

“This book is an amazing blend of scholarly carefulness combined with clarifying simplicity.  
If you have liked the kinds of things I have written, you will love this book.”

—*Dr Jon Paulien, Dean of Religion, Loma Linda University*

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# ANCIENT WORDS PRESENT HOPE

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What the Old Testament teaches us about Revelation

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# PREFACE

The Book of Revelation has fascinated me since my teenage years, and I am delighted and humbled to provide some reflection on this book for the church. I am a product, in part, of the love and care of a local church in Newlands East, Durban, South Africa, where God developed and grew a stuttering teenager with all of my weaknesses. Since entering ministry in 1996, the Lord and His church have nurtured and guided my wife and me through the challenges and joys of ministry, evangelism and leadership. I am deeply grateful to the Lord for how, through the church, He has cared for my postgraduate education. It is now a privilege and honour to serve the church in scholarship and educational leadership.

This book owes its existence to the generosity of my employer, Avondale College of Higher Education, and the research leave I was granted for the first six months of 2013. I was able to travel to the United Kingdom and spend a productive few weeks at Tyndale House in Cambridge. The staff were gracious and helpful, and the environment was stimulating for serious writing and reflection. I came home calling Tyndale House “research heaven” for the outstanding facilities, the ability to work late into the night and the Christian spirit present among all the researchers there. For the rest of that time, I was either in the Avondale library, the Moore College library in Sydney or at home on the dining room table.

I must sincerely thank Dr Steve Thompson for reading my work and making helpful comments to improve its quality. Any deficiencies that remain are solely my fault. I would also like to thank Steve, Dr Jon Paulien and Dr Barry Oliver for writing endorsements. Jon’s influence on my thinking is present in every chapter. I am also indebted to the work of Adventist scholars such as LaRondelle, Strand, Stefavonic, Johnsson, Neale and Pollard. And a special word of thanks is due the editor, Nathan Brown, for his savvy editorial skills, belief in this project and support in bringing it all to fruition.

My wife, Charmaine, and children, Kerryn and Chare, were kind enough to put up with piles of books being moved around the dining room and gracious enough to listen to my new ideas on how to understand the Book of Revelation in the writing process. My children spoiled me with neck rubs and asked interesting questions of this novice. In fact, their questions helped me become a better teacher. My wife, as always, believed in me and supported my research endeavours, and kept me grounded in the importance and beauty of everyday life.

My parents have shown a keen interest in my professional and academic development. Mum and Dad made many sacrifices and paid for my undergraduate education. They provided a wonderful home and a lasting foundation for my brother Lincoln and me. My dad passed away on February 22, 2014, after teaching for more than 50 years. He was a wonderful husband, and a truly great dad and granddad. He was always present to encourage and motivate Lincoln and me, and taught us many valuable lessons on life. This book is dedicated to my mum and dad.

# INTRODUCTION

The Book of Revelation has always had a special place in the hearts of Seventh-day Adventist Christians. This book has had a huge impact on shaping and informing our identity and mission as a church. Revelation has the ability to inspire and challenge us 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. Our identity has been especially found in the three angels' messages of Revelation 14, what has been called the heartbeat of the Adventist message. These messages are important and indeed of dire consequence for the time in human history in which we find ourselves.

Among everything else, Revelation is a literary masterpiece. According to Richard Bauckham, "Revelation has been composed with such meticulous attention to detail of language and structure that scarcely a word can have been chosen without deliberate reflection on its relationship to the work as an integrated, interconnected whole."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the scholarly consensus is that Revelation must be interpreted against the background of the Old Testament. This makes sense when we realise that Revelation is full of allusions and references to the Old Testament. My own understanding of Revelation has grown since re-examining the book in this light.

I remember learning about Revelation in my "Voice of Prophecy" Bible-study lessons as a 12 year old. I eagerly waited for my lessons to come from the VOP office in Cape Town to our home in Durban, South Africa. When they arrived, I forgot about my homework and focused on the lesson. While the lessons were printed in black and white, they came alive in my mind. I was fascinated by the lessons and the powerful ideas they sought to convey.

As I went off to Helderberg College—near Cape Town—to study for ministry, my speciality in preaching in the Lower Boland churches of the old Good Hope Conference in South Africa was Revelation 12 and the messages to the seven churches. The saints in Macassa and Eerste River churches and Wentworth and Newlands East churches in Durban were so

accommodating of this novice preacher with a passion for this complicated book.

