

SINGING THE SONG OF MOSES AND THE LAMB: JOHN'S DIALOGICAL USE OF SCRIPTURE¹

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Introduction

When I began my work on John's use of Scripture, it seemed to me that previous work fell largely into two camps. First, there were those who were primarily impressed by continuity, respect for context, and a proper use of typology. I think particularly of G. K. Beale's work, with his argument that certain chapters of Revelation (1, 4-5, 13, and 17) are a midrash on Dan 7 and that the presence of ἃ δέῃ γενέσθαι (from Dan 2:28) in Rev 1:1, 1:19 (modified), 4:1, and 22:6 implies that the "contents of the whole book are to be conceived of ultimately within the thematic framework of Daniel 2."² I also think of J. Fekkes, and his argument that when John uses Isaiah, he uses visionary descriptions for visionary descriptions, oracles against the nations for descriptions of Babylon, oracles of salvation for descriptions of eschatological renewal, and visions of the restoration of Zion for his description of the New Jerusalem. Fekkes claims that there are few instances where John strays from the "obvious" meaning of Isaiah and that he fully expected his readers to "appreciate the exegetical foundation of his visions."³

On the other hand, there were those like L. A. Vos and G. Vogelgesang who argue for a considerable amount of discontinuity, a lack of respect for context and an improper use of typology. Thus Vos points out that John's visionary descriptions of the "one like a son of man" in Rev 1 and the great angel in Rev 18 gather up a number of evocative phrases, regardless of whether they were previously descriptions of God, angels, or human beings.⁴ And Vogelgesang thinks that John follows the order of Ezekiel to a major extent, but deliberately

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²G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), 277.

³J. Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, JSNTSup 93 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 290.

⁴L. A. Vos, *The Synoptic Traditions in the Apocalypse* (Kampen: Kok, 1965), 21-37.

changes key features in order to “democratize” its message. According to Vogelgesang, the parallelism between Rev 17-18 and 21-22 shows that John’s vision of the New Jerusalem represents “Babylon redeemed,” “an absolutely unthinkable possibility given the original intentions of Ezekiel 40-48.”⁵

The Contribution of Intertextuality

As for my own studies, I felt the truth lay somewhere in between, that one somehow has to do justice to both continuity and discontinuity. And for this I looked to notions of intertextuality that were just entering biblical studies in 1989. Drawing on the theories of J. Kristeva,⁶ J. Hollander,⁷ and T. Greene,⁸ I attempted to formulate a position where the meaning of John’s use of Scripture lies in the *tension* between its previous contextual definition(s) and the new context supplied by John.⁹ The old context does not *determine* John’s meaning, because the text has been set free from its previous textual moorings and now exists in a new context. However, neither is it true that John can make texts mean whatever he likes, for the old text brings with it connotations and associations that *influence* the new setting. Thus there is a dynamic whereby the new affects the old and the old affects the new, leading to two important tasks: to find ways of describing such a dynamic interaction, and to consider the effect this has on the reader. Two examples will illustrate the point.

The Lion and the Lamb

In 1989, it was practically a consensus among Christian commentators that John reinterprets the messianic warrior *lion* with the sacrificial *lamb* of Christian tradition. G. B. Caird stated it baldly:

Wherever the Old Testament says “Lion”, read “Lamb”. Wherever the Old Testament speaks of the victory of the Messiah or the overthrow of the enemies of God, we are to remember that the

⁵G. Vogelgesang, “The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation” (Dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985), 113.

⁶J. Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue and Novel” in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. T. Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

⁷J. Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

⁸T. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

⁹S. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, JSNTSup 115 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 138.

gospel recognizes no other way of achieving these ends than the way of the Cross.¹⁰

However, it seemed to me that not only has the warrior lion been transformed by its juxtaposition with a lamb; the lamb has also picked up many of the traits of the warrior lion. For example, in Rev 6:16, the people of the world are said to hide from the “wrath of the Lamb.” In Rev 14:10, the enemies of the lamb receive double for their sins and “will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and *in the presence of the Lamb.*” There is a battle in Rev 17, but the outcome is not in doubt, for the “Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings” (Rev 17:14). In my reading of Revelation, the introduction of the messianic warrior lion has significantly influenced John’s story of the lamb.

