The Scriptures in the Book of Revelation

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ABSTRACT

After a brief survey of recent research on the Scriptures in the Book of Revelation in general, this study turns to Revelation 21:1–22:9 before addressing some disputed issues in Revelation's use of the Scriptures. Is John interpreting Scripture or does he use Scripture merely as a quarry for his own statements? While the modern understanding of interpretation finds it difficult to find common elements with ancient approaches to interpretation, post-modernity offers a better chance to appreciate John's way of dealing with the Scriptures. John's approach must be understood by situating it among the various Jewish approaches to the Scriptures. It can best be characterised as that of 'rewritten scripture' and is close to midrash and targum.

... we have seen that John's use of the Old Testament is not a matter of plucking phrases at random out of contexts, but consists of careful and deliberate exegesis of whole passages (Bauckham 1993a:246).

We spontaneously expect the New Testament authors to read the Scriptures in a way which is normative for ourselves. Whatever other methods we espouse, we usually expect that the historical meaning of the text be respected and we would like the New Testament authors to do the same. However, a truly historical approach requires that we become sensitive to the ways of reading texts which were normative in New Testament times, and that we understand more fully the implications and limitations of our own expectations.

Furthermore, the postexilic period and particularly apocalyptic, has often been seen in the past as a period of decadence, of epigones and plagiarists (see Russell 1964:92). It was popular to see Jesus (and the earliest Christians) as a continuation of the Old Testament prophets and standing apart from the apocalyptic tradition (see discussion in Koch 1972). Some scholars also wanted to see Revelation as standing apart from the Jewish apocalyptic literature (e.g. Lancelotti 1967) or even as anti-apocalyptic (Vogelgesang 1985:281–286).

In recent years a more open and positive approach to apocalyptic literature has developed. The apocalyptic writers were indeed people who interpreted the writings of their predecessors, but this re-working of existing texts and traditions must be seen in its historical context. To contrast apocalyptic as written prophecy with the oral message of the classical prophets is only applicable to them as historical figures, but not to the biblical books which bear their names. The Book of Ezekiel is the fruit of a re-
writing process in a way which is similar to the way in which the authors of the apocalypses and other pseudepigrapha reworked Scripture. One of the characteristics of Israel’s literature is that it is the fruit of a regular retelling of the ancient stories in order to address the issues of their contemporary contexts. The apocalyptic writers continued what the writers of the books like Isaiah and Jeremiah had done before them.

The title of this article mentions the ‘Scriptures’ and not the ‘Old Testament’. First of all, the author of Revelation clearly did not yet think in terms of an Old and a New Testament. Furthermore, the ‘Old Testament’ may evoke in our minds a very definite set of books in a very definite form, as we find them in the Biblia Hebraica or in Rahlfs’ edition of the Septuagint. We take it that there was no rigidly closed canon before the second century AD (Brown & Collins 1990:1041). John may have included among his Scriptures works like 1 Enoch, as the Epistle of Barnabas 16:5 appears to do. In fact, we know that 1 Enoch was, and still is, part of the Ethiopian Canon (Kealy 1979; Nickelsburg 1992:516). It is also likely that works containing traditions similar to the New Jerusalem texts and the Temple Scroll of Qumran were available to John and were all seen as part of the sacred writings of Israel. It might be best to think of the canon of the Scriptures in the first century AD as still open ended but with a solid core (Kealy 1979:25). Concerns over closure arose among the Jews in the second century CE and also affected the Christian communities, which since then dealt with the issue of closure again and again over many centuries (Brown 1990:1042–1043).

Furthermore, during the first century AD the biblical books existed in a variety of forms. There was no standardised text of the Scriptures during the first century AD, but a strong tendency towards a stable, standard text in Hebrew developed after 70 AD. The Greek text was even less stable. The Septuagint was based on Hebrew texts which differed from the ones which later on became the standard texts, and from the first century BC onwards there were various revisions of the Greek text to make it conform to Hebrew text forms closer to, but not yet identical with, the later standard form.

In the first part of this article we will look at some of the important works on the use of the Scriptures in Revelation. In a second part we will focus on the Scriptures in Revelation 21:1–22:9. In the third we will discuss some of the disputed questions with regard to the use of the Scriptures in Revelation and try to come to some greater clarity.

1 'The Law and the prophets’ was a common expression in the NT: Mt 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Lk 16:16; Jn 1:45; Rm 3:21. It is likely that the second category included writings which were later excluded from the canon. Feldman holds that the second category in Josephus’ Ap 1:43, ‘may mean not only the written Bible but also Jewish tradition generally' (1988:470).
1 USE OF THE SCRIPTURES IN REVELATION: AN OVERVIEW OF RECENT RESEARCH

The study by Ruiz (1989) gives a helpful overview of the research done on the use of the Scriptures in Revelation. We will highlight some of the more relevant conclusions of these works before focusing on his own work.

Neither Swete (1911) nor Charles (1920) '...offers much assistance in determining what John's strategy may have been, yet it may be sufficient that each has taken pains simply to document the use of OT material in Revelation' (Ruiz 1989:18).

Schlatter (1912) looked beyond the issue of OT language and imagery and tried to situate John's use of the OT in the contemporary exegetical practice. However, he focused on rabbinical parallels and neglected the Jewish apocalyptic literature. Boismard's (1949, 1952) contribution lies in the fact that he recognises 'the structural significance of the OT use in Revelation...' (Ruiz 1989:27). Boismard accepts that the present Revelation is the result of the merging of two earlier apocalypses written by the same author at different times. Each one follows a coherent schema, the one based on Daniel and Joel, the other on Ezekiel. While Boismard's theory of the two apocalypses has not found acceptance, he 'furnishes useful suggestions as to how Revelation uses OT material, especially Ezekiel, as a broad outline' (Ruiz 1989:53). Boismard, with many other scholars, saw this dependence on Ezekiel and other OT texts as 'slavish imitation.' This was part of the negative evaluation of the apocalypses as imitation, the work of epigones. Ruiz is closer to the truth when he recognises 'creative interweaving of OT material by John in the production of his new and original composition...' (1989:53). More attention will have to be given to the phenomenon of imitation, which was appreciated in antiquity, while we tend to see it in a negative light, because originality has been elevated since Romanticism (see Brodie 1984). The work of Lust (1980, 1981) confirms the views of Boismard that John used Ezekiel for the outline of his text: he shows how Revelation 18-22 is shaped by the outline provided by Ezekiel 26-27, 37-48, and argues that it even reflects the still fluid state of the order of chapters 37-39.

Goulder (1981) also noted that the order of Revelation follows that of Ezekiel and he explains it by means of the lectionary theory. Week by week, as passages from Ezekiel were read, John drew 'inspiration from them to see visions in the course of worship' (1981:349). Although the liturgical context is very important for Revelation, Goulder's lectionary theory has not been widely accepted (Ruiz 1989:91-96).

The work of Vanhoye (1962) has been very influential. According to him, John depends on the Hebrew text and makes his own translations, which are sometimes faithful (e.g. Ezk 43: 2 in Rv 18:1), sometimes slightly touched up (e.g. Ezk 26:21 in Rv 18:21). Besides these, there is also a global usage, where it is difficult to pinpoint specific verses but where influence is obvious. This last category shows both John's
dependence on Ezekiel and his creative freedom. Vanhoye illustrates this freedom by pointing out four characteristics of John's use of the OT:

- multiple use of a text: the measuring of the temple from Ezekiel 40:3-18 appears in both 11:1 and in 21:10 but with different meanings (Vanhoye 1962:463).
- the unity or coherence of Revelation: John's work does not appear as a mosaic of OT texts; all elements from the OT are transformed into elements of his own vigorously structured work (Vanhoye 1962:466).
- from a thematic point of view, John's outlook is universalistic and this affects the way he uses the material from Ezekiel, which is narrowly focused on Israel (1962:466).
- finally, John combines texts in order to complement and correct particular texts by others to bring out the Christian fulfillment of the OT (1962:468).

Beale (1984) argues that Daniel 2 was the midrashic Vorbild for Revelation. Daniel acted as a kind of hermeneutical magnet which attracted other texts, particularly Ezekiel, Isaiah, etcetera. This midrash of Daniel was influenced by the way Daniel was interpreted in the Christian tradition as reflected in Mark 13. Ruiz (1989:127) criticises Beale's attempt to find in Daniel 2 the framework for the whole of Revelation.

After his survey and evaluation of the literature, Ruiz is confident that it is no longer necessary 'to show that John makes extensive use of Ezekiel, there remains the need to show how this use is integrated within the symbolic structure of his work' (1989:180). In order to reach this aim he asks how John was reading Ezekiel, but in order to get to this it will be necessary to understand 'how John intends that his book be read...' (1989:182). His approach is very much influenced by the studies of Ugo Vanni (1980, 1987, 1998), who was the supervisor of this thesis. Ruiz begins with three crucial considerations: the liturgical context, the hermeneutical imperatives calling for an active, reflective, but not merely intellectual reading of the texts (e.g. 13:9-10, 18), and John's strategy in his use of symbols. Ruiz shows how Revelation is a very well organised text (particularly 16:17-19:10 which is the focus of his study) within which the prophetic texts are incorporated and transformed. Ruiz speaks of 'transformation of prophetic language as a reactualization of its symbolic power in a directed recontextualization of prophetic metaphors' (1989:526).

2 Vanhoye (44-441) lists the following: 1. The inaugural vision of Ezk 1 (and 10) has inspired Rv 4:1-8, which forms the background for the whole book. 2. The eating of the book (Ezk 2:8) is used twice in Revelation: briefly in 5:1 and more elaborately in 10:1-4, 8-11. 3. The long accusations against the prostitutions of Jerusalem have inspired Rv 17:1-6, 15-18, against Babylon. 4. The laments provoked by the fall of Tyre (Ezk 26-27) are echoed in the laments at the fall of Babylon (18:9-19). 5. The feastings of the birds and beasts after the defeat of Gog (Ezk 39:4-17-20) corresponds to Rv 19:17-21. 6. The invasion and the defeat of Gog in Ezk 38-39 are explicitly evoked and summarised in Rv 20:8-9. 7. The measurement of the Temple and of the new city (Ezk 40-43) is used twice (Rv 11:1-2 and 21:10-27). 8. The water flowing from the Temple in Ezk 47 inspires Rv 21:10-27.