Since completing doctoral studies specialising in apocalyptic literature and teaching Revelation to students and other groups, I have had the opportunity to learn a little more about this book that means so much to many of us. The other apocalyptic literature in the Bible—including the book of Daniel, parts of Ezekiel and Isaiah 24–27, as well as a range of apocalyptic Jewish literature—intersects with the prophecies of Revelation and offer an important aid to understanding them better. Similarly, the history of God working with His people as narrated in the Old Testament should also add to our reading:

[T]he 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 reader's 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.<sup>2</sup>

But we must keep pre-eminently in our minds that the central burden of Revelation is not so much a revelation of the future as it is an unveiling or disclosure of Jesus (see Revelation 1:1). The focus of this book is to understand how John has unveiled Jesus Christ and hence God's character through the lens of the Old Testament, in which the dominant image for Jesus is the Lamb. We will examine the many beautiful ways in which Jesus is portrayed in Revelation and unpack the significance of Jesus as the Lamb in its Old Testament setting.

As our journey begins in this book, we want the inspired text to lead us and not for us to attempt to lead the text. Revelation is a difficult book to understand, so we want to depend on God and trust in His leading as we study together. Above all, we want to allow the text to speak. Hence, we will not be making historical applications to the symbols in the book. It is too easy to run ahead and make applications to our present day without first addressing the text.

After the text is addressed, we will make application to our own walk with the Lord, allowing the message of the book to impact our lives and the Holy Spirit to lead us into a deeper walk with God. Too often we are concerned with what is going on out there in the world without due concern

for what is happening in us. The Lord is more concerned that the message of Revelation transforms us, rather than giving us special insight into the next newspaper headline. Biblical information without application leads to spiritual obesity and lethargy, so we will look to apply what we are learning in Revelation. As William Johnsson suggests, biblical “apocalyptic goes hand in hand with service to God and humanity.”<sup>3</sup>

We hope the guidelines we generate for the study of the Old Testament in Revelation and the methodology we use will allow us to discover new meaning in the text and, above all, have our faith challenged, inspired and renewed in Jesus Christ and His plan for our world.

1. Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), page x.
2. Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2002), page 19. Similarly, Jon Paulien comments, “It is only when the [Old Testament] background is understood that Revelation can be expected to yield secrets that may have been perfectly clear to the first century reader.”—“Interpreting Revelation’s Symbolism,” in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 1*, edited by Frank Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, Vol 6 (Silver Springs: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), page 84.
3. William G Johnsson, “Biblical Apocalyptic,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), page 801.

# CHAPTER ONE

## GROUND RULES

As there is a difference between scuba diving and snorkelling, so there is a difference between a surface reading of Revelation and one that explores its Old Testament background. Scuba diving includes cave diving, wreck diving and ice diving. Scuba divers are also professional engineers, underwater welders and military personnel. The swimmer's entire body is under the water. The diver's nose and eyes are covered by a diving mask; the diver cannot breathe in through the nose, but adapts to inhaling from a regulator's mouthpiece. By contrast, snorkelling is all about having fun, as you skim the surface. While a wetsuit can protect you, you can get seriously sunburnt if you aren't using one.

We snorkel through Revelation when we skim the surface, allowing the symbols to dominate our view of what is described or when we self-centredly apply the text to our present day and ignore both its first-century setting and Old Testament background. Conversely, we plumb the depths of Revelation when we attempt to mine the richness of the symbols in their Old Testament context. 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."<sup>1</sup>

### The New Testament background

While the focus of this book is the use of the Old Testament in Revelation, we must acknowledge that the New Testament is equally important. Revelation is the culmination of all that the New Testament has to say about Jesus and God's plan of salvation. For example, John refers to Jesus and



demonstrates the equality of God and Christ, where even God and the Lamb have the same throne (see Revelation 22:3). John also refers to angels on numerous occasions in Revelation and we know they are referred to as ministering spirits elsewhere in the New Testament (see Hebrews 1:14).

Similarly, Jesus’ sermon in Matthew 24 provides a useful platform from which to understand the end-time focus within which John was working.<sup>2</sup> These verbal and thematic connections demonstrate how John was influenced by Jesus’ teaching.

