

Key Old Testament Passages: Revelation 1-9 A Sampler

Revelation 1:1

Daniel 2:27-30

At least three words link the passages. First, John uses the noun “revelation” to describe the book and Daniel uses the verb “to reveal” to describe God’s action. The Greek word *apokalypsis* means an uncovering, an unveiling, a revealing. Ultimately, God is the author of what John sees and hears. Second, the use of the word “must” or “what is to be” underscores that God is sovereign, and his will must be done. Third, the verb “made known” means to be made known in symbols. The King James Version uses the verb “to signify,” because the word that Daniel and John uses means “to make something known by means of signs or symbols.” The language of both books speaks to the imagination and the emotions. Both works use symbolic language to communicate what God has revealed in visions; they are visions clothed in intelligible symbols. The symbols found in Daniel and Revelation were well-known and thus they were a forceful means of expressing ideas.

Revelation 1:4 (4:5; 5:6)

Zechariah 4:2-7

The seven lampstands in Zechariah are a symbol for God’s Spirit and the seven spirits in Revelation are a reference to the Holy Spirit in the fullness of his work.

Revelation 1:5

Psalms 89:27, 37

David is the anointed king who rules over his enemies, and his offspring will be faithful witnesses forever and the throne an eternally enduring one, like the unending witness of the moon. Furthermore, Jesus has triumphed over death and has guaranteed the resurrection of all who follow him.

Revelation 1:6

Exodus 19:6

As ancient Israel was to be a kingdom of priests and committed in their service of God, so followers of Jesus are the true heirs of the promises made to Israel and they too shall submit and serve him as priests.

Revelation 1:7

Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10-12

The son of man will come in clouds to reign and to judge. Unlike Zech. 12:10, the mourning is not linked with repentance but of hopeless regret.

Revelation 1:11 (1:20)

Zechariah 4:2

The churches are symbolized by seven golden lampstands. In Zechariah 4 the seven-branched lampstand represents Israel. In Revelation there are seven separate lampstands probably because they emphasize the duty of each local church to be engaged in mission (Matt. 5:14; Eph. 5:8; Phil. 2:15-16).

Revelation 1:12-15

Daniel 7:9-14; 10:6

The description of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7 is adapted by John to describe Jesus. In Daniel, the Ancient of Days was the divine judge; here in Revelation Jesus assumes that role. The dress of Jesus recalls the dress of priests and kings. Both passages teach that the enemies of the people of God will be judged.

Revelation 1:16

Isaiah 11:4; 49:2

As God's chosen servant in Isaiah will judge the wicked, so John's reference to the sword coming of Jesus' mouth teaches the same truth.

Revelation 2:7

Genesis 2:9

As there was perfect fellowship in the Garden of Eden, if Christians are faithful, they will have perfect fellowship with God after Christ returns (Rev. 22:1ff.).

Revelation 2:10

Daniel 1:12-15

Daniel and his brothers were in Babylon and were challenged to become Babylonian in their daily living. As they resisted and were victorious, so should the disciples in Smyrna resist a limited period of suffering that they would soon experience.

Revelation 2:14

Numbers 22:5-25:3; 31:8, 16

Balaam becomes the model teacher who leads people away from God to worship idols and commit immorality. His "descendants," the Nicolaitans, were found in Pergamum.

Revelation 2:16

Numbers 22:23, 31

If Balaam persisted in opposing Israel, the Angel of the Lord would kill him by the sword. Similarly, if the followers of the new Balaam in Pergamum persisted in their idolatry and immorality, they would be judged.

Revelation 2:20

*I Kings 16:31-32; 21:25-26;
II Kings 8:18; 9:22*

Jezebel, as queen of Israel, seduced God's people so that they worshipped Baal. The people were guilty of practicing both spiritual and physical adultery. God eventually destroyed her and her seventy sons. The same fate awaited her "descendants" in Thyatira.

Revelation 2:27

Psalm 2:9

Even though Psalm 2 referred to the king of Israel, it was also applied to the Messiah. In Revelation those who remain faithful to Jesus will conquer as well.

Revelation 3:5

Exodus 32:30-34

As those who worshipped the golden calf were blotted out of God's book, so shall those in Sardis who do not repent.

Revelation 3:8

Isaiah 22:22

The king, Eliakim, had absolute power over the throne of David and is given a key as a symbol of this power. Evidently the Jews in Philadelphia claimed to have keys to block access to God and Jesus counters the claim by saying that he has absolute control.