3 In this last point his approach is influenced by the recent literature on metaphoric discourse rather than on the inadequate substitution theory of metaphor (1989:215-225, see Wheelwright 1962; 1968; Black 1962).
Ruiz pays particular attention to the creative, transforming involvement with the OT traditions of both John and his readers. He relies on the understanding of the metaphoric process, as seen by Wheelwright, to grasp and appreciate the creative freedom involved in reading the Old Testament. Metaphors are renewed and revitalized by recontextualisation. The readers are invited and encouraged to understand themselves anew in the light of the biblical metaphors. Furthermore, these metaphors are never fully closed but remain open for further or other historical concretisations. Babylon, for instance, is not just a code name for Rome (1989:528-529).

John is not writing a commentary on the Old Testament, hence the absence of explicit citations; 'they are reading John's prophetic book' (1989:526). In reading John's work the churches hear the voices of the prophetic tradition and are guided in their search and encouraged to celebrate the promised victory already now in their liturgy. John clearly presents himself as a legitimate heir to the prophetic tradition. He experienced visions like the great Ezekiel and Isaiah and he speaks the language of the prophets. The fact that there are no explicit quotations from the OT in Revelation does not mean that John draws attention to himself. The attention is on his writings which are not seen so much as his own work but as the word of God, to whom all honour is due. John emphasises the divine origin and christological focus of his literary work (see Rv 19:9-10, Ruiz 1989:533-534).

Mealy (1992) focuses on the resurrection and judgement in Revelation 20. In dealing with this chapter, he develops the recapitulation approach.

... the function of the descriptions in 20.11-15 is not to carry that story further chronologically, but rather to step back in time and to present both a new viewpoint on the parousia as judgement (paralleling 20.4-6), and a new viewpoint on the resurrection of the unrepentant (paralleling 20.7-10) (Mealy 1992:191).

Mealy is particularly attentive to the OT context both on the verbal level and on thematic level. On the level of theme he points for instance to Ps 45 in order to understand the link between the themes of bride and groom (wedding) and that of the victor-king in Rv 19:5-8 and 11-21 (Mealy 1992:64-64; see also Is 14 in order to understand the binding of the Deceiver in Rv 20:1-3 in 1992:129-130).

... [in Rv 20:8] John understood Ezekiel 38-39 as telling the same eschatological story as Isaiah 24-26. And he not only discovered in each prophecies of the resurrection and judgment of the unrepentant, but he also left markers to aid his readers in making the same discovery (Mealy 1992:135).

Mealy, like Ruiz, draws our attention to the fact that John has produced a very well integrated work in which texts from the OT have been 'woven together within his own narrative to form a single coherent picture' (Mealy 1992:135 n 1). Like Ruiz, he also envisages that John expected his readers to be active discoverers (1992:135).

Fekkes (1994) focuses on the use of Isaiah in Revelation and is particularly interested to show that John was 'familiar with a variety of exegetical and literary devices, and employed these consistently and purposefully in his handling of the OT material'
Fekkes defends John’s use of Scripture against the view that his use is arbitrary and does not respect the OT context. ‘Not only does it appear that these Isaiah texts are consciously selected according to subject, but they are also applied according to subject’ (1994:282; also 101–103, 287–288). John recognises the same specific themes in different biblical books and brings these together to build up his own picture.

Moyise (1995) begins by examining the view of Ramsay (1904) and Hemer (1986) that local conditions inspired the selection of Scripture, and that of Beale (1984), who claims that Daniel 2 provided the model which guided John and directed his attention to the other biblical passages. Moyise focuses rather on the use of Ezekiel in Revelation and explores the usefulness of intertextuality to interpret it. It is not enough to point out the presence of allusions to the OT. He agrees with Hays, who adds as a second task, ‘to give an account of the distortions and new figures that they generate’ (Moyise 1995:110). Or, as he formulates it himself: ‘The task of intertextuality is to explore how the source text continues to speak through the new work and how the new work forces meanings from the source text (Moyise 1995:110).

The two works have been forced into mutual interaction. While the new text is dominant, the source text with its context is not always so easily silenced (1995:115). Moyise has taken a typology of imitation from T Green in order to distinguish different types of imitation and to situate the relationship between Revelation and Ezekiel (1995:118–128).

One of the contributions of Bauckham (1993a) is the way in which he has shown in detail how John works with the Old Testament, following the traditional ways of interpreting, (e.g. gezerah sawah, ...). I will use just one example. In Revelation 5:9 John associates the fourfold formula: ‘families, languages, lands, nations’ of Genesis 10:31 with Exodus 19:5–6 ‘out of all the peoples you shall be my special possession’. He uses the formula from Genesis to develop the Exodus text: ‘from all the peoples’ becomes ‘every family and language and people [instead of ‘land’ in Genesis] and nations’. However, the text of Exodus is read in a totally new way: While God elected Israel from (above) all the nations, Jesus has bought for God, by means of his blood a people taken ‘from every family, language, people and nation’. Bauckham comments: ‘This is a grammatically quite legitimate interpretation of Exodus 19:5, which John must have thought now yielded its full meaning for the first time in the light of the international character of the New Testament people of God’ (1993a:327). Furthermore, this series also evokes another text with a threefold formula, which is very important for Revelation, Daniel 7:14: ‘peoples, nations, languages’. This text speaks about dominion over nations, which will be taken away from the beasts and given to the one like a son of man (1993a:330). For Bauckham, Revelation unfolds before us how ‘the sacrificial death of the Lamb and the prophetic witness of his followers are God’s strategy for winning all the nations of the world from the dominion of the beast to his own kingdom.’ (1993a:337).
2 THE SCRIPTURES IN REVELATION 21:1–22:9

2.1 Outline of Revelation 17:1–22:9

According to Giblin (1974) Revelation 17:1–19:10 (A) corresponds to 21:9–22:9 (A'). Mealy sees section B (19:11–20:8) as the final transition: 'the final replacement of all that is old, false and rebellious, with all that is new, true and reconciled to God'. Rv 19:11–21 is 'the final ousting of rebellious humanity as a whole' and 21:1–8 is 'the final appearance of the reconciled community of God under the figure of the New Jerusalem' (1992:62–63). We will focus here on the positive picture of salvation as it is displayed before us in 21:1–22:9.

2.2 The structural influence of Ezekiel on Revelation as a whole and on the last chapters in particular

As we have seen, various studies have shown how the outline of Revelation is to a large extent inspired by Ezekiel and expanded by means of Isaiah, Daniel, and some other texts (Boismard 1949; 1952; Vanhoye 1962; Ruiz 1989; Moyise 1995). On the other hand, Beale (1984) has attempted to show that Daniel 2 provided the Vorbild for the whole book, but this has not found acceptance.

Lust (1980), following a number of earlier scholars like Wikenhauser, Kuhn and Bietenhard, has argued that the order of the final events of the Apocalypse in particular is inspired by the book of Ezekiel. In Revelation 18, which describes the fall of Babylon, we have repeated references to Ezekiel’s oracles against Tyre (chs 26–27). From Revelation 21:10 onwards the references are to Ezekiel 40–48, on the New Temple and the New Israel. In chapter 19:17–18 John refers first to Ezekiel 38–39 (on Gog) and returns to these chapters in 20:7–10. The first resurrection (verses 4–6) is mentioned before the Gog and Magog section, and the second (general) resurrection (verses 11–14) follows immediately after it. This could possibly be explained in terms of John’s double use of particular texts discussed by Vanhoye (1962:362–363, who does not mention this case). Lust offers another explanation. He points out that there are clear indications in the manuscript tradition that at the time of the writing of Revelation there were at least two ways of ordering the material. The one witnessed to by the MT with chapter 37 followed by the Gog section (chapters 38–39), and followed by chapters 40–48, the renewed Israel. The other order, represented in Greek Papyrus 967 and by the best manuscript of the Vetus Latina, the Codex Wirceburgensis, was where the resurrection chapter followed the Gog chapters. In John’s time or a little earlier, Lust speculates, the chapters were read as a chronological description of the final events. Different views on the final events gave rise to different arrangements of the chapters. The more apocalyptic trend thought of a cosmic battle, followed by the resurrection of the chosen people and the inauguration of the messianic kingdom. The other trend, which could be identified with the Pharisees, looked forward to a future in history: after the restoration of Israel, the people would
still have to fight a final war, before the renewed and ideal state. Lust (1981) has shown that Ezekiel 36:23c-38 was composed when Ezekiel 37 was moved to its present place. This is a good example of how the—to some extent—still fluid OT text was shaped by contemporary concerns. John knew both traditions and combined the two so that he came to a pattern with two resurrections, the resurrection of the elect and a general resurrection.

The texts of Ezekiel attracted other biblical passages, in this part of Revelation especially Isaiah. Mealy (1992:99-101,133-142), for instance, has argued that Revelation 19:17-20:10 is shaped both by Ezekiel 38-39 and Isaiah 24-27. The many similarities between these two texts inspired John to draw on both for his own presentation. Fekkes (1994:265) points out how John follows not only the overall order of Ezekiel but that within smaller units, like Rv 21:18-22:5, the order is inspired by Isaiah texts: as we will see Isaiah 54 dominates Revelation 21:18-21, while Revelation 21:22-22:5 is controlled by Isaiah 60.

2.3 Revelation 21:1-22:9


2.3.1 Revelation 21:1-8: the new creation and God’s presence.

This section introduces the theme which will be developed in 21:9-22:9. The new situation was announced in 19:6-9 by means of the two images: the Lord as king of the universe and the marriage of the lamb (already anticipating use of Isaiah 61:10).

As earth and heaven have vanished from before God’s throne (20:11), John now sees a new heaven and a new earth. The sea, which had held the dead, together with Death and Hades, had to surrender them (20:13). According to 20:14 Death and Hades were thrown in the lake of fire. Now we are told that the third power holding the dead, the sea, simply is no more. This is the setting for the descent of the New Jerusalem.

The presence of OT texts: As Ezekiel appears to have been the inspiration for Revelation’s overall picture, it is useful to point out that the Ezekiel text in this section (21:3) is
taken from Ezekiel 37:27 (which itself is inspired by Lv 26:11–12). The themes of God dwelling with his people and the expression of mutuality: ‘I will be their God; they will be my people,’ belong to the covenant language and are widespread in the Old Testament (see e.g. Ezk 37:23; 11:20; 43:6–7,9, Zch 2:14–15; 8:8; Jr 31:1; Ps 95:7).

