking about these verses in Revelation is that they are at pivotal literary junctures.

Daniel 2 has all the elements in the development of biblical eschatology. It records the rise of political powers that will oppress and oppose God's people; judgment symbolized in the stone striking the image; the stone representing Christ; the image itself representing the "abomination of desolation;" and the defeat of cosmic evil in the establishment of God's kingdom.²⁴

Moreover John alludes specifically to Dan. 2:28, 29 which refers to the God of heaven who reveals mysteries. The God of heaven in the book of Daniel is in control of all that happens in history and overrides foreign powers that seek to oppress and persecute his people. The notion of the God of heaven revealing mysteries is found on six occasions in Daniel 2 alone (20, 23, 27, 28, 29b, 30). A major message of Dan. 2 is that God knows the future and can reveal to his servants the prophets what will take place in the future. The other allusion to Dan. 2:45 points to the vision of the rock in particular. The rock points to Christ in the context of both his first (Luke 20:17, 18; 1 Pet. 2:4) and second coming (John 14:3; Heb. 9:28) since the Old Testament prophets "could not clearly distinguish between the events tied to the two comings of Christ."²⁵

²⁴ John, like other writers in the New Testament era, recognizes the significance of Dan. 2. David Wenham has even asserted that "the book of Daniel may be the primary background to the gospel's teaching about the kingdom." D. Wenham, "The Kingdom of God and Daniel," *Exp Tim* 98 (1987): 132-134. Allusions in Luke 20:18 and Matt. 21:44 also identify the "stone" of Daniel 2:34-35 with Christ and so it would appear that the New Testament writers see Daniel 2 as having begun realization in Jesus' earthly ministry. Craig Evans, "Daniel in the New Testament" in *The Book of Daniel, Composition and Reception*, Vol. 2, eds. John Collins and Peter Flint (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 521, concludes an insightful article on the influence of Daniel in the Gospels by stating that "Jesus' eschatology is influenced by themes and images found in the book of Daniel....The somewhat fragmented, disjointed nature of this tradition, as well as its qualification, even suppression in Luke, suggests that it is not the product of the church but contains important elements of the eschatology of Jesus himself."

²⁵ Z. Stefanovic, *Daniel: Wisdom to the Wise* (Idaho: Pacific Press, 2007), 108. So also D. Ford, *Daniel* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Ass., 1978), 99, who states that the eternal kingdom of Dan. 2 applies "first to the building of the church temple (Matt.16:18) and ultimately to the sacred temple of a new world wherein God Himself visibly dwells (Rev. 21:3)." Hence the Old Testament, which normally portrays Messiah's kingdom as a single event without the millennia between the two advents fuses the first and second coming of Christ. I understand Dan. 2 in traditional perspective i.e. the four kingdoms in Dan. 2 represent Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome respectively. I have highlighted the Danielic *vorbild* for approaching Revelation readily admitting that there are also other Old Testament influences on the overall structure of the book. For the influence of the book of Ezekiel see Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, JSNTSup 115 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 64-84.

Daniel 2 provides the theological framework to understand Revelation. Daniel 2 begins in the time of the Babylonian Empire and covers the broad sweep of history culminating in the second coming of Christ, the stone that smashes all the other kingdoms (Dan. 2:44-45). Likewise, Revelation begins in the time of the Roman Empire and covers the broad sweep of history and culminates in the second coming of Christ.²⁶ The symbols in Revelation are therefore applicable to the Roman context but are indeed applicable throughout history as history moves toward the culmination of all things.

A third key principle is that the covenant promises made to Israel in the Old Testament are reinterpreted in the context of the new people of God, the church. The coming of Christ re-oriented the understanding and perspective of the New Testament writers. On the road to Emmaus Christ spoke to the two disciples who were filled with doubt and uncertainty. “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures *concerning himself*” (Luke 24:27; emphasis added). After this time of study the disciples responded by saying that their hearts burned within them as Christ “opened the Scriptures to us” (Luke 24:32). Jesus has the ability to open minds as well as to open the Scriptures. As the Messiah, Christ recapitulated God’s plan with Israel, conquering where Israel had failed. New Testament writers understood Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament and interpreted the Old Testament in that light.

