

‘BEHOLD, I AM COMING’  
THE USE OF ZECHARIAH IN REVELATION <sup>1</sup>

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There is a steady flow of articles and monographs seeking to explore the ways in which the NT authors utilised earlier biblical texts, with no sign that this will soon dry up. Within this flow, the book of Revelation has at last, in recent years, received considerable scholarly attention and is now properly represented within this field of research. However, no thorough study of John’s use of Zechariah has been undertaken, although the need for such a study has long been recognised. This study fills the gap by seeking to answer the question of how the book of Revelation uses the book of Zechariah.<sup>2</sup> It examines the links between the two books thoroughly, with an emphasis on those instances where Revelation alludes specifically to Zechariah.

While the primary aim of this study is thus to provide a thorough account of the use of Zechariah in Revelation, it also offers perspectives on various issues and questions relating to John’s use of the OT in general. In particular, it makes a contribution to the on-going quest for scientific and objective criteria for discerning and determining allusions, to the discussion of John’s sources, and to the current ‘John’s respect for the OT context’ debate.

Chapter One first looks briefly at some preliminary issues related to the study of Revelation and the assumptions and limitations of our present study. It then introduces the question of John’s sources and the hermeneutical issue of John’s use of the OT, including the ‘respect for

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<sup>1</sup> M. Jauhiainen, *‘Behold, I Am Coming’: The Use of Zechariah in Revelation* (Ph.D., University of Cambridge, 2003); supervisors: Dr J. P. M. Sweet, and Dr A. Chester.

<sup>2</sup> More than two thirds of this study had been completed when I became aware of a recently submitted Ph.D. dissertation (R. R. Rogers, *An Exegetical Analysis of John’s Use of Zechariah in the Book of Revelation: The Impact and Transformation of Zechariah’s Text and Themes in the Apocalypse* [Ph.D., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002]) which attempts to fill the same gap. However, it turned out that our respective methodological discussions, exegetical analyses, and results were very different.

context' debate, which is familiar from elsewhere in NT studies but has its own peculiar flavour in relation to Revelation.

Chapter Two focuses on the definition of 'allusion' and other related terms, and on the quest for objective criteria for determining and discerning OT allusions. A survey of significant past contributions that have focused on identifying allusions reveals that most do not even define the nature of the objects they are trying to investigate. Another observation is that the quest for objective criteria for discerning allusions in their variable manifestations has not been very successful, as the criteria have proved more elusive than the allusions themselves. This study responds to the first observation by adopting a definition of allusion, together with an accompanying account of how an allusion is actualised by the reader, from Z. Ben-Porat, a leading allusion theorist whose insights have hitherto not been appropriated by NT scholars. As for the problematic criteria for discerning allusions, it is proposed that the quest is at least partially misguided and should be laid to rest, for analysing allusions in Revelation is essentially a subjective enterprise and a matter of reading competence rather than following a set of 'objective' criteria. The study of the use of the OT in Revelation should be seen as normal exegesis, no more and no less scientific than the exegesis of other NT documents. The best approximation to objectivity is the normal scholarly debate to which all interpretations are subjected.

If Revelation is the book in the NT that is the most obscure and most indebted to earlier traditions, then Zechariah is its OT counterpart. Chapter Three tries to make sense of Zechariah as a whole; for before it is possible to analyse with confidence John's use of Zechariah, it is necessary to have an idea of what Zechariah itself is about. After arguing for a specific reading strategy and explaining Zechariah's setting, the chapter proceeds to offer a reading of Zechariah that examines in more detail those sections and passages to which John appears to be alluding. The burning issue for Zechariah was the coming restoration of God's people. In Zechariah 1–8, it is presented as imminent, if only his audience would respond appropriately to Yahweh's gracious initiative. Zechariah 9–14, together with the testimony of later sources, show that the community failed to respond and the restoration was therefore postponed until 'that day'.