The Isaian texts, which are prominent in this section, are the following (certain or virtually certain according to the list of Fekkes 1994:92–93, 281):

- Rv 21:1–2a: Is 65:17,18b: a new heaven and a new earth
- Rv 21:2b: Is 61:10: city prepared as a bride adorned
- Rv 21:4a (and 7:17b): Is 25:8ab: God will wipe every tear from their eyes
- Rv 21:4d: 65:16c/43:18: former things passed away
- Rv 21:5a: 43:19a: behold I make all things new

It is clear that Isaiah 65 is a major text for this section. Isaiah 25:8ab was attracted by 65:19–20; Isaiah 43:19a is close to 65:17; Isaiah 43:18 is close to 65:16c.

Isaiah 61:10, Jerusalem as a bride adorned for her husband (Rv 21:2b), fits in well in the parallelism between Babylon and Jerusalem in the structure of Revelation. This text was already evoked in Revelation 19:7–8, and is close to Isaiah 65:18, where we find the same pair ‘be glad—rejoice’.

Isaiah 55:1 is at first sight not immediately connected with Isaiah 65. The water of life is described as a river of water of life in Revelation 22:1 and feeds the tree of life. This obviously picks up the imagery of Ezekiel 47:1. Revelation 22:2 is inspired by Ezekiel 47:1–12. However, Isaiah 65:13 (drink) and 65:25 evoke an image of paradise with the animals returning to their vegetarian diet (although the snake remains cursed!).

In verse 7 we are reminded of 2 Samuel 7:14, a second formula of mutuality. The close relationship between God and the davidic king is promised to the community of the redeemed.

### 2.3.2 Revelation 21:9–22:5: the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem

This section is widely recognized as the pendant to 17:1–18:24, the fall of Babylon. (Compare Rv 17:1 with 21:9; 17:3a with 21:10a; ... Fekkes 1994:94–95). A Y Collins (1990:1015) sees this section as ‘a coda to the seven visions of 19:11–21:8, as an elaboration of one of the images of the seventh vision, the New Jerusalem’.

### 2.3.2.1. Architecture of the heavenly Jerusalem: Revelation 21:9–21

The following list is taken from Fekkes (1994:281, 241–247) and from Vanhoye (1962:476).

- Rv 21:10: Holy City shown on mountain: Ezk 40:2 (40:4; 43:5)
This section is predominantly inspired by Ezekiel, enriched with some other traditions also reflected in Isaiah and Tobit. The description of the new Jerusalem adorned with precious stones and pearls is inspired by traditions found also in Is 54:11-12, Tob 13:16-17. According to Ezk 28:13 and Gn 2:11-12 precious stones and gold belonged to the glory of the Garden of Eden. Already in the traditions about the temple of Jerusalem the temple was seen as having elements from paradise (Bauckham 1993b:134). For instance the twelve precious stones on the priest’s breast plate, which also represent the twelve tribes (Ex 28:15–21; 39:8–14), were associated with the precious stones and gold from paradise. According to 4QpIs’ 1.4–9 and LAB 26:13–15 these are so brilliant that they serve as sources of light in place of the sun and moon (Draper 1988:43–44, 52–59; Bauckham 1993b:134). In this way the images of the new Jerusalem and paradise are interlinked continuing an already existing tradition. Fekkes (1994:98) suggests that this may be a way of ‘extending temple imagery to the city as a whole’. The new Jerusalem with the glory of paradise is the bride of the Lamb, who has prepared herself (19:7; 21:2) and has been adorned (21:2; 21:19) for her husband. The Church who is called to prepare herself (chs 2–3) is here presented as prepared, adorned and ready for the marriage union (Fekkes 1994:247–253).

2.3.2.2 The temple-city: 21:22–25

While the last part of the previous section (21:18–21) was mainly inspired by Isaiah 54, this section is shaped by the next section in Isaiah (Is 60) to deal with Zion and developed by means of other New Jerusalem texts (Is 42; Zch 14; Ezk 47). Again we see how John is guided by the order of the texts he is working with (Fekkes 1994:265 and note 113: ‘another example of John’s use of OT testimonies in thematic sequence’). It is also worth noting that the unit is held together by an inclusion evoking Is 60:19: not sun or moon, but the Lord shall be their light. The list which follows is from Fekkes (1994:98).

Rv 21:23: city needs no sun or moon, glory of God: Ezk 43:2; Is 60:1–2,19
Rv 21:24a: nations walk by its light: Is 60:3a
Rv 21:24b: kings bring their glory into it: Is 60:3b; 5b-9, 11–13,16
Rv 21:25a: gates will never be shut: Is 60:11a
Rv 21:25b: shall be no night there: Zch14:11(?)
Rv 21:26: glory of nations brought into it: Is 60:11b cf 60:5)
Rv 21:27: the unclean will not enter it: Is 52:1
Rv 22: 3a: no more curse: Zch 14:11
Rv 22: 5a: shall no more be night: Zch 14:7a(?)

For 22:1-2, Vanhoye (1962:476) recognizes the influence of the Garden of Eden (Gn 2:9-10), of Ez 47:1-12 (particularly 1,7,12) and of Zch 14:8. This link with Genesis was already prepared in Rv 2:7. (See also Ezk 36:35 where the restored land will be 'like the Garden of Eden').

Wilcox (1980) defends the view that Revelation 21:9-22:5 reflects an early Jewish interpretative tradition based on Is 60 which was available to John ready-made. John received this tradition into his text and corrected it by means of 21:22 (211, 213, 214-215). It may be difficult to determine exactly the shape of the preformed material, but it is important to appreciate that John was not reading Isaiah in a vacuum but in a context in which the texts had been interpreted for centuries and were surrounded by interpretive material. This material is reflected in the contemporary texts which Wilcox has retrieved: Targumic material, LXX, and Qumran texts: 5Q15 (one of several New Jerusalem fragments); 11QT.

It will also be helpful to pay attention to some other details which show us other aspects of the way John works with the text. First of all, Isaiah 60:19b speaks about God and the Lord in parallelism. In Revelation 21:23 John takes the opportunity to read the Isaian text in a Christian way and to introduce the Lamb into the picture.5

Another interesting example of how John works with the texts can be found in Revelation 21:25-26 (see Fekkes 1994:271-273). While John is reading Isaiah 60:11: 'Your gates shall always be open, day and night they shall not be shut, so that nations shall bring you their wealth...', he takes from it: 'Your gates shall not be shut by day'. He omits 'by night' and reminds us that there will not be any night in the New Jerusalem, probably with an allusion to Zechariah 14:7a. After this digression, he continues to the main point that, as the gates will be always open, they will bring in the 'glory and honour' of the nations (Fekkes 1994:272-273).

Fekkes (1994:269-271) points to John's preoccupation with the nations6 and the kings of the earth7, and how this preoccupation affects his reading of Isaiah 60:3 (5,11,13). John has a vision of the conversion of the nations and the kings of the earth turning away from Babylon towards Jerusalem: the nations 'will walk by its light' instead of the original 'nations will come to your light'. That 'the kings of the earth will bring their glory to Jerusalem' (Rv 21:24, 26) is John's way of understanding and

The New Testament has a number of examples of such a Christian reading: Isaiah 40:13 in 1 Cor 2:16, while the same text is applied to God in Romans 11:34.

synthesising a number of verses in Isaiah 60 announcing that kings and nations will serve Jerusalem and pay tribute to her. John draws these texts into his own perspective and reshapes them. What is meant by 'bringing their glory and honour' becomes clear if we keep in mind 4:4,9,10,11 and 11:15–16. While Isaiah speaks about the 'wealth of the nations,' John has interpreted this as the worship of the nations.

There are two aspects in John's reading of Ezekiel in which he clearly puts forward a Christian view of the New Jerusalem, the place of the nations and the absence of the temple.

(1) The nations. The Gentiles (nations) is a term which appears rather frequently in Revelation compared with the other NT writings: 23 times in Revelation while 43 times in Acts and 54 times in the Pauline Corpus; 15 times in Matthew; 13 times in Luke, 6 times in Mark (see other related terms: human beings; kings of the earth). The nations are mentioned three times in our text: 21:24,26; 22:2. The theme also appears in 21:3.

Revelation is concerned to show that the nations who were led astray by Satan and his allies, particularly also by Babylon (14:8; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3,8,10; see also 12:9; 13:14), will be walking by the light of the new Jerusalem (21:24). The struggle for the hearts of the nations is a very prominent theme in Revelation. In John's picture of the New Jerusalem, the holy city will be open to humankind (not only Israel) and they shall be his peoples (21:3). They will enter and give glory to God (21:24–26); in other words, they will be converted. Earlier on in Revelation, the vindication of the two witnesses leads to the conversion of a considerable portion of people (11:13); the hymn of Moses (15:3–4) refers to God as the king of the nations and announces that all the nations will come and worship before God; the Jerusalem scene, which pictures the ultimate goal of God's plans, shows us a large scale conversion of the nations as the fulfilment of that announcement (Bauckham 1993a:310).

All four of the statements about the nations are found in texts from the Old Testament. The first two (21:24,26) are found in passages which have been inspired by Isaiah 60. The third one (22:3) belongs to a passage inspired by Ezekiel 47:12 and the fourth one to a passage inspired by Ezekiel 37:27 (originally probably from Leviticus 26:11–12, but found in a number of biblical texts). In each case John translates the text in such a way that it will express the point he has to make.

In 21:24, Isaiah's statement 'nations will come to your light' (60:3) has become 'the nations will walk by its light' (Fekkes 1994:269). He has chosen a verb (peripatein) which is used regularly in a Christian context to refer to the behaviour of Christians. The second half of the verse, 'and the kings of the earth bring their glory into it', departs from the parallelism of Isaiah 60:3. It picks up a theme which is present in the 8 See Rm 13:13; Jn 8:12; 11:9; 12:25; 1 Jn 1:17; Eph 4:17; 5:8; listed by Fekkes 1994:269 n 125.
rest of Isaiah 60 (particularly verses 5 and 10), that the wealth of the nations will be brought to Jerusalem. He translates ‘wealth’ as ‘glory’ and this fits in well into his picture of the kings acknowledging the greater glory of God (Fekkes 1994:270).

In 21:26, ‘they will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations’, is a translation of Isaiah 60:11b. As in the previous text, the ‘wealth’ of the nations is translated as ‘the glory’ and even expanded by the addition of ‘and honour’. Again we recognise Christian language; ‘glory and honour’ are familiar in the language of worship (see Fekkes 1994:272, note 134).