Hence the Old Testament writings took on fresh meaning and spoke in relevant ways to the church, the Israel of God (Gal 6:16). Moreover, when we examine the passages used by John from the Old Testament, we find that he does not choose passages at random, but rather selects passages from the Old Testament in which Israel were to be a blessing to the nations. Thus, John carries the divine intention to its intended logical conclusion. For example, in the

²⁶ Kenneth Strand, “Foundational Principles of Interpretation,” in *Symposium on Revelation-Book 1*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series 6 (Silver Springs: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 13 writes: “Revelation likewise scans major historical developments from John’s day up to and including a portrayal of the grand eschatological finale.”

Old Testament covenant claims of God's marriage to Israel (cf. Isa 54:5; Jer 3:14), we discover a reinterpretation of Christ's cosmic marriage to his celestial bride (Rev 19:7-9).

Our fourth principle is that what is portrayed locally in the Old Testament is reinterpreted universally in Revelation. David's triumph over Jerusalem when he fought against the Jebusites and his standing as victor with his brave soldiers on Mount Zion (2 Sam 5.6-8) is a case in point. This local victory is now recast as a cosmic victory of the Lamb over the dragon and his evil associates (Rev. 12:1-4; 13:1, 11). The Lamb now stands on Mount Zion with the victorious 144, 000 (Rev 14.1-5). The interplay between the local and universal is also seen in John extending to the nations the promises God made to Israel.

A significant example of this is when John views, not just the Aaronic priesthood, but rather the entire throng of the redeemed as priests in Rev 1:6. This is a careful development from Exod. 19:5 where God expresses his intention to make all Israel a kingdom of priests. Peter applies this text to the New Testament church in 1 Pet 2:5 and John has extended this to include all the redeemed. John's universalizing hermeneutic is also evident in Rev 14 where on six occasions John stresses that the final harvest will be a harvest of "the earth" (see Rev. 14:14-19). Revelation 14:14-20 is a telling example of the worldwide extension of God's judgment because of the global witness of the gospel by the church (see Matt. 24:14; Rev. 14:6, 7; 18:1). John discloses that the apocalyptic consummation will not be Israel-centered but Christ-centered and will focus on the universal church of Christ-followers. The four above-mentioned principles can guide the interpreter in the study of this enigmatic book.

Criteria

Revelation is unique in the New Testament writings in that while it contains no explicit quotations from any prior literature its entire fabric exhibits a knitted tapestry of allusions to the Old Testament. This has led scholars to focus on developing criteria to assess the

presence of allusions to and echoes of the Old Testament in Revelation.²⁷ Scholars have struggled to classify what an allusion is exactly. Michael Thompson noticed that scholars have not been accurate in their definition of an allusion and so he distilled the insights of literary criticism into a concise form with an attempt at a far more exacting definition.

According to Thompson, literary critics agree on the following: “Allusion involves 1) the use of a sign or marker that 2) calls to the reader’s mind another known text 3) for a specific purpose.”²⁸ For Thompson the allusion “works” in the following fashion in a text: the reader must “recognize the sign, realize that the echo is deliberate, remember aspects of the original text to which the author is alluding, and connect one or more of these aspects with the alluding text in order to get the author’s point.”²⁹ It is important that scholars clarify what they mean by an allusion and seek to use that definition in their work. The specific criteria of two scholars will now be assessed.