Revelation 3:9

*Isaiah 45:14; 49:23; 60:14;
Ps. 86:9*

The Old Testament passages are about the time when unbelieving Gentiles will bow down to the God of Israel. John does a reversal and proclaims it will be the unbelieving Jews who will bow down before Jesus, the Messiah.

Revelation 3:10

Daniel 12:1

Neither servants of God in the Old Testament or in John's day were promised immunity from trials. They may suffer physically, but they will be protected spiritually. The period of testing will purify and strengthen them rather than destroy them.

Revelation 3:12

Ezekiel 48:35

Both Ezekiel and Jesus promise that those who are faithful and victorious will always remain in the presence of God.

Revelation 4:3

*Genesis 9:11-13 and
Ezekiel 1:28*

It is possible that the reference to the rainbow is a reminder that God's acts of judgment do not deny his ultimate mercy.

Revelation 4:6-8

*Ezekiel 1:5-14; 10:12-14,
20-22*

The angelic throne attendants (cherubim in Ezekiel) represent creation that ceaselessly gives praise to God. They are called "seraphim" in Isa. 6:2-3 (see below). The images are merged to emphasize universal praise by creation.

Revelation 4:8

Isaiah 6:2-3

With obedience and vigilance, the seraphim praise God as the thrice holy one.

Revelation 5:1-3

*Ezekiel 2:9-10; Daniel 12:1-2,
4, 9*

The content of the scroll is not revealed to John, but the vision in Ezekiel suggests that it includes words of gloom and doom for unbelievers. Daniel, on the other hand, was given a scroll that was not to be opened until "the time of the end." With the coming of Jesus the time has now arrived.

Revelation 5:5

Genesis 49:8-10; Isaiah 11:1, 10

Jesus descended from the tribe of Judah and has royal power. The lion of Genesis was a symbol that the scepter shall not depart from Judah until the advent of the messiah to whom all sovereignty is given. Isaiah announces that the Messiah would come from house of David, the son of Jesse.

Revelation 5:9

Daniel 7:13-14

The Son of Man in Daniel is fulfilled in Christ who has authority and whose kingdom is without end.

Revelation 6:1-8

Zechariah 6:1-8

The four horses in Zechariah are sent out to punish those who have oppressed God's people. John adapts this source by changing the colors of the horses that symbolize the torment that evil brings to the world in general and to Christians in particular.

Revelation 6:9-10

Psalms 79:10

Despite the power of evil, God's justice will prevail in due time.

Revelation 6:12-17

*Isa. 13:13; 50:13; Joel 3:4;
Isa. 34:4; Jer. 4:24; Isa. 2:9;
Hos. 10:8; Joel 2:11; Nah. 1:3;
Mal. 3:2*

Language of exaggeration is often used in the Old Testament to describe the downfall of kingdom like Babylon, Edom, and Israel itself. In Hos. 10:8 Israel will wish for the mountains to hide them from God; in Rev. 6:15-16 unbelievers plead the same. The predictions in Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah were fulfilled in the various misfortunes of war, strife, famine, and disease that came upon Israel and Judah. The truths found in the writings of the prophets are eternally valid, as John makes clear. The judgments pronounced against nations opposed to God have occurred, are occurring and will continue to occur.

Revelation 7:1

Ezekiel 7:2; Isaiah 11:12

The four corners of the earth is a symbol for totality.

Revelation 7:1

*Zechariah 6:5; Ps 104:34;
Isaiah 19:1; Jeremiah 4:11-12*

At times the four winds are agents of God's judgment.

Revelation 7:2

Ezekiel 9:4-5

God commands an angel to put a mark on those who are faithful to him and to slay those who are unfaithful.

Revelation 7:9

Genesis 16:10; 32:12

The descendants of Abraham will be innumerable.

Revelation 7:16-17

Isaiah 49:9-10

As Israel will be freed from Babylon's tyranny, so God's people will be on judgment day.

Revelation 8:1

*Zechariah 2:13; Habakkuk 2:20
Zephaniah 1:7*

Silence is commanded since God is about to act either in punishing or rewarding.

In the context of 8:2-5, judgment seems to be the emphasis. The sound of silence is shattered by the sound of the seven trumpets being blown by the seven angels.

Revelation 8:2

*Leviticus 16:12-13;
Psalm 141:1-2*

The priests were required to offer incense with the sin offering (Exod. 29:18, 25; 30:8-10). Like incense before God, prayers would be heard and answered. In Revelation, the saints who are priests are assured that their prayers will result in God judging the wicked.