The third statement about the nations (22:2), ‘for the healing of the nations’ is an addition to Ezekiel 47:12. According to Vanhoye (1962:470–471), John read the text of Ezk 47:1–12 in the light of Gn 2:10–14. The water and the wood (trees) in Ezekiel reminded John of Paradise with the rivers and the tree of life. The text of Ezekiel also reminded John of Zechariah 14:8: ‘On that day waters of life shall flow out from Jerusalem…’. John apparently got the expression ‘water of life’ from this passage in Zechariah. The next verse in Zechariah is very universalistic, exactly what John wanted: ‘And the Lord will become King over all the earth…’. This reminded John that he should improve on Ezekiel’s text to bring out this universalistic perspective even more and so he added that ‘the leaves of the trees serve as medicine for the nation’.

The fourth text, Revelation 21:3, is a reformulation of Ezekiel 37:27 in the light of Zechariah 2:15.9 Ezekiel’s text envisages God’s dwelling with the sons of Jacob, while Zechariah 2:15 has a universalist version of the same theme: ‘Many nations shall join themselves to the Lord on that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in your midst’ (Vanhoye 1962:470). The idea of God’s dwelling with his people appears in both texts with words of the same root (skn). The nations are mentioned in both; in Ezekiel they will know what the Lord does for Israel; in Zechariah they become part of God’s people. Bauckham (1993b:137) also refers to Is 19:25; 56:7; Am 9:12. Revelation bends texts from Ezekiel in the light of other texts and in the light of the Christian experience to express the universal scope of God’s salvation.

(2) No temple. The second theme which deserves some special attention is John’s affirmation that there will be no temple in the New Jerusalem: 21:22. This is very striking as Ezekiel 40–47 focuses precisely on the temple. The statement forms part of a series of negative statements: no temple, no need for sun or for moon (verse 25: no night; verse 27: nothing unclean…). Vogelgesang (1985:85 n 85; 130) considers this an expression of John’s democratisation programme. The temple as ‘a particularistic institution, separated from all other nations and set apart’ is a poor image for the presence of God. Ruiz (1989:168)

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9 It is very difficult to decide in 21:3 between the reading ‘my peoples’ and ‘my people’ (Metzger 1975). Mealy (1992:223 n 1) prefers the singular as the lectio difficilior, but concludes that ‘[f]rom the point of view of ideological consistency within Revelation, ...the two readings stand on equal footing’.
sees other possible reasons: the temples in Asia Minor as places of emperor worship, the fact that the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed (so also Collins 1990:1015).

John seems rather radical as he eliminates the temple altogether. However, it turns out that he rejects the idea of a physically reconstructed eschatological temple, while holding on to the symbolism of the temple as representing a close relationship with God (see Draper 1988:58; Collins 1999:1015). The whole city is filled with God's immediate presence. As a result the city itself becomes a temple. The most striking sign of this is its perfectly cubic shape (21:16). In this it is like no city ever imagined, but is like the holy of holies in the temple as described in 1 Kings 6:20 (Bauckham 1993b:136).

A beautifully clear sign of the immediate presence of God with his people is the touching image of God himself wiping away all tears from his people's eyes (21:4) and in verse 5, God himself speaks personally (he first speaks in 1:8). They will see the face of God and his name will be on their foreheads, like the High Priest once a year in the old temple (Bauckham 1993b:142). The throne will not be a symbol of domination but a symbol of sharing (they will reign: 22:5).

Although John is largely guided by Ezekiel 40-48 in his vision of the New Jerusalem, his view about the newness is more radical than that of Ezekiel: while Ezekiel sees God coming to dwell in the new temple (43:1-5), John sees the whole of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven, from God, having the glory of God (21:2,10-11). God's throne, which was inaccessible in heaven, now comes down upon the earth together with the New Jerusalem. God's presence is a radiant, open presence, no longer hidden in the holy of holies behind a veil (21:22-24). 'The Temple, as symbol of access to the divine presence, is replaced by the Presence itself' (Deutsch 1987:115). According to Ezekiel 43:7, the temple is the place for the soles of God's feet. For Isaiah 66:1, the whole earth is God's footstool, while his throne is in heaven. For John, in the new heaven and the new earth, there is no more distinction between heaven and earth; God has fully come down to live among his people.11

3 SOME DISPUTED ISSUES IN THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN REVELATION

There can be no doubt that John read the Scriptures of Israel very carefully. But we could ask ourselves, what kind of a reader was he? Was he a competent reader? Does

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10 Lupieri (1999:337-338) questions the idea of a cubic shape.
11 According to Mealy (1992:193-200), that there is no longer any sea must be understood as the removal of the firmament which separates heaven and earth from the beginning of the first creation. The 'sea' appears first in Rv 4:6 as the glassy floor of the heavenly throne room. This reflects Ezk 1:22, 10:1; Ex 24:10, where it refers to the sky. John speaks repeatedly about the stripping away of the firmament: 6:14; 19:11; 20:11. He finds the OT inspiration for this removal of the firmament in Is 64:1, and particularly in Is 25:7 (shroud—sheet), a text which has clear verbal and thematic parallels with Rv 21:3-4.
he fit our criteria of a competent reader? What were his criteria for competent reading? Or, to put it in other words, does he interpret Scripture or does he merely treat Scripture as a quarry for his own composition? This is a challenge which Schüssler Fiorenza put before scholars: ‘He does not interpret the OT but uses its words, images, phrases, and patterns as a language arsenal in order to make his own theological statement or express his own prophetic vision’ (1985:135).

3.1 Different reactions to Schüssler Fiorenza’s assertion that John does not ‘interpret’ Scripture

John claims prophetic authority for his own work but does not seem to call on the prophetic authority of the biblical works he draws on:

...in contrast to much of the NT, Revelation never cites as Scripture (graphe) any individual passage from either the Hebrew Bible, now known to Christians as the OT, or the Greek Bible, known as the Septuagint. Nor does John, the writer of Revelation, ever appeal to the authority of Scripture with the phrase “it is written” (gegraptai) or state that something happened to “fulfill”...some prophecy in Scripture (Michaels 1997:851).

The views of Schüssler Fiorenza (1985) on the issue help us to put the question more sharply and have provoked reactions from a number of scholars. She reacts against the view that John cannot be seen as a typical early Christian prophet, but must be seen as a typical OT prophet (Vielhauer 1965; Hill 1971–72). Rather than opposing OT prophecy and NT prophecy, prophecy and apocalyptic, she would see a contrast between prophecy on the one hand and exegesis and homily on the other.

Therefore, the use of the OT in Rev. links it to Jewish apocalyptic and early Christian prophecy. The author of Rev. is not bent on the exposition and explication of the OT as authoritative Scripture. It is not the OT prophets, but his own historical-theological situation, which is the locus of revelation. Yet it is precisely in using the OT in such an apocalyptic “anthological” fashion that Rev. proves to be a genuine expression of early Christian prophecy. According to K. Stendahl the apocalyptic style rests on the conviction that “the prophetic spirit creates; it does not quote in order to teach or argue” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985:136).

In her argument against Hill, who sees John as similar to the Qumran Teacher of Righteousness, Schüssler Fiorenza emphasises the difference between them in their use of Scripture: ‘John uses OT texts as he uses Jewish apocalyptic, pagan mythological, or early Christian materials in an allusive “anthological” way. He does not interpret the OT but uses its words, images, phrases, and patterns as a language arsenal in order to make his own theological statement or express his own prophetic vision’ (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985:135).

We must agree that Revelation is not cast in the literary form of a commentary on Scripture, as for instance the Qumran pesharim. Furthermore, Revelation does not explicitly refer to the very large number of OT texts evoked or alluded to as Scripture. However, does this mean that Revelation is in no way expounding Scripture? Does it
mean that he does not take these passages as authoritative Scripture or revelatory texts? A number of scholars have found the statement 'he does not interpret the OT' inaccurate. Draper (1988:59-60) concludes: 'In Revelation the interpretation is implicit rather than explicit, but it is interpretation nevertheless, of a kind in keeping with what is found in the Scrolls' (60), while he also draws 'on several Jewish apocalyptic traditions originating outside of the Old Testament' (59). Bauckham also expresses disagreement with the statement of Schüessler Fiorenza and attributes this judgement to her lack of appreciation of the 'expert and subtle use of current Jewish exegetical method' (1993a:297).

Moyise also comments on Schüessler Fiorenza's statements. In response he first considers the view which understands John's prophetic gift as a state in which he has taken on the mind of Ezekiel (as in the case of pseudonymity). The texts of the older prophets are then no longer an external source and hence he needs not quote (1995:78–80). However, Moyise sees various difficulties with this view, the first one being that John would have had to take on the mind of a variety of prophets. Furthermore, he contrasts the views of Ruiz and Beale before proposing his own synthesis. While Ruiz holds that the readers are invited to 'reappropriate biblical metaphors through the lens of Revelation itself' (1989:223), according to Beale the Old Testament texts are 'utilized as a lens through which past and present eschatological fulfilment is understood' (1988:325). This makes it clear for Moyise that the two contexts must be taken seriously: the Old Testament book and John's own work have been bound 'together to form a complex set of interactions' (83). Here he sees the truth of Schüessler Fiorenza's comment that 'John is not offering the reader an interpretation of Scripture. ... In other words, John's use of Ezekiel involves the reader in a hermeneutical challenge' (83). Moyise then concludes, '[t]he nature of this challenge can be explored by using the literary concept of intertextuality' (84). Moyise (63 n 40) refers to the various models and names which have been put forward to understand the relationship between Revelation and the Old Testament texts quoted. He finds midrash inappropriate because as Wright has put it: in midrash 'the new composition exists for the sake of the old text' (1967:74). He is also unhappy about the term 'inner-Biblical exegesis' as this 'puts too much emphasis on what the new author does with the old text' (1995:63 n 40). He would be happier with the more neutral term 'inner-Biblical allusion', but he believes that intertextuality is the most suitable approach. In the light of intertextuality he ends up disagreeing with Schüessler Fiorenza's statement. She overestimates the voice of the new context (1995:111); ‘the original context is not so easily silenced’ (115); ‘the reader of John’s book will look at the Old Testament in quite a different light from the one who has not read it...’ (135–136).

Michaels also seems to go along with Schüessler Fiorenza in his own way:

His [John's] role is not that of a scribe interpreting a written text but of a prophet incorporating the spoken words of ancient prophecies into new prophecies for a new time.
To John, the truth he presents is not derivative from those ancient prophets he knows but never identifies by name - Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah. Rather, it comes from the same wellspring of divine inspiration on which he drew. His visions and auditions, no less than theirs, are revelations from God (Michaels 1997:852).