The New Jerusalem

Along with a succession of scholars, such as Albert Vanhoye¹¹ and Vogelgesang, I was impressed by the structural parallels between Ezekiel and Revelation, culminating in the extensive similarities between John’s vision of the New Jerusalem and Ezekiel’s vision of a restored temple. However, the climactic moment of John’s vision is the declaration that there is *no* temple in the New Jerusalem because its temple is the “Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (21:22). It would appear that John wishes his readers to think of Ezekiel’s vision of a restored temple, only to confront them with a negation; the New Jerusalem does not have a temple. Once again, I suggest that John has purposefully set up a dialogical tension for the hearer/reader to puzzle out. It would be ridiculous to argue that what Ezekiel really meant when he predicted a restored temple (and took nine chapters to describe it) was a New Jerusalem without a temple. John leaves the hearer/reader with a tension. Sverre Bøe draws on this and argues for a similar understanding of the Gog and Magog material.¹²

Revelation 15 and the Song of Moses

In the course of writing a chapter on the use of the Psalms in the book of Revelation, I came across another example which is best described

¹⁰G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (London: A & C Black, 1984), 75.

¹¹A. Vanhoye, “L’utilisation du livre d’Ezéchiel dans l’Apocalypse,” *Bib* 43 (1962): 436-477.

¹²S. Bøe, *Gog and Magog: Ezekiel 38-39 as Pre-text for Revelation 19,17-21 and 20,7-10* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 367.

as dialogical tension. In Rev 15:3-4, John introduces a song sung by the saints with the words: "And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb." However, what follows has little to do with the song of Moses found in either Exod 15 or Deut 32; but, in David Aune's words, a "pastiche of stereotypical hymnic phrases gathered primarily from the Psalms."¹³ It is the contention of this article that this is another example of John's dialogical use of Scripture. He leads his hearers/readers to expect a quotation or at least an allusion to the Song of Moses as recorded in the OT, and then places before them a scriptural song drawn from up to ten different locations. Indeed, when one analyzes the most likely sources of this song, namely, Pss 86, 98, 111, 139, and 145, along with Jer 10, Deut 32, a repeated phrase from the book of Amos and possibly Tob 12, one can almost say that Exod 15 is conspicuous by its absence. John seems to have gone out of his way to avoid any connection with this famous OT song, despite deliberately pointing to it by the ascription, "the song of Moses, the servant of God."

The article falls into three parts. First, I will demonstrate the most likely sources of John's song. Second, I will defend the view that John is intending to point his readers to the Song of Moses in Exod 15. And third, I will review a number of other explanations of this passage which seek to avoid the conclusion that John offers his readers a dialogical tension.

Psalm 86:8-10

The closest linguistic parallel with Rev 15:3-4 is Ps 86:8-10. Designated a "Prayer of David," the psalm strengthens the poet's faith by reminding himself (and God!) of God's incomparable attributes. In vv. 8-10, a statement about God's uniqueness ("There is none like you among the gods") and incomparable deeds ("nor are there any works like yours") is followed by the promise that the nations will come (ἔξουσιν), worship (προσκυθήσουσιν), and glorify (δοξάσουσιν) his name. This universal hope is the message of Rev 15:3-4, and with the exception of the singular *δοξάσει* for *δοξάσουσιν*, verbatim agreement extends to seventeen words. It is also possible that John's opening words (*μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά*) have been influenced by the *ὅτι μέγας εἶ σὺ καὶ ποιῶν θαυμάσια* of Ps 86:10, though other texts offer closer parallels (see below).

¹³D. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, WBC 52A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 874.

Ps 86:8-10	Rev 15:3-4
<p>οὐκ ἔστιν ὁμοίός σοι ἐν θεοῖς <u>κύριε</u> καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν κατὰ τὰ ἔργα <u>σου</u> <u>πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ὅσα ἐποίησας</u> <u>ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν</u> <u>ἐνώπιόν σου</u> κύριε, καὶ δοξάσουσιν τὸ ὄνομά <u>σου</u> ὅτι μέγας εἶ σὺ καὶ ποιῶν θαυμάσια σὺ εἶ ὁ θεὸς μόνος ὁ μέγας</p>	<p>μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά <u>τὰ ἔργα σου,</u> <u>κύριε</u> ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ· δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναὶ αἱ ὁδοὶ σου, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν· τίς οὐ μὴ φοβηθῆ, κύριε <u>καὶ δοξάσει τὸ ὄνομά σου;</u> ὅτι μόνος ὄσιος ὅτι <u>πάντα τὰ ἔθνη</u> <u>ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν</u> <u>ἐνώπιόν σου,</u> ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματά σου ἐφανερώθησαν.</p>