Synoptic Gospels	Revelation 6
Wars, rumours of wars, insurrections (Matthew 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9)	Rider on a white horse bringing war (6:1, 2)
Nation against nation (Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:10)	Rider on a red horse bringing international war (6:3, 4)
Famines (Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11)	Rider on a pale horse accompanied by Hades—killing by sword, famine, pestilence and wild animals (6:5–8)
Jesus’ followers put to death, hated by all (Matthew 24:9; Mark 13:9–13; Luke 21:12–16)	The souls beneath the altar (6:9–11)
Earthquakes (Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11)	Earthquakes (6:12)
The sun will be darkened; the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven (Matthew 24:29)	The sun as black as sackcloth; the moon like blood; the stars falling to the earth (6:12, 13)

The two-ages concept—the present age and the age to come—is an important theological key to understanding the writings of the New Testament. The present age was considered the age of trial, persecution and evil. The age to come was viewed as the age of peace, righteousness and goodness. Jewish writings also had this notion of the two ages.<sup>3</sup> In Jewish writings, however, there was a radical break between the two ages that took place with the arrival of the Yom Yaweh—the Day of the Lord.<sup>4</sup> This decisive break between the ages was to be preceded by a time of great

tribulation and suffering.

The New Testament writers understood this concept of the two ages (see Mark 10:29, 30; Luke 20:34, 35; Matthew 28:19, 20; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Galatians 1:4; Ephesians 2:7). For example, Mark 10:29, 30 reads:

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no-one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age [homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions] and in the age to come, eternal life.”

They understood the first advent of Christ as the in-breaking of God’s rule and reign (see Mark 1:15), with the coming of Jesus the decisive break between the two ages. Hence there is a dynamic tension in the New Testament’s view of the end. According to Adrio König, “prior to Jesus’ birth Simeon looked forward to the consolation of Israel; now his own eyes have seen the deliverance which God has made ready (Luke 2:30).”<sup>5</sup> Because Christ has come, salvation is now (see 2 Corinthians 6:2) and, through Him, God has spoken “in these last days” (Hebrews 1:2). Paul stated that the Corinthians were living at the “fulfilment of the ages” (1 Corinthians 10:11). Peter can say that Christ was revealed in “these last times” (1 Peter 1:20) and yet that He is to be revealed “in the last time” (verse 5).<sup>6</sup>

The Christ-event—His life, death, resurrection, ascension and high-priestly ministry—inaugurated or installed the kingdom of God.<sup>7</sup> The synoptic gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—contain the most persuasive evidence for the Christ-event to have fulfilled certain eschatological (end-time) expectations.<sup>8</sup> In fact, in the New Testament all the cosmic signs of the Old Testament “Day of the Lord” are fulfilled in the context of both the Cross and the Second Coming.<sup>9</sup> In the Day of the Lord, there would be thunder, earthquake and darkness (see Ezekiel 32:7, 8; Haggai 1:6–9; Jeremiah 4:23–27; Amos 8:3–10; Isaiah 13:9–13 and Joel 2:28–32). At the Cross, especially as recorded by Matthew, there was an earthquake and darkness when Jesus died (see Matthew 27:45, 51–53). And, at the second coming of Jesus, there will be a mighty earthquake, lightning and darkness (see Matthew 24:27–30; Revelation 16:18–21). The signs of both the Day of the Lord and the Second Coming take place at the Cross, emphasising the

Cross as the great centre of salvation-history. According to Jon Paulien:

All that the Old Testament views of the end had promised became a reality in principle with Christ's death and resurrection. The kingdom of God arrived (Matthew 12:28) and the judgment of the world took place at the cross (John 12:31, 32). The end-time outpouring of the Holy Spirit took place at Pentecost (Joel 2:28, 29; cf. Acts 2:16–21) and eternal life became present (John 5:24, 25).<sup>10</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that Revelation must be seen in this dynamic “already–not yet” tension as well. The decisive victory has taken place at the Cross but the full and final victory is at the Second Coming. As Christians, we live between the Cross and the Second Coming.

## John's use of the Old Testament

John uses the Old Testament by drawing on Old Testament history, ideas, places and persons.<sup>11</sup> Just a few of the many possible examples will introduce us to this way of reading Revelation. We will also look at the principles needed to interpret these and the many other ways in which John uses the Old Testament.

Revelation 11:6–8	Old Testament history
Heaven shut up for three-and-a-half years—no rain	Elijah shut heaven for three-and-a-half years—no rain
Water turned to blood	Moses turned water into blood
Earth struck with plagues	Egypt struck with plagues
Sodom	Sodom destroyed with fire and brimstone

When we read the Old Testament stories that are being referenced (see 1 Kings 17:1; James 5:17, 18; Genesis 18, 19; Exodus 6–12), we can gain a clearer understanding of what is going on in Revelation.