This way of looking at the issue plays down the importance of the previous prophecies, while Moyise with his view of intertextuality tries to uphold the importance of both the text of Revelation and the Old Testament prophecies. In order to clarify this Michaels posits a contrast between the written text (the hard copy) and the oral form (as it came orally from God, or as it is read in the liturgy). As John reads the ancient texts they lose their solidity and they ‘take on new life in John’s visions as part of the language by which he speaks to situations not imagined at the time the prophecies were given. This phenomenon known to students of literature as intertextuality, is nowhere better illustrated in the NT than in the Revelation’ (Michaels 1997:852).

This seems to be a different understanding of intertextuality from that of Moyise.

One way to look at the issue could be to ask, what is the relationship between Revelation and the Old Testament? Does Revelation correct and therefore supersede the Old Testament? Is the Old Testament then a superfluous book for Revelation? However, the Old Testament was preserved in the Church, not merely to show forth its imperfection and hence to highlight the perfection of the New, but in a genuinely positive way. Revelation probably does not express a dissenting voice in this regard.

However, there was clearly an argument over the interpretation of the Old Testament between Christians and non-Christian Jews, as can be seen from 2 Corinthians 3:12-18 and the Epistle of Barnabas. It is not unlikely that John gives us the true interpretation of the Old Testament. Or, as Ruiz puts it, Revelation was meant as a lens through which the biblical metaphors were reappropriated. However, the fact that the Old Testament retains its autonomous existence sets up a tension between the Old Testament and the New, a tension which intertextuality is able to appreciate. It looks as if Schüssler Fiorenza’s assertion is unable to do justice to this complex relationship between Revelation and the Scriptures of Israel.

3.2 Elements towards a better understanding

Before we continue our evaluation of John’s ‘reading’ or ‘interpretation’ of Scripture, it will be useful to reflect on the prejudices about these activities which guide our thinking and try to understand those of John’s cultural context.

3.2.1 How does our modern understanding of interpretation affect our ability to appreciate Revelation’s use of Scripture?

Our spontaneous approach to interpretation is to expect first of all an articulation of the original meaning of the text. The text is to be respected in its original wording and
in its original context. These are the constraints of modern interpreters. The ideal is a commentary which lets the text stand free and explains the text. As such we are the heirs of modernity.

However, we have also been influenced by the contemporary critique of a number of modern positions: we no longer accept that a text has only one meaning, that of the original author; we no longer accept that the reader does not contribute anything to the meaning of the text; we may hold that the meaning of the text is mainly what it says to our situation. To the extent that we are heirs to modernity we will not understand the pre-modern approach to the Scriptures as this is seen in the New Testament and in Patristic and Mediaeval exegesis. To the extent, however, that we are affected by the post-modern approaches to interpretation we will experience a new affinity with pre-modern exegesis. Thiselton quotes Robert Morgan: ‘Texts, like dead men and women, have no rights, no aims, no interests. They can be used in whatever way readers or interpreters choose. If interpreters choose to respect an author’s intentions, that is because it is in their interest to do so’ (1992:62).

Thiselton (1992:142–178) offers a brief but useful comparison between the pre-modern, modern and post-modern approaches to interpretation. He is able to point to a number of contrasts between modernism on the one hand and pre- and post-modernity on the other. While pre- and post-modern perspectives often disagree in unison against modernity, they also differ from each other, the one being like the reverse mirror-image of a concern of the other. For instance: ‘Both a hermeneutics of trust and hermeneutics of suspicion equally recognize, as modernist individualism does not, the importance of the trans-individual frame within which understanding and interpretation operate’ (Thiselton 1992:146).

Tradition was seen by pre-modernism in a positive sense as the safe guide, but in post-modernism the recurring patterns of tradition are seen with ‘intense suspicion, as devices of power to sanction monarchical, feudal, or bourgeois socio-political values...’ (Thiselton 1992:146). At present the tendency is to recognise that readers can have different goals in reading and that these goals determine the reading. There is a plurality of readings guided by interests. Post-modern interpreters are focusing their attention on these interests rather than on the question of meaning (particularly Stout, Rorty and Fish: Thiselton 1992:547). Thiselton holds that for a theological reading of texts we can learn a lot from this plurality of readings but there is also a need to evaluate and rank them (1992:548–550): ‘But if strategies reflect interests, and if interests reflect world-views and values, we cannot simply say of pluralism “Well, there it is!”’ (1992:549).12

12 It might be appropriate to add here that the shift from interpreting and understanding to reading may not be as innocent as it may appear. As Thiselton points out: ‘...the newer paradigm shifts the focus from epistemological communication and interpretive judgment to semiotic effect, with some considerable loss for biblical scholarship and for the status of the Bible itself’ (1992:503).
Although pre-modern Christian reading of texts used a variety of strategies and displayed considerable creativity and freedom in working with texts, they also had ways to evaluate reading and hence to constrain it. Thiselton (1992:155–156), for instance, notes that a number of Fathers of the Church made interpretation less stable by the use of allegorical interpretation, but they held on to three constraining principles in conjunction and in combination:

(i) the rule of apostolic faith as a context of understanding;
(ii) the wholeness of Scripture as a comprehensive theological horizon;
(iii) the biblical and ecclesial witness to Christ as the ‘centre’ of the biblical texts and their subsequent interpretation.

We may also see these as the constraining principles of New Testament writers, but this still leaves considerable freedom to deal with particular texts. Often modern NT scholars are worried about arbitrariness and ‘atomistic exegesis’ in the New Testament reading of the Old (Moyise 1995:12–13, 110–111; Fekkes 1994). Fekkes (1994:282,287–288) defends the author of Revelation against such accusations and he is careful to point out that ‘[n]ot only does it appear that these Isaiah texts are consciously selected according to subject, but they are also applied according to subject’ (1994:282).

It should be clear that whatever could be judged as atomistic in modern terms may not be so for the pre-modern Christians. The context for interpreting a text in Judaism and early Christianity is not the context of origin of the text, but the context of the Christian community reading the text as part of the Bible as a whole. The School of Antioch found the Alexandrian allegorism excessive and arbitrary and insisted on literalism as an additional constraining factor (Simonetti 1992). However this literalism is not yet the same as the modern historical meaning.

Finally, the post-modern appreciation of the role of tradition in understanding helps us to see that the use of the Old Testament by the New is not merely for the sake of apologetic proof or support, but is constitutive of the early Church’s act or process of understanding the Christ event and the Christian community (see Thiselton 1992:150).

3.2.2 Revelation’s way of dealing with the OT must be seen against the long tradition of re-telling and eventually re-writing the traditions

If the Old Testament is constitutive for the early Christian act or process of understanding the Christ event and of the Christian community it will be important to pay attention to the ways in which Israel’s Scriptures functioned in that search for understanding.

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13 On the rule of faith, see Grossi (1992) and Studer (1996:342).
3.2.2.1 Do visionary texts reflect a distinct approach to Scripture?

Some scholars see an expression of independent authority and autonomy in the device of pseudonimity, the claim to inspiration or revelation, the allusive use of Scripture, the absence of explicit references to the biblical books, the absence of explicit mention of fulfilment of the Scriptures (Stone 1984:429; Adler 1996:20). According to Stone:

It has also been claimed persuasively that the methods of exegesis in the apocryphal literature in general and a fortiori in the apocalypses, show that the possibility of inspiration and the results of independent cogitation were accorded more weight than in rabbinic literature... this also leading to a less intimate tie to the biblical text (1984:429).

In line with this we can see how John's claim to prophetic inspiration could also be seen as one of the reasons why he was able to use the Scriptures with such great freedom and creativity. John has no hesitation in qualifying his work as a work of prophecy (1:3; 22:7,10,18,19). His mission is to prophesy 10:11 and he sees himself as one of the prophets in the Church, possibly their leader (22:9). Furthermore the revelation he has received comes from Jesus, who is uniquely worthy to reveal the secrets of God, far superior to all the other revealers like Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, etcetera. No one is worthy to open the seals of the scroll, except the Lamb (Revelation 5). This enables us to understand John's freedom and creativity in working with the texts. John's work should not be sealed, unlike the prophecy in Daniel 12:4, because the time is near and God's plan has now been fully revealed.

By the time of the New Testament a type of prophecy had developed in which use and reinterpretation of previous prophets became more important. Interpretation of Scripture became more and more part of the message of the prophets. Furthermore, there seems to have been a strong concern in some circles to subordinate the contemporary prophets to the Scriptures, which were in the process of being consolidated. Hence the tendency of Josephus to reserve the title prophet to the canonical prophets (Sommer 1996:40); hence also the view in some circles that prophecy had ceased and would return only at the time of the messiah (for texts, see Sommer 1996:36–37). Nevertheless other circles representing the apocalypses and pseudepigrapha continued in a more independent vein. John breaks through that subordination and reads the old texts in a new way, in the light of the victory of the Lamb. The mystery is about to be fulfilled: Revelation 10:7. This is also the way Paul reads the OT in Romans 9–11 (Aune 1993:148).

Because of his prophetic authority and the revelation received from Jesus, John is able to articulate more clearly in the light of the Christ event what the old texts were saying less clearly. Since the time is near the proclamation is also clearer, for instance, as opposed to the prophecies of Daniel (who did not understand: Dn 12:8). John's mission, from our point of view, involved correcting, twisting, broadening, 'improving' the statements of the prophets, particularly of Ezekiel, at several points, as we have seen.
As Bauckham points out:

Certainly, John sees himself as a prophet in the Old Testament tradition of prophecy and receives a revelation given to him as a prophet. But just as late Old Testament prophecy already takes up, interprets and develops the authoritative oracles of its predecessors, so John gathers up and interprets all the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets which he regarded as relating to the eschatological coming of God's kingdom. Because the Old Testament prophecies are authoritative for him, his fresh revelation cannot be discontinuous with them, but must be closely related to interpretation of them, thereby providing the culmination of the whole prophetic tradition (1993a:262–263 n 32).

In other words, John's independence as a prophet is only relative. When Michaels claims that the truth John presents 'is not derivative from those ancient prophets he knows' but from 'the same wellspring of divine inspiration' (1997:852), he ignores the fact that John receives divine inspiration in the language, imagery, expectation and understanding articulated by the prophets before him, and comprehends these texts as interpreted in his own time.

The greater authority and freedom of John does not mean either that the methods of scriptural interpretation which he uses are different from those common in the culture of his time. Hartman sees no basic difference between the methods of visionaries and others. The visionary and the ordinary author 'employ the same devices, as regards form, language and style' (1966:106). This is not surprising, because what we see and experience is grasped and expressed in the cultural forms available to us. The Scriptures and their interpretations were a most important cultural form in which John and his readers were operating and thinking, and even visionaries experience the transcendent in terms of their culture. It is not surprising then to find that John's prophecies presuppose the work of interpretation (see Fekkes 1994:283–290).