I enlisted the landmark work of Richard Hays to establish the credibility of allusions in my doctorate published by Edwin Mellen Press.³⁰ Hays suggested seven criteria for the

²⁷ The importance of controls for the analysis of allusions and echoes is underscored by Stanley E. Porter, *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals*, eds. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, JSNTSup 148 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 82, in which he laments the misuse of these terms by highlighting the work of J. D. G. Dunn. In his article [J. D.G. Dunn, “Jesus Tradition in Paul,” in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, NTTS 19 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 155-78], Dunn uses both the terms “echo” and “allusion,” at times with distinction, at other times they are equated, whilst at other times “echo” is seemingly given a subordinate role to “allusion.” Porter, *Early Christian Interpretation*, 82, concludes that “it is difficult to get the precise meaning of Dunn’s terminology.” For work in Revelation see: Jeffrey Vogelgesang, “The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1987), 15-16, provides five criteria for discovering a direct literary dependence on Old Testament texts (specifically Ezekiel): “patterns of thought, unique material, striking verbal similarities, exegetical detail and structural dependence;” Gregory K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), 43, proposed three categories of allusions in determining degrees of dependence between two literary works. These are clear allusion, probable allusion (with more varied wording), and possible allusion or echo; Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and their Development*, JSNTSup 93 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994), 15, attempts to consider all the allusions from Isaiah in the book of Revelation and categorises them into ‘certain/virtually certain,’ ‘probable/possible’ and ‘unlikely/doubtful.’

²⁸ Michael B. Thompson, *Clothed with Christ: The Example and Teaching of Jesus in Romans 12.1-15.13*, JSNTS 59 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 29.

²⁹ *Ibid.* While this part of his work is helpful for my present discussion, Thompson goes on to identify eleven criteria for detecting an allusion which is too burdensome for the exegetical enterprise. His classification of allusions is also unnecessarily complex.

³⁰ See Kayle B. de Waal, *A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of the Seven Trumpets of Revelation: The Apocalyptic Challenge to Earthly Empire* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 2012).

assessment of echoes, which he called “serviceable rules of thumb.”³¹ The guidelines are as follows: (1) Availability – is the proposed text available to the historical author?; (2) Volume – is the pattern of words or themes repeated?; (3) Thematic coherence – does the echo fit the thought of the author’s text?; (4) Historical plausibility – does this use of the text reflect the historical context of the interpreter?; (5) Recurrence – does a particular OT passage appear in various locations and forms?; (6) History of interpretation – is the current echo influenced by additional texts and traditions? And (7) Satisfaction – does the reading make sense within the context of the book as a whole?³²

Four of the weightiest of Hays’ criteria are enlisted since he himself recognizes that to use all of the criteria for each verse under consideration would be wearisome. These are volume, thematic coherence, recurrence and history of interpretation.³³ Thematic coherence analyses how an allusion would fit in the thematic and theological context of a passage. The history of interpretation guideline looks for how other interpreters have read the passage and whether they have categorized the precursor text as an allusion.

Volume is determined largely on the basis of precise repetition of words or syntactical relationships. It also “depends on the distinctiveness, prominence or popular familiarity of the precursor text.”³⁴ Since thematic coherence and history of interpretation focus more on interpretation, they are balanced by the criteria of volume and recurrence that strengthen the possibilities of impartiality. These two criteria are seemingly the same, yet volume pays

³¹ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Yale, 1989), 31-2. I recognize that these guidelines are terse. For further discussion of these criteria see Richard Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 34-45.

³² Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 31-2. For a critique of Hays work see: Robert Brawley, *Text to Text Pours Forth Speech. Voices of Scripture in Luke-Acts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 13-4; Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 13-4; Stanley E. Porter, “The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament: A Brief Comment on Method and Terminology,” in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals*, eds. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 83 and Kenneth D. Litwak, “Echoes of Scripture? A Critical Survey of Recent Works on Paul’s Use of the Old Testament,” *CRBS* 6 (1998): 260-88. For a response to his critics see Richard Hays, “On the Rebound: A Response to Critiques of *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*,” in *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*, eds. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, JSNTSup 83 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 70-96.