Building on Chapters Two and Three, Chapters Four and Five provide an exegetical analysis of the plethora of proposed allusions to Zechariah in the scholarly literature. Chapter Four examines allusions to

Zechariah 1–8 and Chapter Five allusions to Zechariah 9–14. The resulting data are tabulated and used as the basis for the further analysis and evaluation in Chapter Six. The emphasis of the analyses in these two chapters is on identifying allusions to Zechariah and giving an account of each allusion's function in its context in Revelation.

Out of over eighty proposed allusions, only seven marker text – marked text pairs are judged to be true allusions (the 'marker' text is the alluding text in Revelation; the 'marked' text is the text alluded to in Zechariah), and a further three pairs are judged to be 'indirect' allusions. Up to fourteen pairs are considered potential allusions. In addition to these, Revelation contains several motifs and literary devices which also occur in Zechariah, yet are not limited to these two books only and therefore should not be seen as allusions to Zechariah specifically. Moreover, the marker texts of thirty-six pairs do not appear to have any significant direct connection with their proposed marked texts. These results suggest that John's direct indebtedness to Zechariah has been somewhat exaggerated in the past.

The various threads of the study are drawn together in Chapter Six. It first reflects on the methodological decisions in Chapter Two in light of the results from Chapters Four and Five. A comparison of allusions to Zechariah perceived by this study and three other recent works reveals considerable differences among the four. Among the more significant findings is the fact that two of them have reached very different results, yet they have employed essentially the same set of criteria for discerning allusions. This seems to confirm the view that the adoption of 'objective' criteria does not necessarily lead to the desired objective results. Indeed, the exaggerated claims regarding John's use of Zechariah are at least partly traceable back to these criteria, together with inadequate definitions of 'allusion'.

Next, the chapter revisits the 'respect for the OT context' debate introduced in Chapter One. While other NT authors may formally cite an OT passage in a way that appears problematic in light of its wider OT context, the nature of the problem is different in Revelation, where there are no formal citations in Revelation. In order to demonstrate that John does not 'respect' the OT context of one of his allusions, we first need to establish that he is alluding to that context in the first place. Yet the very concept of allusion demands that there is a significant link between the marker text and the marked text and that activating one or more aspects of the latter in its context somehow makes sense to the reader. It is thus

always possible to argue for some kind of 'contextual' use of the marked text, for that is how an allusion functions.

As for the question of John's sources, the study comes to three conclusions: (1) There is very little evidence to support the majority assumption that John prefers the MT-type of text, for the audience would only miss one allusion if they did not know how the Hebrew version of Zechariah's story differed from the LXX. (2) There is even less support for John's preference for the LXX: none of the allusions would be missed even if the reader was not familiar with the LXX rendering of Zechariah. (3) John could thus effectively communicate to his audience regardless of the version of Zechariah with which they were familiar. These findings suggest that until a thorough and methodologically sound study of John's sources for the rest of the OT has been undertaken, it would seem best to pay equal attention to both the LXX and the MT in analysing John's use of the OT.

The bulk of the chapter is spent evaluating the contribution of allusions to Zechariah in Revelation. The allusion to Zechariah 12 in Revelation 1:7 is especially important because its strategic placement at the beginning of John's letter offers the reader significant interpretive keys. It (1) highlights the coming of Jesus as a key theme in Revelation; (2) suggests that in the eschatological schema, Jesus will fulfil roles that in the OT belong to Yahweh; and (3) activates the eschatological framework of the three primary narratives that were available to the early church regarding the final events – the versions from Zechariah, Daniel, and the Synoptics.

All John's allusions and potential allusions to Zechariah are related to the wider theme of the restoration of God's people and can be divided into three groups: (1) signs of imminent or consummated restoration; (2) the coming of Yahweh; and (3) the building of the eschatological temple. A more detailed analysis of the texts in each group shows that while few in number, the allusions to Zechariah nevertheless make a significant contribution to Revelation, which is also concerned with the theme of restoration. Firmly anchored in the Jewish prophetic tradition, John addresses this Jewish expectation by both explicitly and implicitly bringing closure to unfulfilled prophecies and promises of restoration. In contrast to Zechariah, John offers his own vision as the final word on the question of when and how the restoration of God's people will take place, showing that the process has already been set in motion and that this time the restoration will not be postponed.