3.2.2.2 Does faith in Jesus affect the exegetical and literary devices?

Fekkes (1994:283–286) emphasises that John works with the exegetical and literary devices of Judaism of his day and like a Jew of his days. He also makes a useful distinction between christological presuppositions and exegetical praxis. However, it is difficult to accept his conclusion that '[c]ertainly the latter serves the former, but this does not mean that the former always dictates the latter' and that 'christological awareness was an overriding determinant in all his exegesis' (1994:285). We can agree that John does not work with a distinctly Christian set of devices, but it is clear that his whole approach is shaped by his Christian experience, which should not be narrowly defined as 'christological awareness'. Indeed, John's picture of salvation as the New Jerusalem has much in common with contemporary Jewish texts about the New Jerusalem. He clearly works with the same traditions. However, his Christian presuppositions were an overriding determinant in his exegesis, and to a large extent these coincided with the presuppositions of his non-Christian Jewish contemporaries. However, John's reading about the place of the nations in God's plan probably
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reflects the Christian experience of the Church opening up to Gentiles. His view that there is no more need for a temple probably also reflects the post-70 Christian view of the issue.

Although John approaches the Scriptures with the freedom of a prophet who proclaims the revelation from Jesus Christ and about Jesus Christ (1:1), he nevertheless works very carefully with the Scriptures in ways which remind us of the Jewish culture of his time. In order to understand John as a reader in that particular culture, we have to consider the 'conventions, cultural codes, and historically-conditioned expectations which constitute the reading-community as a socio-cultural phenomenon' (Thiselton 1992:496).

3.2.2.3 The status of the written works

Michaels posits a contrast between the written text (the hard copy) and the oral form (as it came orally from God, or as it is read in the liturgy). As John reads the ancient texts they lose their solidity and they 'take on new life in John's visions as part of the language by which he speaks to situations not imagined at the time the prophecies were given. This phenomenon known to students of literature as intertextuality, is nowhere better illustrated in the NT than in the Revelation' (Michaels 1997:852).

Interestingly, Clements (1988) has a different appreciation of the written word: he reflects on the change from oral to written prophecy and points out that by becoming part of Scripture, texts lose their historical uniqueness and become paradigmatic for God's purpose; they can then be linked with other texts, harmonized, combined, developed, in trying to come to terms with the divine purpose. He sees this as very important for the rise of apocalyptic.

The point, on which both agree, seems to be that John does not just stick to the original or historical meaning of the text, but that he uses the texts in a creative way for new situations. However, each one of the two has a different assessment of the written text. Michaels sees the written text as an obstacle to what John was trying to do. His view of a 'written' text emphasises the aspect of it being hardened or fixed. This is a modern understanding, but it would be an anachronism to apply this to the situation in New Testament times. The many warnings against interfering with texts make clear that it was a regular occurrence: Revelation 22:18–19; Dt 4:2; 13:1; Ep Arist 310–311; Josephus Contra Apionem 1.8 par 42; 1 Enoch 104:9–13 (Orlinski 1989:558–559).\(^{14}\)

The image used by Michaels for John's approach to the written text is rather vague, while the approach of Clements is more satisfactory. We should remember

\(^{14}\) See Feldman's discussion on Josephus' promise not to modify the Scriptures (1988:466–470). It is interesting to pay attention to Meg 14a Bar, quoted in Str-Bill 1, 601: '48 prophets and 7 prophetesses have prophesied to the Israelites and they have not diminished or added to what was written in the Law...' Adding or taking away is here not to be taken in a material sense!
here the perspective of modern hermeneutics in the sense in which, for instance, Ricoeur has reflected on the transition from the spoken word to the written text. This transition brings about a distance from the original author and from the original situation (Ricoeur 1973). Furthermore, canonical criticism focuses our attention on the whole of Scripture as the context for understanding. These last two points enable us to appreciate better the understanding of the written word of Scripture as it was understood in NT times.

We can gain an insight into the approach to written texts when we understand the way many Old Testament texts were produced. There was a long tradition of reworking the existing oral and written texts in order to address the present. Although the process of *fixing* or *stabilising* the texts had started by the time the New Testament was written it is important to keep in mind that the older and long established approach of adapting the texts, written and oral, was still very popular. The written works were part of a *living* tradition.

It is interesting to note how Moyise (1995:118-138) towards the end of his study is led to consider various forms of *imitation* (inspired by T Green) and how this has structured the last part of his study. John is indeed imitating Ezekiel (and Isaiah and Daniel) in some way. It will be important to recognise that this imitation points to an activity which was essential for the life of Israel and which was at the origins of what we now call Israel’s Scriptures, namely *re-telling*, and eventually *re-writing*, the traditions of the past.

One should imagine the production of apocalyptic texts, and indeed of the New Testament as a whole, as part of a broad stream of creative biblical tradition, a tradition that constantly draws on previous traditions in order to face the challenges of the present. Scholars have tried out various models to help us understand how Jewish interpreters worked with texts: the more common of these are: actualisation, *re-lecture*, inner-biblical exegesis, midrash, targum, intertextuality.

The earlier books of the Old Testament were to a large extent the fruit of the retelling of the traditions over a period of time in different contexts. The book of the prophet Isaiah, for instance, is not simply a record of the words of the historical figure, but is the fruit of the creative, living tradition of these words, a tradition which was actualised in new contexts (see Buchanan 1998). Van der Woude (1992:168)

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15 Maybe already from the fourth-third century BC relatively few changes were introduced in the texts of the MT and LXX, while others, like the Samaritan Pentateuch and several Qumran scrolls were more open to change (Mulder 1988:104). In other words, the biblical books took on a variety of shapes. The Qumran evidence suggests that there may have been as many as six different texts of the different books (according to E. Tov as cited by Mulder 1988:103-104). The fact that the Qumran caves contained scrolls representing different texts, while the later finds of wadi Murabba‘at, Nahal Hever and Nabat Tse‘elim from AD 130 and those from Masada from AD 70 only represent the text found in the MT, has led scholars to conclude that the tendency towards standardisation was becoming effective from the end of the first century AD onwards. This process of standardisation can also be seen in the revisions of the LXX and
links the movement towards a uniform textual tradition to the view that prophecy had ceased, or that 'the holy Ghost had withdrawn since the days of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi'. However, there were other Jewish circles, which trusted that there were still prophets among them. We may presume that they were more inclined to continue the established tradition of adapting and re-writing the texts. The early Christians would generally have belonged to these circles.16

The process of rewriting the older traditions not only expanded existing books (like Isaiah), but also produced new works like Deuteronomy, Chronicles, or sections of new works, like Daniel 9, which ponders Jeremiah 25:10-12; 29:10.17 The Testament (or Assumption) of Moses 'is Moses' farewell address to Joshua based on Deuteronomy 31-34.18 We can still add 11QTemple and Jubilees; this last work is a revised version of Genesis 1-Exodus 14. Aune comments: 'The fact that the author altered the text in so many ways makes it obvious that his conception of “sacred text” was not identical with the modern conception of a “fixed text”' (1993:142).

More examples of this developing and rewriting of the traditions can be found in the pioneering work of Bloch 1957:1271-1279, where she treats this as midrash. Fishbane also (1985; 1989:3-18) has drawn our attention to this phenomenon under the name of inner-biblical exegesis. As Fishbane has put it: Scripture ‘not only sponsored a monumental culture of textual exegesis but was itself its own first product’ (1989:4).
(1) Texts as manifestations of traditions. The work of Susan Niditch on Oral world and written word (1996), and other studies on the relationship between orality and writing, may prove helpful in appreciating the status of the written text in New Testament times. Niditch speaks about the Bible 'as a collection of freeze frames in an even richer tradition'. Tradition is actualised in a variety of texts, but no one text exhausts the tradition. Just as a play can be performed in a variety of ways, tradition can be and has been actualised in ever new ways. ¹⁹

It is meaningful, therefore, to study all the different versions of a certain story. For instance, in dealing with the story of Esther it is important to consider the versions found in Josephus, Ant 190–194, in the MT, in the LXX, in the Lucianic recension, and in the Targums (see Moore 1977). Similarly, in order to understand Genesis 6:1–4 from the New Testament point of view, it will be fruitful to bear in mind the various Jewish interpretations of this curious story (Alexander 1972; Delcor 1976).

(2) Written texts must be seen as having an inside and an outside. The inside of a text is a specific constellation of words, or of consonants. The outside of a text is made up of the traditions which have inspired it and the multiplicity of its interpretations. A text cannot not be seen in isolation. What is stated in the text is related to material which is not included and to some extent not even focused on (as emphasised by intertextuality). The outside of a text also includes material which is now considered as belonging to the 'Wirkungsgeschichte' of the text.

The fact, for instance, that by NT times there was a fairly fixed set of traditions preserved in the Book of Isaiah, does not mean that the Book of Isaiah was seen as an entity closed in itself. The written work was as it were 'sympathetically' surrounded by the material which had not been included and by the interpretive traditions (preserved for us, for instance, in the Targums) through which the task of actualisation was continued. The later view of canonicity, particularly from the Renaissance and Reformation onwards, may lead us to think that there was a rigid distinction, and even opposition, between the traditions in the text (canon) and those surrounding it, those outside. In post-modern times the interest in the extra-canonical literature has reversed this. ²⁰

This surrounding material existed in oral or written form; some of it has reached us through the Targums, the legends as preserved in Josephus, the interpretations of Philo, the pseudepigrapha, rabbinical materials to mention but a few. All this material surrounding the Old Testament writings can stimulate us now in our efforts to

¹⁹ This is how we should look, for instance, at the different versions of the Book of Isaiah at Qumran. The various versions of the Book of Daniel also show how there were other Daniel stories in circulation, not included in the short form of the book (MT) but included in longer versions (LXX and Qumran).

²⁰ Thisclton (1992:534–535) commenting on David Bleich sees his disregard for the privilege of the canonical texts as an expression of the socially egalitarian agenda; see also Brown in Brown & Collins 1990:1054.
understand the texts and can help us to appreciate John's understanding of these texts. John did not face the biblical text in a vacuum; he was part of a community with a well developed interpretive tradition by which the biblical texts were part of the life of the community and shaped the community. The biblical texts through their interpretive traditions were part of John's pre-understanding.

Looking at the issue diachronically, before a text came about (e.g., Rev 20–22) there existed an oral and written tradition to which the text is a witness. The book is often only a limited expression of the tradition, the tip of an iceberg. The Gospel of John is very explicit in stating that the work represents only a selection from a vast amount of material: John 20: 30–31. Revelation gives us a very brief description of the New World and the New Jerusalem, but the traditional material not explicitly quoted is nevertheless also part of the play.