Revelation 2:14–16	Old Testament person/event
Doctrine of Balaam	Balaam the prophet
Balak—a stumbling block to Israel	Numbers 22:1–24:25
Eating things sacrificed to	Numbers 25:1–3

idols	
Commit fornication	Numbers 25:1–9
Fight with the sword of my mouth	Numbers 31:16

To understand the “doctrine of Balaam,” the interpreter needs to read the stories in Numbers to find out what was going on there and try to understand the implications for interpreting Revelation 2:14–16.

Revelation 17–18	Jeremiah	Old Testament parallels
17:1, 15	51:13	The great whore
17:4	51:7	The cup
17:2	51:7	Drunken Babylon
17:4	51:13	Her dress
17:6	51:49	Killing the saints
18:2, 21	51:8	Fall of Babylon
18:2, 3	51:37	Corrupt birds
18:20	51:48	Rejoicing over her downfall

From these parallels, we can deduce that the fall and judgment of Old Testament Babylon foreshadows the fall and judgment of New Testament Babylon. While John uses the Old Testament to speak to his generation, by drawing on the deep reservoir of Scripture the whole gamut of God’s dealings with humanity come into play.

## Five principles for reading Revelation

As we discover and explore these and many other references and links, there are five principles for studying the use of the Old Testament in Revelation we need to keep in mind. These principles should assist us to better understand how John has used the Old Testament and deepen our understanding of this important book. The principles are part of our belief in the inspiration of Scripture and, as spiritual scuba divers, provide us the opportunity to explore the depths of the riches of this book.

**1. Jesus is at the core of Revelation and we must use His methods to interpret the book.**

Jesus is the central person in the book; it is a Christian apocalypse. In Revelation 1:5, Jesus is identified as the faithful witness, firstborn of the dead, ruler of the kings of the earth. The voice of Jesus directs the book at critical moments (see Revelation 1:10; 10:4, 8; 16:15; 22:7, 12, 16) and Jesus is identified as the “One like the Son of Man” (Revelation 1:13), an obvious allusion to Daniel 7:13. This was one of the well-loved sayings to come from the lips of Jesus while on earth and now He takes on this distinctive title again in Revelation. Jesus is also the author of the seven letters (see Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14) and meets the churches at their specific point of need, based on the circumstances they face. He directs the opening of each of the seven seals and is present in the symbols of Revelation 8:2–5 that point to the centrality of His death. He is the Lamb and the Child who rules with a rod of iron (see Revelation 12:4, 5). Finally, Jesus is also the rider on the white horse (see Revelation 19:15) coming to conquer those who have opposed His gospel and persecuted His people. All these various symbols point to the centrality of Jesus in the visions John received on Patmos.

John had the privilege of being with Jesus in His ministry and seeing Him perform His mighty miracles. He even had the joy of resting on Jesus’ shoulder. From being a loud boisterous fisherman, John was transformed by the love of Jesus. His writings are filled with not just human love, but the agape love God came to give us in Jesus. He writes, “Beloved, let us love because God is love” (1 John 4:8, 9). He writes that we will see Jesus when He comes and that we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is (see 1 John 3:2). John must have longed for that day. It must have been a very meaningful experience for John to now see Jesus in vision. Now in a glorified state but the same Jesus He had talked to and ministered with, the same Jesus who had calmed the angry seas and fed thousands, was now enthroned in heaven. These visions must have had a powerful effect on John and he had no doubt about their fulfilment.

John used the Old Testament in his writing ministry just as Jesus had used the Old Testament in His earthly ministry. It was their Bible since there was obviously not yet a New Testament. Jesus referred to 20 Old Testament characters and quotes from 17 Old Testament books. From Genesis, for example, Jesus made reference to Creation, the institution of marriage, Noah, Abraham, Lot, and Sodom and Gomorrah. From Exodus, Jesus spoke

of Moses, the burning bush, the manna in the wilderness and the Ten Commandments. Jesus referred to the ceremonial and moral law from Leviticus and He talked about the bronze serpent from Numbers. Jesus referred to David, Solomon, Elijah and Zechariah.

Jesus confounded His critics not just by quoting Scripture but by identifying Himself as the One the Scriptures were speaking about. In His first sermon, Jesus said, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). To His opponents, Jesus replied: “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me” (John 5:39).