³³ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 32.

³⁴ Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination*, 36.

attention to similar words and ideas that are present in both the precursor and successor text while recurrence focuses on where else the same text is used in Revelation. These criteria can be used with profitable exegetical findings.³⁵

Another important contribution is that of Jon Paulien who developed an exegetical methodology in his 1987 dissertation. The method consists of four fundamental steps: 1) basic exegesis of the passage being studied, including attention to the non-canonical background to the book, 2) an examination of relevant parallels to that passage in other parts of Revelation, 3) a careful search of the Old Testament to find the root sources of the imagery in the passage which can be found there and 4) consideration of how early Christians like John transformed the meaning of those symbols in the light of the Christ-event.³⁶

Paulien seeks to differentiate methodologically between echoes and direct allusions. He states that echoes are not dependent “on the author’s conscious intention,” simply being “an idea the author picked up in previous literature, but was probably unaware of the original source.”³⁷ Direct allusions are classified as “certain,” “probable,” “possible,” “uncertain” and “non-allusion.”³⁸ This aspect of his method seems too cumbersome even though he claims that his method seeks to identify allusions on a “more objective and scientific basis.”³⁹ Direct allusions are to be determined on the basis of internal and external evidence.

Internal criteria include the establishment of verbal, thematic and structural parallels. The more verbal, thematic and structural parallels are evident in a text, the stronger the case for the possibility of authorial intention. Of the three categories, structural parallels are the most certain because of the “number of interlocking verbal and thematic parallels” they

³⁵ See de Waal, *A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of the Seven Trumpets of Revelation*, 114-123.

³⁶ Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1988), 156-57.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 172.

³⁸ Paulien sees the first two as having a higher level of certainty with the third category being problematic, in terms of certainty. The last two are not to be interpreted as direct allusions. His lack of sufficient controls in this matter has him place “echoes” in the same category as “probable” allusions.

³⁹ Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets*, 178.

contain.⁴⁰ The weakest category is thematic parallels.⁴¹ Paulien demotes the external evidence of Judaic and Greco-Roman culture in the hermeneutical process. Nevertheless, Paulien's close reading of 8:7-12, the rigorous application of his methodology and the scholarly consensus of the influence of his work should cause any student of Revelation to thoroughly engage with his research.⁴²

The Debate about Echoes

There has been lively debate between Paulien and Beale on the use or perhaps abuse of the literary construct of echo.⁴³ Although Paulien has made advances in exegetical methodology in the interpretation of Revelation Beale claims that Paulien's formal discussion of echoes is too brief. He argues that Paulien fails to address the "degree of probability he sees echoes having, despite the fact that he sees echoes as being unconscious and unintentional."⁴⁴ Further, Beale believes that a weakness in Paulien's work is the large number of echoes he finds for specific texts in Rev 8.7-12 that are seemingly spread across the Old Testament.⁴⁵ His method in this regard, according to Beale, is "too uncontrolled if several echoes from different portions of the OT are posited which have no ostensible link with OT allusions already clearly identified in a verse."⁴⁶

In a recent publication Paulien argues that Beale has misunderstood his position on

⁴⁰ Ibid., 185-86.

⁴¹ Jon Paulien, *The Deep Things of God: An Insiders Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 2004), 142-46 (144).

⁴² See the helpful reviews of his work in Jauhainen, *The Use of Zechariah in Revelation*, 21-3 and Russell S. Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb: A Tradition Historical / Theological Analysis of Revelation 4-5*, *Studies in Biblical Literature* 110 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 5-6.

⁴³ For a useful discussion on the current debate involving allusions and echoes see Ian Paul, "The Use of the Old Testament in Revelation 12," in *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J. L. North*, eds. Steve Moyise and J. Lionel North (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 256-67; Robby Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, *JPTSS* 30 (Dorset: Deo, 2006), 39-96 and Jon Paulien, "Dreading the Whirlwind: Intertextuality and the Use of the Old Testament in Revelation," *AUSS* 39 (2001): 5-22.

