

Blackwell, Ben C., John K. Goodrich, and Jason Maston, eds. *Reading Revelation in Context: John's Apocalypse and Second Temple Judaism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019. 182pp. + 22pp. (back matter)

Reading Revelation in Context is an accessible resource for reading Revelation in light of second temple literature, especially those pieces considered to be apocalyptic. Each chapter of the book links a chapter of Revelation with an extra-biblical source that supposedly illuminates it. Each chapter follows the same basic pattern: the extra-biblical source is introduced and the material relevant to interpreting Revelation is described, Revelation material illuminated by the source is discussed, “additional ancient texts” which also may shed light on a given chapter of Revelation are listed, and a bibliography is provided (which includes a listing of translations of the key extrabiblical source discussed).

Chapter 1 compares the Parables of Enoch (1 Enoch 37–71) with Revelation 1. Benjamin Reynolds establishes that both John and the Parables of Enoch bring together Daniel’s Son of Man language with other Old Testament messianic texts. Reynolds does not claim that John drew on 1 Enoch.

In chapter 2, Mark Mathews observes that 1 Enoch 103:5–8 makes a connection between sinners and wealth and that the churches that received critique in Revelation 2–3 were also noted for their wealth. The connections seem a bit tenuous.

David A. deSilva observes that *The Testament of Levi* presents a journey to heaven in which various ranks of angels are seen before God’s throne, which is placed in a temple setting. In light of this, deSilva suggests that the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, and the seven spirits represent differing orders of angels serving in God’s temple. However, the seven spirits in chapter 4 should be interpreted in light of Revelation 1:4, which is a Trinitarian context.

In Chapter 4, Dana Harris finds it notable that 4 Ezra and Revelation 5 both include messianic lion imagery (Rev. 5:5; 4 Ezra 12:31–36). In both cases there is an allusion back to Genesis 49. Several times Harris explains the parallel as reflecting a shared interpretive tradition, which is likely. Once Harris seems to suggest Revelation’s dependence on 4 Ezra, but this is unlikely if 4 Ezra was written in AD 100 as Harris suggests.

Chapter 5 discusses 2 Maccabees and Revelation 6, martyrdom being important to both. However, Ian Paul ends up highlighting differences more than similarities.

In chapter 6 Ronald Herms observes that the Psalms of Solomon include a passage that speaks of God marking people for either salvation or judgment (15:4–9). Herms identifies Genesis 4:15; Ezekiel 9:4–6; and Habakkuk 1:12 as the biblical background for this idea. Though Herms thinks that the Old Testament background stands behind Revelation 7 and 14, he thinks the Psalms of Solomon show how this theme of marking worked itself out in another post-OT text that was concerned with the suffering of God’s people.

Jason Matson thinks the Testament of Adam indicates that the silence in Revelation 8 is to allow the prayers of the martyrs to be heard. However, the Testament of Adam in its final form was likely composed several centuries after Revelation and does not reveal the reason for the silence. Matson provides that reason from unspecified Jewish traditions.

Ian Boxall identifies two main parallels between the Animal Apocalypse (1 Enoch 85–90) and Revelation 9: (1) fallen angels depicted as fallen stars and (2) animals that war against God's people. The first symbol is not unique to 1 Enoch, as Boxall notes. The second contains some significant differences (also noted by Boxall). First, the animals in 1 Enoch are normal whereas the ones in Revelation are composite. Second, the animals in 1 Enoch represent human nations whereas in Revelation they represent demons.

Chapter 9 adduces parallels regarding angels in Jubilees and Revelation 10. The difficulty with Goodrich's proposed connections is that in every case the parallels between Revelation and the OT are much clearer and stronger than the connections with Jubilees.

In chapter 10 Garrick Allen proposes that 4 Ezra 13 and Revelation 11 share some significant parallels, which he represents in a chart. However, the parallels are clearer in the chart than in the text. In the body of the article, Garrick acknowledged some of these discontinuities. In fact, the body of the article seems to focus on the dissimilarities. In the end it is not clear what 4 Ezra 13 contributes to the understanding of Revelation 11.