Accordingly, both the Old Testament and New Testament are important to develop a comprehensive biblical theology of Revelation.<sup>12</sup> Biblical theology is concerned with developing a theology from the whole Bible that takes seriously the self-consistency of Scripture and the unified message Scripture conveys in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The writers of the New Testament understood Christ to be the fulfilment of the basic intent of the whole Old Testament.

Jesus is the new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), born by means of the Spirit that overshadows Mary (cf Luke 1:35 with Genesis 1:2). He is the new Adam (Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15): made in the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15), married to a new Eve (Ephesians 5:32, 33—the church), and in full dominion over the earth (John 6:16–21), over the fish of the sea (Luke 5:1–11; John 21) and over every living thing (Mark 11:2).<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, New Testament writers drew on major Old Testament themes in a typological manner, the most popular way to interpret the Scriptures by the early Christians.<sup>14</sup> Typology means that God has ordained certain people, institutions or events to prefigure or foreshadow His divine leading in the future. In fact, this was a method used by Jesus.<sup>15</sup> For example, Jesus saw Himself as a New Jonah and a New Solomon (see Matthew 12:40, 41) but what Jesus went through as the New Jonah far exceeded what Jonah went through. Jonah died the first death, while Jesus experienced the second death. The later fulfilment, therefore, is greater and more intense than the initial historical reality.

In reading Scripture in this way, Jesus was using a method that is itself found in the Old Testament. The broad typological sweep of Old Testament

self-understanding is evident in how Moses functioned as a type for both Joshua and Josiah.<sup>16</sup> The prophets continually portrayed the eschatological future with motifs and imagery derived from the Book of Genesis (compare Genesis 2 with Isaiah 11:6–9, 35; 65:23–25; Ezekiel 34:25–30; 36:35). And Isaiah predicts the coming deliverance of Israel from the Assyrian–Babylon captivity in terms of a new and greater Exodus (see Isaiah 43:16–19; 51:10–11).<sup>17</sup>

This typological perspective is also evident in Old Testament apocalyptic books, such as Daniel, that specifically speak about the end-time. For example, it seems possible to see in Daniel 7 a midrash—a commentary—on the creation story of Genesis 1. The literary links include the following:

Daniel 7	Genesis 1
Winds churning up the sea (Daniel 7:2)	Spirit moving on the waters (Genesis 1:2)
Beasts appear (Daniel 7:3–8)	Animals appear (Genesis 1:24, 25)
Son of Man follows (Daniel 7:13, 14)	Adam follows (Genesis 1:26–28)
Dominion granted (Daniel 7:13, 14)	Dominion granted to Adam (Genesis 1:26–28)

Here is an early 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 (see Daniel 7:13, 14, compare 7:27).<sup>18</sup> Similarly in Revelation, the visions of Christ use the language of John’s past, the Old Testament, as the primary source for its symbolism.

A notable contribution to understanding the typological approach to Revelation is the research of J S Casey.<sup>19</sup> Casey contends that the Exodus typology can be discerned in three interrelated themes: redemption (see Revelation 1:5, 6; 5:9, 10), judgment (see Revelation 15–16) and inheritance (see Revelation 7:1–17; 14:1–5; 15:1–5; 20–22). 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. As God judged Pharaoh and the Egyptians, so God will judge the enemies of His people. And, finally, 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 Exodus 19:5, 6.<sup>20</sup> Thus, as we will discuss further, John was referring to the Exodus experience through his understanding of the redemption purchased by Christ and made available to believers.<sup>21</sup>

## **2. The Old Testament context must be taken into account when interpreting Revelation.**

Since John was part of the first-century world, he used the writing practices of his contemporaries. David Instone-Brewer has demonstrated that the rabbis around the time of Jesus studied their sacred texts with due consideration for the literary and thematic context of a passage they were studying. Brewer summarises the conclusions to his research: “The predecessors of the rabbis before 70 AD 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.”<sup>22</sup>

Further, a number of scholars have demonstrated that the Old Testament context is significant for interpretation. By context, we mean the literary and thematic context of the Old Testament passage. Richard Bauckham writes that the allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation are 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 same Old Testament passage in various parts of the Apocalypse, an interpretation of whole passages of Old Testament prophecy.”<sup>23</sup> Gregory Beale has stated that the Old Testament context is important because:

- 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].<sup>24</sup>

In a nutshell, Beale is saying we need to study the Old Testament in the light of the coming of Jesus. Jesus is the great centre of both the Old



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