⁴⁴ Paulien only provides five pages of discussion on this subject and on pages 305-06 is simply restating and clarifying what he had already said on pages 175-77. Cf. G. K. Beale, "Review of *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretation of Rev 8:7-12*, by Jon Paulien," *JBL* 111 (1992): 358-61.

⁴⁵ Beale focuses specifically on Rev 8:7. However an examination of all the verses under consideration in Paulien's research, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 259, 276, 293, demonstrates that he has large numbers of echoes for each of the verses without sufficient controls.

⁴⁶ Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, 21.

echoes. He maintains that Beale seeks to “limit the meaning of John’s echoes to the way they are used in passages to which John clearly alludes.”⁴⁷ He argues, on the other hand, that “John was not conscious of specific Old Testament usages when he echoed the language of the Old Testament.”⁴⁸ Aside from the criticisms of Beale, Paulien still feels that a distinction must be made between allusions and echoes.

According to Vernon Robbins echoes have a strong basis in cultural tradition and that the evocation of an echo is normally a word or phrase. However, the evocation of the echo, whether it be a word or phrase, is never from only one cultural tradition. Thus, “interpreters regularly will debate the presence or absence of a particular echo in the text under consideration.”⁴⁹ This insightful comment can be seen in relation to the aforementioned debate between Beale and Paulien about what constitutes an echo.

Literary critic John Hollander first developed the concept of echo in a study of Milton’s poetry. Paulien and Hays have both acknowledged their indebtedness to him. According to Hays, Hollander seeks to “trace the way in which motifs and images are passed along through literary traditions in such a way that they gather significations through time.”⁵⁰ The notion of echo is recognized as an acoustic occurrence in Hollander’s initial discussion and is used figuratively and at times synonymously with reverberation and resonance.⁵¹

For Hollander an echo is a “substitute” for an allusion, in the same way as an allusion is a substitute for a quotation. “There seems to be a transitive figurational connection among them; it points to what we generally mean by echo, in intertextual terms. In contrast with literary allusion, echo is a metaphor of, and for, alluding, and does not depend on conscious

⁴⁷ Jon Paulien, “Elusive Allusions in the Apocalypse: Two Decades of Research into John’s Use of the Old Testament,” in *The Intertextuality of the Epistles: Explorations of Theory and Practice*, eds. Thomas L. Brodie, Dennis R. MacDonald and Stanley E. Porter (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 61-68.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴⁹ Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge: Trinity, 1996), 60.

⁵⁰ Hays, “On the Rebound” 72.

⁵¹ John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 1-3.

intention.”⁵² In order to overhear echoes the reader must have access to the text’s cave of resonant signification. Hollander suggests that the cave of resonant signification is accessed when a reader has reference to both the earlier text and the later text and is found at the point of their intersection.⁵³ Paulien and Hays have arrived at their respective approaches using the resources of English scholarship. Hays follows the views of Hollander while Paulien is indebted to the work of Richard Altick.⁵⁴ However, Paulien has taken the insights of Altick and applied an author-centred approach to the book of Revelation while Hays has executed an approach that focuses more on the reader and his/her appropriation of the Pauline text.

There are three key ingredients that need to be understood in order for the interpreter to grasp what an echo is and how it works according to Chris Beetham.⁵⁵ First, an echo may either be a conscious or unconscious act on the part of the author. According to William Green, while an allusion “usually connotes a conscious authorial act and perhaps a knowing audience,” an echo “requires neither.”⁵⁶ Second, an echo has “in each instance a single identifiable source.”⁵⁷ Hollander believes that echo is a form of citation in that it refers to a particular precursor text. While obviously disagrees with this point.