Archie Wright suggests parallels between Revelation 12 and an extrabiblical account of Satan's fall in the Life of Adam and Eve 12:1–17. He thinks these parallels suggest Revelation's dependence on this source. However, the parallels cited fall short of demonstrating dependence, for all of the parallel elements also appear in canonical Scripture. What is more, Revelation 12 is likely portraying eschatological events rather than primeval ones.

Jamie Davies appeals to 4 Ezra 11–12 to argue for a preterist reading of Revelation 13. Though 4 Ezra 11–12 links Daniel's fourth beast to first-century Rome, it also is about the Messiah's advent at the end of days. This makes a preterist reading of 4 Ezra a modern perspective rather than the perspective of the author.

In chapter 13 Ben Blackwell notes that the Damascus Document makes a clear division between the righteous and the wicked and that it involves the "overlapping" actions of God, angels, and humans. However, these are very broad themes which appear in earlier Scripture.

In chapter 14 Benjamin Wold relates the septets of plagues in Revelation to the Qumran document, Words of the Luminaries. He focuses on how this work was shaped by Leviticus 26 and its presentation of judgment in a septet. Wold is not claiming that John was dependent upon the Words of the Luminaries. He observes that seeing the passages that the author of the Qumran document relied on can make us sensitive to the range of passages drawn on by John.

In chapter 15, Edith Humphrey draws on the fact that Revelation 17 makes use of a symbolic woman to make a connection with the writing, Joseph and Aseneth, in which Aseneth symbolizes repentance. Humphrey recognizes that the two women represent opposites (repentance for Aseneth, rebellion for the whore of Babylon). Humphrey does not claim any dependence of Revelation upon Joseph and Aseneth. It also seems that Aseneth symbolizes repentance differently than the whore of Babylon symbolizes rebellion. Aseneth is a character in a novella type story who symbolizes repentance (or would it be better to say *exemplifies* repentance) by her actions within the story. The whore of Babylon is pure symbol all the way through.

In her chapter on Revelation 18, Cynthia Long Westfall notes that 1 Enoch 91:1–105:2 critiques “power,” “wealth,” “extravagance,” “luxury,” “consumerism,” and the leveraging of these for “oppression” and “injustice.” It also predicts eschatological judgment on the wicked. The question remains whether the Epistle of Enoch is simply reflecting its biblical milieu or whether it adds something unique to the interpretation of Revelation 18.

Michael Gorman observes that Psalm 17 from the Psalms of Solomon draws on the same Old Testament texts that Revelation 19 draws on (Pss. 2; 110; Isa. 11). He notes that there is debate over whether Psalm 17 presents a nonviolent Messiah. While he acknowledges that debate as still ongoing, he argues (unpersuasively in my view) that Revelation 19 presents a nonviolent Messiah.

In chapter 18, Elizabeth Shively draws parallels between 1 Enoch 10 and Revelation 20. She claims that both passages involve angels who bind fallen angels within the earth for a period of time before those fallen angels are judged by fire. She concludes that 1 Enoch and Revelation are drawing from a common tradition. This was an instance in which the parallels seem real, rather than contrived.

In chapter 19 Jonathan Moo compares the account of the New Jerusalem to 4 Ezra. He observes that “[i]t is unlikely that either author knew of each other’s book,” but he finds the comparison worthwhile since the two books were written around the same time and share both “genre” and “a number of motifs and ideas.”

Sarah Underwood Dixon adduces a parallel between the Apocalypse of Zephaniah 6.11–12 and Revelation 19:10; 22:8–9. In both passages the person receiving an apocalyptic vision falls before an angel and is rebuked by the angel and told to worship only God. Dixon notes that similar scenes occur in Ascension of Isaiah 7.21–22 and Tobit 12:16–22. She does not claim any dependence between these texts.

Reading Revelation in Context provides an interesting introduction to a segment of Second Temple literature. However, it fails to demonstrate the importance of this literature for understanding Revelation. Presuming that the authors chose the best companion texts, the lack of a strong connection between many of the texts and Revelation was notable. The most convincing parallels were due to the texts drawing on the same Old Testament material as Revelation. This reinforces what is plain from the numerous allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation: the most important source for rightly reading Revelation is antecedent Scripture.

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