Revelation 8:5

Exodus 19:16-18

In the Old Testament, the images of “thunder, bumbling, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake” emphasize God’s rescue of and presence among his people that takes place during or after the judgment of the wicked (Psalm 77:15-20; Isaiah 29:6-7)

Revelation 8:7

*Exodus 9:18-26; Isaiah 28:2;
Ezekiel 38:22; Isaiah 10:16-19*

Beginning with the first trumpet, there are frequent echoes of the plagues against Egypt as described in Exodus as well as other Old Testament allusions. Egypt was God’s enemy and opposed his people, and accordingly God judged. As God’s people in Egypt were spared God’s judgments, so God’s people in the first century and in succeeding centuries are spared judgment. Isaiah teaches that God used hail against his enemies and the hostile enemies are burned up like trees. God’s judgment of God shows up here and elsewhere in Revelation (the seven bowls and Rev. 20:8).

Revelation 8:8

*Isaiah 2:12-17; Jeremiah 51:25,
63-64; Ezekiel 38:18-22; Exod. 7:
17-24*

Like a mosaic, John weaves together horrific scenes of God’s judgments against evil kingdoms. Isaiah reveals that trees, mountains, and ships would be destroyed because the people put other things before God. God takes away idols so that people will repent and return to him (see Revelation 9:20-21). On the other hand, in Jeremiah Babylon is described as a burnt mountain, and it will sink into destruction. John is announcing that evil kingdoms will be destroyed not that literal mountains will be destroyed. In Revelation, Babylon is a code name for Rome, and it becomes a symbol for any culture who opposes God and his people. All such kingdoms will be destroyed. Ezekiel’s vision about judgment of Gog communicates the same truths as does John’s allusion to the first plague where the Nile was turned into blood.

Revelation 8:10-11

*Isaiah 14:12-15; Proverbs 5:4;
Deuteronomy 29:18; Jeremiah
8:14; 23:15*

In addition to alluding to the first plague (Exod. 7:14ff.), John's readers would have thought of Isaiah's description of the king of Babylon who was attempting to become the greatest power but who would surely fall. On the other hand, there are numerous references to poisoned fruit or water. "Wormwood" was a symbol for the bitterness that the consequences of sexual immorality (Prov. 5:4), corrupt justice (Amos 5:7; 6:12), false teaching (Jer. 23:15), and idolatry (Deut. 29:18) brought. It was also a symbol for the results of God's judgment for sin (Jer. 8:14; Lam. 3:15, 19). Once again, like the first two trumpets, John alludes to the plague where the fresh water of the Nile became undrinkable because it was polluted.

Revelation 8:12

*Exodus 10:21-23; Isaiah 13:10;
Ezekiel 32:7-8; Joel 2:10; 3:15*

In addition to alluding to Exodus, this time to the plague of darkness (Exod. 10:21-23), there are other passages that refer to the disruption of the sun, moon, and stars as signs of God's judgment against evil nations and rulers. Perhaps such judgment foreshadows the eternal darkness that is to come upon all who refuse to repent.

Revelation 8:13

Hosea 8:1

The eagle is often used as a sign for destruction, especially sinful Israel (see also Deut. 28:49; Jer. 4:13; Lam. 4:19; Hab. 1:8; Matt. 24:28).

Revelation 9:1-4

*Genesis 19:28; Exodus 10:4, 15;
12:13; Ezekiel 9:4*

John may be alluding to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (note the references to "sulfur and fire" in 9:17). Once again, allusions to the plagues in Exodus dominate. Locusts often refer to punishment from God (Amos 7:1-2). Moreover, as the Angel of Death killed the firstborn male of any household that had not marked its doorpost with the blood of a lamb, so God will judge those who do not belong to him (see Rev. 7:1ff.). Ezekiel 9 describes a similar situation when angels who were to destroy Jerusalem were told not to harm those who had received the mark of God on their foreheads.

Revelation 9:7

Joel 1:6-7; 2:3-7

The locusts in John and Joel have remarkable similarities, with one major difference: the locusts in Revelation do not destroy vegetation whereas the ones in Joel do. Why the difference? John's vision focuses on God's judgment of evil people.

Revelation 9:13-14

Isaiah 7:20; 8:7

The Assyrians and Babylonians, enemies of Israel, crossed the Euphrates River to be used by God to punish Israel because of her sins. So here, disobedient kingdoms will always be judged (Jer. 46:2-10, 22-23).

Revelation 9:19

Jeremiah 8:15-17

As God used an army to humble Israel because of its idolatrous ways, so God continues to judge idol-worshipping people.