Third, by echo the author does not intend to point the audience to the precursor text. While this may seem contradictory to the second point, intentionality implies conscious activity on the part of the author and an echo is often but not always a conscious act. Rather, an echo is a linking of texts so that an intertextual relationship can be established between the precursor and successor text. If the echo can be traced to a single precursor text then the original literary and thematic context of that text must be taken into account. The meaning of

⁵² Ibid., 64.

⁵³ Ibid., 65.

⁵⁴ Richard D. Altick, *The Art of Literary Research* (n. p.: W. W. Norton, 1963).

⁵⁵ Christopher A. Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

⁵⁶ William Scott Green, “Doing the Text’s Work for It: Richard Hays on Paul’s Use of Scripture,” in *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*, eds. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*, JSNTSup 83 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 58-63 (59), cited in Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, 14.

⁵⁷ Hollander, *The Figure of Echo*, 72.

the echo in its new literary context is dependent on or tied to the previous context.⁵⁸ This point reinforces the second principle I outlined in the section on principles.⁵⁹

Conclusion

This article has paid attention to the principles and criteria needed to responsibly interpret the Old Testament in Revelation. The four principles emerge from Scripture itself and can be used profitably in interpreting Revelation. Determining a foundation for the use of criteria is more challenging since they are heuristic devices we enlist to understand the text. Jon Paulien is adamant in his position because the research outcomes of his dissertation demonstrated that echoes do not require the immediate context to be examined since the echoes cumulatively made sense in his interpretation of Rev. 8:7-12. Beate Kowalski's research seems to support Paulien's position.⁶⁰ On the other hand, the research of Chris Beetham, Richard Hays and Gregory Beale suggests that echoes do need controls and that the immediate literary and thematic context is helpful in the interpretational endeavour.

Essentially then we have two camps that view echoes differently and yet both have come to winsome and historically plausible interpretations of the Johannine and Pauline literature. The core difference between the two camps is whether one approaches the text from the perspective of the author or the reader. An author-centred approach, like that of Paulien, can argue that echoes are present in many places in the Old Testament corpus since they are in John's worldview or mind. Hays has a more sophisticated approach in that while

⁵⁸ I have adapted Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, 11-35, for these three points.

⁵⁹ In relation to Paul's use of Scripture in Romans, Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the letters of Paul*, 40, suggests that the reader will overhear the context of the Hab. 2:4 quotation in Rom 1:16. That literary and thematic context from Hab. 2:1 was the issue of theodicy. Hence, Hays argues that by Paul placing the echo at the beginning of his letter to the Romans, "he links his gospel to the OT prophetic affirmation of God's justice and righteousness." Other scholars who confirm Hays position include Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 43-56 (50), "In Rom. 1.17 the Habakkuk citation must be allowed to determine the sense, not only of the "righteousness of God" but also of "by faith for faith," referring to Rom. 1.16 and F. F. Bruce, *Romans*, TNTC, repr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 79-81. For a stimulating discussion of Rom 1:16 and how James Dunn, Francis Watson and Richard Hays approach this verse see Steve Moyise, *Evoking Scripture: Seeing the Old Testament in the New* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 49-62.

⁶⁰ Beate Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel in der Offenbarung des Johannes*, Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge 52 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2004), 57-59.

he dialogues with both the reader and the author he does give pre-eminence to the reader and hence can argue that an Old Testament background and not ten or fifteen different texts can shed interpretational light on a particular passage or text in Paul's writings.

Since echoes is a term we use to point to a small piece of text what is essential to remember is that we are dealing with Scripture. Hence an echo is part of the theological weaponry in the biblical writer's language arsenal. The matter of the use of the literary construct of echoes will not be easily resolved. What is crucial is that scholars carefully define the terms they are using, apply their methodology with precision and give a good account of the hermeneutical implications of the purported echo. By enlisting the Old Testament background and deploying the principles outlined in this article together with clear definitions and criteria the interpreter can provide a theologically responsible interpretation of Revelation.