Jeremiah 10:7

The second text that is regarded as definite by most commentators is Jer 10:7, which combines the epithet, “King of the nations” (מֶלֶךְ הַגּוֹיִם), with the question, “who will not fear you?” (מִי לֹא יִירָא), though in reverse order to John.¹⁴ The text is absent from the LXX manuscripts that have come down to us, being part of a lacuna between Jer 10:5 and 10:9. This could mean that John is dependent on a Hebrew source, that he knows an alternative Greek translation such as that preserved in Theodotion,¹⁵ or he has derived it from a liturgical source, perhaps one where phrases from Ps 86:8-10 have already been combined with Jer 10:7. It is surely no coincidence that Jer 10:6 (“There is none like you, O Lord; you are great, and your name is great in might”) is very similar to Ps 86:8. John or someone before him has linked these texts through their common vocabulary and theme.

Deuteronomy 32:4/Psalm 145:17

There are two main suggestions for the “just and true are your ways” clause, both of which are interesting because they also use ὄσιος, which occurs in John’s phrase ὅτι μόνος ὄσιος (not italicized by Nestle-Aland). Linguistically, Deut 32:4 is the strongest candidate, as it contains ἀληθινά, ὁδοί, δίκαιος and ὄσιος. Furthermore, it belongs to another

¹⁴There is a strong variant βασιλεὺς τῶν αἰωνῶν (p47, X*2, C) that could come from 1 Tim 1:17. If original, the source could be Jer 10:10 (absent from LXX, but present in Theodotion).

¹⁵R. H. Charles categorizes the allusion as deriving from the Hebrew text, but showing influence from a Greek version other than the LXX (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 1:lxxx).

song sung by Moses (Deut 31:30), this time recounting Israel's rebellion (Deut 32:5), though not without hope (Deut 32:36). On the other hand, Ps 145:17 is closer to Rev 15:3-4 contextually, extolling God and his mighty deeds in a hymn of praise.

Rev 15:3b, 4b	Deut 32:4	Ps 145:17
<u>δίκαιαι</u> καὶ <u>ἀληθιναὶ</u> <u>αἱ ὁδοὶ</u> σου ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν· τίς οὐ μὴ φοβηθῆ, κύριε καὶ δοξάσει τὸ ὄνομά σου; ὅτι μόνος <u>ὁσος</u>	θεός <u>ἀληθινά</u> τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ καὶ <u>πάσαι αἱ</u> <u>ὁδοὶ</u> αὐτοῦ κρίσεις θεός πιστός καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀδικία <u>δίκαιος</u> καὶ <u>ὁσος</u> κύριος	<u>δίκαιος</u> κύριος ἐν <u>πάσαις</u> ταῖς <u>ὁδοῖς</u> αὐτοῦ καὶ <u>ὁσος</u> ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ

Tobias 12:22/Psalm 111:2/Psalm 139:14

The opening words of the Song (μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά) as a description of God's works (τὰ ἔργα) parallels Tob 12:22 (τὰ ἔργα τὰ μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τοῦ θεοῦ), though Ps 111:2 (μεγάλα τὰ ἔργα κυρίου) and Ps 139:14 (θαυμάσια τὰ ἔργα σου) have also been suggested. Since the "core" of the Song appears to be Ps 86:8-10, it is possible that John was led from its μέγας and θαυμάσια to one or more of these texts.

Amos 3:13; 4:13; 5:8

The epithet κύριε ὁ θεός ὁ παντοκράτωρ is a favorite of John's (Rev 4:8; 11:17; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22), and ten of its thirteen occurrences in the LXX come from the book of Amos (e.g., 3:13; 4:13; 5:8, 14, 15, 16, 27).¹⁶ Now it is quite possible that this is John's own formulation in opposition to imperial claims, but since he alludes to the book of Amos elsewhere, it is possible, perhaps even probable, that he has been influenced by this prophet.¹⁷

Psalm 98:2/Jeremiah 11:20

Finally, John's song ends with the statement that God's δικαιώματά have been revealed (ἐφανερώθησαν). There is debate as to whether this should be taken as the revelation of God's judgments (so NRSV) or the revelation of God's righteous acts (which lead to the conversion of the nations). If the former, then Jer 11:20 could be in mind, especially as he alludes to this verse elsewhere (Rev 2:23). If the latter, then the positive

¹⁶The other three are Hos 12:6; Nah 3:5; Zech 10:13.