The border between the outside and the inside of the text could be seen as an impermeable wall or it could be seen as rather porous. For us now, the border between the inside and the outside of the canonical texts is seen as very hard and definite. An interesting phenomenon is the way glosses eventually became part of the text in pre-modern times. In modern times, due to our new mentality, these had to be removed from the text on text critical grounds. We can also point to the LXX and the targums, which have included interpretive and additional material in their translations without qualms of conscience. It is also striking that the Qumran commentaries alter 'the biblical text to bring it in line with their understanding of the true meaning of the text' (Aune 1993:135). This shows how the interpretation (outside) was still able to shape the inside (the exact wording). We could also find a number of examples of this in the NT writings. Another sign of the rather porous nature of the border between the inside and the outside of the text is the way the early scribes of the New Testament text felt free to manipulate the text in order to protect it against heretical interpretations. Here again the outside of the text, in this case the christological debates, shaped the inside (see Ehrman 1993).

By establishing the earliest form of the text we can construct a functional taxonomy of its subsequent modifications: some serve to improve the grammar of a text, others to eliminate discrepancies, still others to effect harmonizations. And others change the text's meaning, or put a different slant on it, "improve" its theology. It is not only thinkable that scribes would make such changes, it is manifest that they did. Scribes altered their sacred texts to make them "say" what they were already known to "mean" (Ehrman 1993:275–276).

This softness of the border, this openness to outside material, be it improvements, refinements, corrections of the text, or be it additional material, is important for an appreciation of the NT way of dealing with the written text. Furthermore, during the first hundred years after the death of Jesus, there also seems to have been a sense, at least with regard to the NT text, that the oral tradition was superior to the written text. 'But even the Gospels once written were no substitute for oral witness, as we hear from Papias, who in the early 2d cent. was still seeking oral testimony although he
knew several Gospels, canonical and non-canonical (Eusebius, HE 3.39.4) . . .' (Brown & Collins 1990:1044).

In dealing with sacred texts in the New Testament we have to be attentive to this appreciation of the relationship of the oral tradition to the written text, to the softness of the border between the inside and the outside, and even to the possible superiority of the oral over the written word.

It will be helpful to recall here the rabbinical understanding of oral tradition, where we also find an expression of the need to see the written texts embedded in a living tradition which regulates its interpretation. Although the Mishnah situates the origin of this tradition at the time of Moses, it actually reflects the views of the rabbis who developed this view (Avery-Peck 1992).

3.2.3 Revelation's way of dealing must be situated in the broad contemporary Jewish context in which there was a variety of literary genres, all concerned in some way to actualise the Scriptures

Charlesworth (1993) argues that in the past the Pseudepigrapha were neglected as sources of information about Jewish interpretation of Scripture for the period 250 BCE to 200 CE. At first scholars were looking for information in the targumim and midrashim, but it seemed doubtful whether these could inform us about the interpretation of Scripture in the pre-70 CE period. Later on the Qumran pesharim and targumim proved to be a surer guide. The biblical text types found at Qumran also made scholars recognise the potential of the Septuagint as a witness to very early Hebrew traditions, and it became clear that interpretation of the Bible could already be found in the Bible itself — see the work of Bloch (1957) on midrash and of Fishbane (1985; 1989) on inner-biblical exegesis.

Charlesworth claims that ‘[t]hese pseudepigrapha are not adequately categorized as “modes of enriching the sacred story” (Schürer] div. 2, vol III, p. 134); they are interpretations of Torah by reciting and expanding the stories, and thereby making them more meaningful and paradigmatic for daily life’ (1993:21–22 n 2).

Commentary is not the only possible literary genre in which interpretation of Scripture is transmitted. Aune (1993:140–143) has shown how in early Judaism interpretation and actualisation of Scripture appear in a variety of literary genres and therefore we find different types of biblical exegesis. He lists paraphrastic translation, rewritten scripture, anthological style, and commentaries (1993:129–130). Paraphrastic translations present the interpretation as part of Scripture. 'Rewritten Scripture' (e.g. Jubilees and 11QTemple) differs from the paraphrastic translations only in the more extensive degree to which nonbiblical traditions are assimilated in a new presentation of the biblical text. For the apocalypses, he points out that they often follow the anthological style and that parts of some apocalypses use biblical books (prophets) as structural models, like Ezekiel in Revelation 16:17–19:10 (1993:130, 141). They 'virtually never present formal interpretations of biblical texts separated from the text itself' (1993:
Rewritten Scripture deserves special attention here because Revelation 21:1-22:9 seems to be very close to this genre.

Evans (1993:171-174) distinguishes between explicit and implicit biblical interpretation. Explicit interpretation is what moderns usually understand by interpretation: there is a clear distinction between the text and interpretation; the material integrity of the text is respected; the words of the text cannot be changed. According to this modern definition there is very little explicit interpretation in the literature of the Old Testament and New Testament. While the Qumran pesharim seem to come close to explicit interpretation, it should be noted that the lemmata are often altered (for specific examples and discussion see Aune 1993:135). Still, it seems that Evans would call these examples of explicit interpretation. Evans then presents three basic ways of implicit exegesis: translation, revocalisation and radical paraphrase besides the kinds of paraphrase which bear only a general relationship to the Old Testament. Evans considers those works which rewrite the biblical story either through expansion or abridgement, and he agrees with Endres (1987:196-225) that these must be classified as 'rewritten Bible' and not as midrash, which is comment on the text, nor as targum, which is to paraphrase the text. We will return to this question later on in this paper.

With regard to Revelation 21:1-22:9, although much work on the Scriptures and their interpretations must have gone into the production of these verses, John does not present them as interpretation of other prophetic texts but as his own prophetic words which he has received from Jesus and from God. They are not presented in the form of revealed interpretations of the words of Ezekiel, Isaiah, Daniel but in the form of the re-written Bible. Unlike Josephus, John does not claim that he has 'not added or omitted' anything to or from the Scriptures. However, he wants his own text to be treated with that respect (22:18-19).

21 'Of the genres discussed in this section, certainly the apocalypses present interpretative traditions that make no pretense of being identified with portions of the biblical canon. Here the technique is quite different. Exegetical traditions (along with a pastiche of various types of cosmological and eschatological lore) are presented as divine revelation communicated to a seer by a supernatural revealer' (Aune 1993:143). The question is whether these new divine revelations are not usually linked to biblical stories or incidents. We could then see them as expansions of the biblical narratives by means of traditions of all sorts. For instance, Gn 6:1-4 is expanded in this way in various apocalypses.

22 See the categories of Charlesworth (1993:29-40): inspiration, framework, launching, inconsequential.

23 Jubilees: Gen 1:1-6:50; Martyrium of Isaiah: 2Kgs 21:16; Joseph and Asenath: Gn 37-50; Life of Adam and Eve: Gn 1-6; Liber Antiquitatum Bibliarum: Gn-2 Sm.

24 Both midrash and targum have been tried by a number of scholars as categories in which to situate these works: Bueckham (1983:33) 'midrashic'; Chilton (1983) typifies the gospels as 'cognate' to the retelling process of the targums; Draper (1983:265-269; 1988:46); 'targumic.' Evans would not call the Gospels midrash because 'no Gospel as a whole is an exposition...of its major literary sources' (1993:198).

25 Nevertheless, while Josephus remains close to his sources, he also actualises the text in
We can situate these chapters of Revelation in the context of the actualising rewriting of the biblical traditions and texts. Revelation 21:1–22:9 can be compared with the various ways in which other Jewish or Christian authors of that time have been inspired by Ezekiel 40–48. Fekkes (1994:96, note 72) draws our attention to The New Jerusalem Apocalypse of Qumran, of which copies have been found in caves 1, 2, 4, 5, and 11, and also to the Qumran Temple Scroll and the Mishnah tractate Middoth. Wilcox (1980:211–213) even proposed that 21:9–22:5 was a ready-made Jewish text which John integrated into his work and corrected by means of verse 22.

It looks as if John is closer to the very old tradition of rewriting previous texts rather than to the more recent genres which quote texts, give comment, or point to their fulfilment. It is obvious that for John it is the Lamb who brings the fullness of revelation: he reads the prophetic texts in such a way as to bring out that fullness realised by the blood of the Lamb (Bauckham 1993a:260–266). John’s work is therefore the ‘climax of prophecy’ as the title of Bauckham’s study puts it.

**Conclusion:** Commentary is not the only or even the earliest form of biblical interpretation. The earliest form was the re-telling of the tradition. At first, when the traditions began to be stabilised in written texts, the interpretations (amplifying, adding, modifying) were integrated into the existing texts. As the sense of the sacredness and venerability of these texts became stronger the re-written interpretations took on the form of separate works. These works were generally seen as supporters of the canon, not rivals, although in some communities some works (like the Books of Enoch) may have been meant to replace the canonical works (Charlesworth 1993:22 n 2; Aune 1993:143).

### 3.2.4 Revelation as the fruit of charismatic exegesis, as Midrash, as Targum?

#### 3.2.4.1 Charismatic exegesis

If we agree that Revelation is interpretation of Scripture in the broad sense of the word and not just ransacking or plundering it, we may find it useful to consider whether John, the prophet, was practising charismatic exegesis. In fact, John seems to see his whole book, with its re-working of the biblical traditions, as revealed by Jesus.

Charismatic exegesis presupposes that the text is a mystery, or at least has a mysterious dimension (see Decock 1993:276–277, Cryer 1994:328). Aune’s (1993) discussion of the category of charismatic exegesis is very helpful. We can begin by looking at its four basic characteristics. The first one is that it is commentary. Aune takes commentary in a fairly wide sense (not restricted to particular methods of interpretation nor by a particular literary genre). The last two aspects of a commentary do not seem to fit the approach of Revelation: commentary is separated from the text and it

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is not regarded as equal in authority to the text being interpreted. In Revelation, on the other hand, the interpreted text is not highlighted in any way; it is left in the background. All focus is on the new revelation. Aune writes elsewhere: ‘in my view the author is less concerned with exegesis than with shaping his own theological message using OT style, language and patterns of thought’ (1997:cx). We probably give due credit to John by saying rather that his work is the fruit of careful exegesis, but that it is presented as the fuller revelation made possible by Jesus, the Lamb, who was found worthy to open the seals of the scroll.