¹⁷Notably Amos 3:7 in Rev 10:7; 11:18.

message of Ps 98:2 is perhaps more likely. Either way, this would appear to be a possible rather than a probable allusion, and it is not italicized in Nestle-Aland.

Rev 15:4b	Jer 11:20	Ps 98:2
ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματά σου ἐφανερώθησαν.	But you, O Lord of hosts, who judge righteously (κρίνων δίκαια), who try the heart and the mind, let me see your retribution (ἐκδίκησιν) upon them, for to you I have committed my cause (ἀπεκάλυψα τὸ δικαίωμά μου).	O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory. The Lord has made known his victory (σωτήριον); he has revealed his vindication (ἀπεκάλυψεν τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ) in the sight of the nations.

Summary

Though there is some doubt about this last example, we conclude that Aune's judgment that the song is a "pastiche of stereotypical hymnic phrases gathered primarily from the Psalms" is essentially correct. Some may object to the word "pastiche" on the grounds that it implies a somewhat random collection, whereas it is clear that some of these texts can be linked through common words or phrases. But if we choose a more neutral word such as "collection" or "amalgam," the point remains. John does not quote or allude to Exod 15 but offers a collection of hymnic phrases drawn mostly from the Psalms.

Is John Intending to Point to Exodus 15?

There can be little doubt that the phrase "the Song of Moses, the servant of God" is intended to evoke the occasion when God rescued Israel from the Egyptians. Exodus 14:31 says that the people "believed in the Lord and in his *servant Moses*," and the following verse (Exod 15:1) introduces the song with the words: "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord." This is supported by the importance attached to the Song in Jewish tradition. Thus Wis 19:6-9 makes the point that Israel's rescue through the Red Sea was accompanied by praise to God. The midrash on Pss 145:1 and 149:1 links the Song of Moses with the "new song" to be sung in the age

to come (so also *b. Sanhedrin* 91b). According to R. H. Charles,¹⁸ the Song was sung at the evening sacrifice on the Sabbath, and Philo speaks of its being sung by the Therapeutae.¹⁹ Some commentators on Revelation also think the location of the saints beside the “sea of glass mixed with fire” (Rev 15:2) is significant. Rabbi Ishmael referred to the Red Sea as appearing like a “sea of glass” and Rabbi Nathan adds that fire was present.²⁰ J. Roloff concludes that John wanted to “create a typological correspondence to the exodus . . . [where] the glassy sea might be an image of the world from which those who overcome were rescued, while fire is the symbol of the wrathful judgment that will befall God’s enemies in the world.”²¹ Others, such as R. R. Osborne, think the sea of glass is more likely a reference to the heavenly sea mentioned in Rev 4:6.²² Nevertheless, the explicit reference to the “Song of Moses,” his designation as “servant of God,” and the importance of the Song in Jewish tradition, have convinced most scholars that John is deliberately pointing his hearers/readers to Exod 15.

However, this is only half the title that John gives to the song. What the saints sing in heaven is “The Song of Moses, the servant of God, and the Song of the Lamb.” Though grammatically this could be referring to two songs, the majority of scholars believe that it is a single song with a dual name. My proposal is that, like the juxtaposition of lion and lamb in Revelation 5, John juxtaposes the salvation won by Moses with the salvation won by the Lamb. It is not that lamb replaces Moses any more than lamb replaces lion. John’s technique is to force the hearers/readers to wrestle with the tension created by the juxtaposition. In other words, this is not simply exegesis, typology, or midrash, which assumes a unidirectional move from source text to interpretation. It is a dialogical use of Scripture, which brings two or more texts together in order that they might mutually illuminate one another. But before I expand on this suggestion, I will first demonstrate the weakness of alternative interpretations.