The second characteristic of charismatic exegesis is that it be presented, implicitly or explicitly, as inspired. John considers the whole of his book to be prophecy: 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19. There can be little doubt that he claimed divine inspiration for his treatment of the older sacred texts. The third characteristic, that it is eschatological, clearly applies to Revelation. John reveals what is to take place soon (1:1,3; 22:6). Jesus is expected to come soon (22:7, 12, 20). Finally, John clearly presents his work as prophecy. The last three characteristics of charismatic exegesis are certainly present in Revelation. However, it does not present itself as a commentary. At most, we can say that it is implicitly charismatic exegesis.

3.2.4.2. Revelation as Midrash or Targum

Bloch (1957) has drawn our attention to a specifically Jewish approach to Jewish Scripture which aims at actualising the text, making it speak to the present. Bloch called this approach midrash or midrashic. By the mid-sixties this label had been used in such a broad sense that Wright thought that a more rigorous definition of Midrash was needed. He tried to limit midrash to a literary genre and did not want to see it in the broader sense as a method of interpretation (1967:74). Among the characteristics of midrash he holds that it is ‘literature about literature’ and that it exists ‘for the sake of the text’ (1967:74, 84, 120, 122, 138, 140), ‘or the benefit of the original texts’ (:123). ‘For the sake of the text’ has been used a number of times after him (Collins 1986:348–350).

Le Déaut (1969:406–407) has raised some pertinent questions with regard to the requirement, that a composition is midrash only if it exists for the sake of the (original) text. In this case, only the strictly exegetical commentaries would qualify as midrash. Le Déaut replies that interpretation is not simply for the sake of the text. It is first of all for the well being of the community that one searches the actual meaning of the Word of God. Le Déaut (1969:413) prefers to maintain a more general sense for midrash, with as its essential elements the scriptural context and adaptation. Midrash can then be subdivided into various sub-categories according to various criteria: e.g. content (haggadic, halakhic, narrative, apocalyptic and others) or according to literary genre (pesher, piyyut, etc).

While Bloch (1957:1276–1278) saw apocalyptic works as a variety of midrash, Wright (1967:136–138) accepted the possibility of a composite genre, being both
apocalyptic and midrash:

If the apocalyptic work scrutinizes past history for a key to the future, it is simple apocalyptic. But if the apocalyptic work scrutinizes biblical texts from the past for the answers to the future and reinterprets these texts in the manner proper to apocalyptic, the word is of a composite; it is both apocalyptic and midrash (Wright 1967:136-137).

Daniel 9 would be an example of the latter. Jubilees is less obvious, but he is 'inclined to see JB as another example of an apocalyptic-midrashic work' (1967:138–139 n 102). However, he holds that the anthropological style of Revelation 'is of the non-midrashic variety' (1967:138).


These assessments depend on the definition of midrash one works with. The broad definition of midrash has enabled Bloch to show the history of this creative way of dealing with Scripture. According to Wright:

...the real contribution of Mlle. Bloch to midrash studies lay...in her effort to point out the history of the genre, i.e., its biblical origins and its development through the biblical and post-biblical literature... The assumption underlying the earlier works had been that the period of great haggadic creativity had been between 100–500 A.D. (1967:23).

Revelation must be situated in this approach to Scripture and shares in it.

Wright has also tried to distinguish between the genres of midrash and targum. 'The purpose of the targum is to give translation plus incidental material; the purpose of the midrash is to give homiletic material with incidental connection to the text... a targum sets out the full biblical text whereas a midrash frequently does not (1967:86). However, Le Déaut (1969:410) points out that often in practice the distinction between the two genres is difficult to make, 1QGenAp being a case in point.

3.2.5 The contribution of intertextuality

Intertextuality helps to relativise some of the modern obstacles to an appreciation of the New Testament use of the Old (although different scholars use it in different ways, see Porter 1997:82–85). The approach of intertextuality helps us to appreciate better that biblical texts are not to be seen in an individualistic way, as texts which stand alone and which have their meaning simply within them, a view which was strongly pushed by structuralism. Source criticisms, redaction criticism, etc did pay attention to the surrounding texts, but they only considered their influence at a time in the past, at the time of the writing. Intertextuality opens up a space to see the continuing co-operation of these surrounding texts in the production of meaning. According to intertextuality, Ezekiel is as much a commentary on Revelation as Revelation is
a comment on Ezekiel (compare Moyise 1995:136). In the case of the use of the Old Testament in the New, this means to create a space in which the tension and interaction between the old context and the new can be explored (Moyise 1995:139–142). Intertextuality plainly accepts that ‘every quotation distorts and redefines the “primary” utterance by relocating it within another linguistic and cultural context’ (Worten & Still 1990:11 quoted in Moyise 1995:112).

The shift of focus from the context of origin to the present reading also opens new perspectives for the understanding of the use of the Old Testament in the New. The role of the reader is not seen as a mere recipient of a ‘given’ meaning but as a ‘creator’ of meaning. This can be seen in the approaches of Ruiz and Moyise. If the present reader is necessarily creative, the same can be appreciated in the case of John as reader of the Old Testament.26 According to Thiselton: ‘If post-structuralism shifts attention to the reader, this is not the consciousness of the individual reader of formalist theory, but to the conventions, cultural codes, and historically-conditioned expectations which constitute the reading community as a socio-cultural phenomenon (Thiselton 1992:496).

We can imagine that John and his contemporaries approached the biblical texts and the surrounding texts without worrying about the chronology of the various texts or about which one was a source for other texts. They approached the texts without the historical perspective which we would expect, and saw them all on the same plane. (Some post-modern painters deliberately abandon perspective, which was seen as a great achievement of modern painting, and present objects on a flat surface). John reads various texts together; he amplifies Ezekiel by selecting texts from another tradition (Deutero-Isaiah) and guided by the understanding developed in the Christian communities of the salvation which Christ brought for Israel and for all the nations. Having apparently enriched (to us ‘corrected’ or ‘contradicted’) Ezekiel, these prophetic texts as they were, were still valid to the Christian community, which created tension with John. St. Augustine was later able to appreciate the play involved in maintaining these OT texts as Christian Scriptures, like a game of hiding and showing: Novum in Vetere latet, Vetus in Novo patet (Quaestiones in Hept. 2,73; PL 34, 623).

John’s texts do not maintain a post-modern dialectic opposition between them and the book of Ezekiel, but John evokes and appreciates Ezekiel with its authority and power and shows what it means when the seals are broken. Probably the characterisation of Thiselton (1992:143) of the pre-modern (trust), modern (doubt) and post-modern (suspicion) is appropriate here: John’s work seems to ooze confidence that the Old Testament prophecies are able to show forth the good news (Rv 10:7).

26 There are different views of the role of the reader: the reader’s role is emphasised by Kristeva and Barthes but less again by Derrida, Riffaterre, Genette (see Bastiaens 1993:8–9).
3.3 Revelation does not speak about the fulfilment of Scripture

John does not say explicitly that Scripture is fulfilled, as for instance Matthew does. Revelation 10:7 would come closest to it. In this text God’s servants, the prophets, are probably both the Old Testament and New Testament prophets (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985:136; Collins 1990:1007 leaves it rather open). There will be a variety of factors shaping Revelation’s own way of working with the Old Testament. For instance, his perspective is not so much a looking backward at the fulfilment of Scripture in the life of Jesus (e.g. Matthew) as a looking forward to the fulfilment to come on the basis of the great things God has done through Jesus. In Revelation 10:7 the focus is on the full realisation of God’s plans, still in the future.

Willis (1989) concludes that in Revelation the OT is not used within the framework of promise and fulfilment: ‘He draws parallels between Old Testament events and ideas and the circumstances in which he and his readers find themselves... There is an underlying assumption of continuity between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church reflected in the statements and language of the book of Revelation (1989:238).

The framework of promise and fulfilment was not suitable for John’s treatment of the new Jerusalem, as he was focusing on the future. The presupposition, of course, was that God’s promises made through the prophets would be fulfilled (Rv 10:7). He worked over these promises and let them speak to his own generation in their new context created by the victory of the Lamb and after the breaking of the seals and the handing over of revelation to him by Jesus. There is clearly also ‘the assumption of continuity between the Old Testament Israel and the New Testament’. The Scriptures are not merely used in the framework of promise and fulfilment; together with their interpretive traditions they are much more intimately involved in John’s message; they are the language in which he thought, in which he perceived God’s revelation and in which he proclaimed it. This is probably not the way Schüssler Fiorenza understood it.

4 CONCLUSION

The number of allusions to the Scriptures in Revelation is a sign that John was intensely involved with the Scriptures. It has been pointed out in several studies how John follows the outline of Ezekiel (Vanhoye, Lust, Goulder, Ruiz, Moyise), how he works over passages by enriching and correcting them by means of related passages (Bauckham). For instance, the scroll in Rv 5:1–9 and Rv 10 is an interpretation and development of the scroll in Ezk 2:9–10 and Dn 12:6–9 (Bauckham 1993a:251–253).

Whether his involvement must be considered interpretation of Scripture or labelled ‘rummaging the Scriptures like a scrapyard of words, images and motifs’ must be judged first of all against the practice of interpretation of those days.

- The Scriptures were seen as presenting the story of God with his people and with the world. The people of Israel were urged to remember the story and to draw the
consequences from it for their own situation. (Willis 1989:238 speaks of continuity). To remember meant to see themselves as part of the sacred story. Retelling the story in view of their present needs was their concrete way of remembering.

- From a hermeneutical point of view the Scriptures were the 'horizon of thinking' of the Christian communities. Turning to the Scriptures was not something extra, for instance for the sake of apologetics, or for a merely rhetorical effect (though at times these were also factors). As the Scriptures were their 'horizon of thinking', or their 'language', their 'pre-understanding', the 'tradition' within which they understood the world and themselves, they could not but draw on the Scriptures.

- John’s use of the Scriptures could be called the most basic one and most traditional one, that of re-written Scripture, compared to the more elaborate forms like explicit quotations, pesher, fulfilment formulae, and the like. In order to understand John’s way of re-writing Scripture, it is useful to situate it among the various practices for which scholars have found labels like charismatic exegesis, midrash, targum. John’s use must be seen at least as contiguous to these.

- The tension between the modern demand of respect for context and original meaning and the perception that the New Testament use of the Old does not respect context, is somewhat deflated by the approach of intertextuality, which focuses our attention on a more fruitful tension, that between the original context and the new context. John’s pre-modern frame of mind inclined him to trust that the old texts would easily bend to the meaning of the new texts (the full revelation of God’s plans), while the post-modern approach suspects—and rejoices—that the old contexts put up resistance and maintain a tension.

**WORKS CONSULTED**


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