Alternative Explanations of Revelation 15:2-4

John Is Not Interpreting Scripture at All

Responding to Wilhelm Bousset’s suggestion that the saints sing two songs, first the Song of Moses and then the Song of the Lamb, and that

¹⁸Charles, 2:36.

¹⁹Philo, *De Vita Contemplativa* 11; see also idem, *De Agricultura* 17 (trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Loeb Classic Library [London: Heinemann, 1929-1962]).

²⁰So G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 791-792.

²¹J. Roloff, *Revelation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 183.

²²R. R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 562.

it is only the latter that John has reproduced, Charles thinks the reference to “the Song of Moses” must be an interpolation. Not only does the Song bear no literary relationship to Exod 15, it is quite different in intent. Exodus 15 is a celebration of triumph over Israel’s enemies, but John’s song is a “paean of thanksgiving, which the martyrs sing, when in the first perfect unclouded vision of God they wholly forget themselves and burst forth into praise.”²³ According to Charles, the reference to “the Song of Moses” began as a marginal note and was mistakenly included in the text during transmission. Thus understanding John’s use of Scripture in this passage does not arise, for he is not attempting to refer to the Song of Moses.

Caird accepts the reference to the Song of Moses as genuine but finds greater significance in the addition, “and the Song of the Lamb.” The parallel with Exod 15 is that: “Like the Israelites after the crossing of the Red sea (Exod. xv.1), the Conquerors sing the song of God’s servant Moses, celebrating the triumph of God over the enemies of his people.”²⁴ But there the similarity ends, for “this triumph has been won by no other weapons than the cross of Christ and the martyr testimony of his followers.”²⁵ Thus it is fitting that John composed a new song, a “jubilant anthem of Christian optimism,” constructed from a “cento of quotations from many parts of the Old Testament.”²⁶ Caird sees no need to discuss any of the underlying texts and indeed makes no mention of them. John has composed a new song that reflects his new Christian theology. However, if Caird is correct, one wonders why John mentioned “the Song of Moses” at all. Why not just call it “the Song of the Lamb”? The mention of the Song of Moses places that thought in the minds of the hearers/readers and raises certain expectations. It is the fact that these expectations are then dashed that we are trying to explain.

John Is Interpreting Deuteronomy 32, Not Exodus 15

Josephine Massyngberd Ford acknowledges that the song has been influenced by a large number of texts but thinks that Deut 32 (also called a Song of Moses) has played the key role. Thus in addition to the influence of Deut 32:4 (recognized by most commentators), she claims that Rev 15:4a (“Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name?”) is akin to Deut

²³Charles, 2:35.

²⁴Caird, 198.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

32:3 ("For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God!"). She also notes that the theme of the fire of God's anger is found in Deut 32:32. She concludes that "the song seems more influenced by Deut 32 than Exod 15, but this is understandable in the light of the stress on wrath and justice in the Deuteronomistic writings."²⁷ This is puzzling for a number of reasons. First, Ford has already noted that the phrase in Rev 15:4a comes from Jer 10:6-7; Ps 86:9; and Mal 1:6. It is hard to see what Deut 32:3 adds to this. Second, her assessment that Rev 15:3-4 is primarily about wrath and judgment seems forced. Thus she claims that the question "who will not fear and glorify your name" shows that "fear" rather than "love" motivates the song. On the other hand, she plays down the universalism of Rev 15:4 by saying that it contains "an element of hope for the conversion of the nations." I conclude that the answer to John's use of Scripture in Rev 15:2-4 does not lie in taking "Song of Moses" to be a reference to Deut 32.

John Is Exegeting Exodus 15, but the Links Are All Invisible

Richard Bauckham argues that John *is* thinking of the song of Moses in Exod 15, but he has been led by verbal association from Exod 15:11 ("who is like you, O Lord, among the nations?") to three other texts, namely, Psalm 86:8-10; 98:1-2; and Jer 10:7. From these three texts, by the "skillful use of recognized exegetical methods," John has discerned the content of the song to be sung in the new age. This corresponds to the fulfillment of the Song of Moses as recorded in Exod 15.²⁸ The error of many commentators, Bauckham says, is that they move

from the correct observation that none of the words of the song in Revelation 15:3-4 derive from Exodus 15:1-18, to the claim that therefore there is no literary connexion between the two passages. The literary connexion, as we shall see, is made as it were, beneath the surface of the text by John's expert and subtle use of current Jewish exegetical method.²⁹

Bauckham defends this proposal in three ways. First, he shows that there are precedents for it in Jewish literature. For example, in the *Biblical Antiquities* of Pseudo-Philo 32, the opening words reproduce Judg 5:1, but the song that follows is not the song of Deborah as

²⁷J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, AB 38 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 257.

²⁸R. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 306.

²⁹Ibid, 297.

recorded in Judg 5:2-31 but a fresh composition. More significantly, Isa 11 ends with the promise that there will be a highway for the remnant “as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt” and then records two songs which reproduce the first verse of Ps 105, a psalm that has links with Exod 15. Bauckham says:

Therefore, the new version of the Song at the Sea in Isaiah draws on Psalm 105 as well as Exodus 15. It should be noticed that the verbal links between Exodus 15 and Psalm 105 are not visible in the text of Isaiah 12: they occur in parts of the text of Exodus 15 and Psalm 105 which are not quoted in Isaiah 12. This is a kind of implicit *gezerah šawa* which is not uncommon in Jewish and Jewish Christian literature.³⁰

Second, Bauckham seeks to show how the themes of Exod 15 have been taken up in the book of Revelation. He suggests that when John read Exod 15, he would have found the following five points: God’s mighty act of judgment on his enemies, God’s incomparable superiority to pagan gods, the pagan nations filled with fear, God’s people brought into the temple, and that the song concludes with the words, “The Lord shall reign forever and ever.” He then proceeds to show how these themes are present in Revelation.

Third, Bauckham seeks to account for John’s precise wording on the basis of the Hebrew text. For example, he explains the phrase “you alone are holy” by asserting that John is still following Ps 86:8-10, but found the phrase “you alone are God” puzzling, since the psalm has already asserted that there is “none like you among the gods” (v. 8). Thus John rendered אֱלֹהִים here by ὁστος. He seeks to support this by noting that the LXX also found אֱלֹהִים puzzling but chose μέγας instead of ὁστος. Another example is the δικαιώματά in the final clause, which Bauckham explains on the basis of Ps 98:1-2, suggesting that John would have read the consonants as צְדָקָה (“righteous acts”), whereas the MT has pointed it צְדָקָתוֹ (“righteousness”).

In terms of the proposal put forward in this article, Bauckham agrees that John points specifically to Exod 15 and then offers a composition that bears no visible contact with that song. However, where we differ is that Bauckham thinks the hearers/readers would have recognized that John is offering an exegesis of Exod 15, even though all the links are now hidden. This is, of course, possible, but there are at least three reasons why I think it is less likely than my proposal. First, the arguments from the Hebrew text are weak. We have already shown that John agrees with the LXX of Ps 86:8-10 in seventeen words. Why

³⁰Ibid, 300.

should we accept speculative proposals about rendering מִלְתִּי with ὄσιος when there is a perfectly good text (Deut 32:4) which contains not only ὄσιος, but also ἀληθινὰ, ὁδοί, and δίκαιος?

Second, Bauckham is surely guilty of special pleading when he asserts that scholars have mistakenly assumed that a lack of visible links implies that there is no literary connection. He himself dismisses the view that John has Deut 32 in mind because he says the proposed links are “too tenuous.” This is somewhat ironic given the fact that there are links with Deut 32:4 and they are visible, namely, the presence of ὄσιος, ἀληθινὰ, ὁδοί, and δίκαιος. And even if such links did not exist, Bauckham’s position ought to be that scholars should not dismiss such a suggestion on the basis of a lack of visible links.

Third, Bauckham makes the assumption that despite the lack of visible links, John’s hearers/readers would have assumed that John is engaged in detailed exegesis of Hebrew texts. There are two problems with this. First, it is an assumption about the biblical competence of John’s readers; he is, after all, writing them a Greek letter. What is the evidence that Christians in a late first-century church in Asia would have had the Hebrew text at their fingertips? Second, where in the book of Revelation does John indicate that he is about to engage in detailed exegesis of Scripture? His claim to authority is not based on the use of authorized exegetical methods, but on revelation. Bauckham would no doubt respond that the book is full of scriptural allusion and so it is reasonable to assume that his hearers/readers would have understood it. But that in itself does not support Bauckham’s particular proposal. Indeed, I would suggest that the nature of the book of Revelation strongly suggests that detailed scribal exegesis, of the sort that Bauckham proposes, is the least likely deduction from the evidence. Thus I agree with Bauckham that John points to Exod 15 and then constructs a song that has no visible links with it, but disagree that the hearers/readers would have deduced that this is a form of exegesis.

John Is Offering an Interpretation of Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 32

Beale agrees with Bauckham that John *is* alluding to the Song of Moses and is not merely offering a pastiche from the Psalms. He acknowledges that the “actual contents of the song itself come not from Exodus 15 but from passages throughout the OT extolling God’s character,”³¹ but suggests that more attention needs to be given to Deut 32. He notes the

³¹Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 794.

following: Deut 32 is specifically called a "song" in Deut 31:30, and is applied to judgment and reward in the world to come in the Babylonian Talmud (*b. Taanith* 11a); the opening words of the song, "Great and amazing are your deeds," come from the LXX of Deut 28:59-60, where Israel is threatened with a judgment like God's "great and amazing plagues" (Beale calls this an allusion, whereas Ps 111:2 is called an echo); the noun phrase "just and true are your ways" echoes Deut 32:4 (most commentators agree on this, though many also mention Ps 145:17); citing the work of C. J. Labuschagne, Beale claims that the use of the "who is like?" formula in the OT, including Jer 10:7 and Ps 86:8, is always a reflection on the Exodus.

This is an important conclusion for Beale, for he wishes to challenge Bauckham's view that John has replaced the "judgment of the nations" theme from Exod 15 with the "salvation of the nations" from the three quoted texts. Despite the fact that the song, as we now find it in Rev 15:3-4, claims that all the nations will worship and glorify God, Beale suggests that we must read this both in the light of what the rest of the book says and in the light of its OT background:

The fact that the eulogy in Rev. 15:3-4 is sandwiched between major sections narrating judgment suggests that the emphasis is on God's righteous acts in judging the ungodly nations. This emphasis is supported by the broad OT context of the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 and especially Exodus 15, which underscores the idea of judgment of Israel's enemies leading to Israel's redemption.³²

I have no quibble with the view that Deut 32 is one of the texts that John has used, but I disagree with the influence that Beale wishes to claim for this. The prominent allusion in Rev 15:3-4 is Ps 86:8-10, a psalm noted for its particularly universal outlook. That John combines this with an allusion to Deut 32:4 is not to be doubted, but it hardly warrants importing the whole judgment background of Deut 32, let alone Exod 15, into what John has actually written. Had John wanted to do that, an allusion to almost any other verse in Deut 32 would have done the trick. The allusion to Deut 32:4 contributes to the portrait of God as one who is worthy of the nation's glory and praise. It is possible that the allusion might bring with it a nuance of judgment, but it is hardly the dominant thought.

Furthermore, his suggestion that the opening phrase, "Great and amazing are your deeds," comes from Deut 28:59-60 is also open to question. First, why look to a text about God's great and amazing

³²Ibid, 799.

plagues when there are perfectly acceptable texts that speak about God's great and amazing deeds? Second, an allusion to a text that is separated from Deut 32 by more than eighty verses is hardly evidence for the importance of that text to John. And third, even if Beale were correct that John is alluding to Deut 28:59-60, then we have to note that he has changed "plagues" to "deeds," suggesting that judgment is not the theme that he wishes to evoke.

Conclusion

What these explanations have in common is their attempt to resolve the tension created by John without remainder. What I am suggesting is a literary model for texts interacting with one another that does not lead to premature closure. John points to Exod 15, both by the imagery of the sea and the mention of "the Song of Moses, the Servant of God." This raises certain expectations that are then dashed; the song that follows bears no visible links with Exod 15, as Ford, Bauckham, and Beale acknowledge. But that does not mean that the associations from Exod 15 are completely silenced. The pointers are sufficiently specific to maintain an almost subliminal presence that accompanies a reading of the text. But it is no more than that. It is certainly not loud enough to turn a universalist song into a judgment song. Nor is it loud enough to convince readers that John is offering an (invisible) exegesis of Exod 15. It remains in the background, barely affecting the interpretation of Rev 15, but ready to be reactivated when John begins the plague sequence in Rev 16. I suggest that this dialogical model does more justice to the dynamics of Rev 15 than proposals that seek resolution without remainder.