

THE EXODUS MOTIF IN REVELATION 15–16: ITS BACKGROUND AND NATURE

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In the last century, considerable attention has been given to the use of the OT in the NT. However, the book of Revelation seemed to be neglected up to the 1980s in comparison with the rest of the NT books.¹ Thus E. Schüssler Fiorenza could say that “a thorough study of the use of the Old Testament by the author of Revelation is not available.”² The main reason for this is seen in the nature of John’s use of the OT.³ Although Revelation does not directly quote the OT, it is well known that it contains more allusions to it than any other NT book.⁴ Thus the lack of explicit quotations and the ambiguity of the allusions make it difficult to compare Revelation with the OT material, for John did not so much focus on particular books and authors, but on themes to guide his choice of material. In the last two decades, G. K. Beale, J. M. Vogelgesang, J. Paulien, J. -P. Ruiz, J. Fekkes, and R. J. Bauckham, whose investigations centered primarily on the exegetical methods of the author and the hermeneutical approaches of the interpreters, explored the most prominent OT traditions found in Revelation, such as Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah.⁵

¹A. Schlatter’s work was the only scholarly book on John’s use of the OT (*Das Alte Testament in der Johanneischen Apokalypse*, BFCT 16.6 [Güterschloh: Bertelsmann, 1912]) until F. Jenkins, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972). Unpublished works on John’s OT allusions include: L. Trudinger, *The Text of the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (Th.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1963); and C. G. Oanne, *The Influence of the Text and Language of the Old Testament on the Book of Revelation* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Manchester, 1964). For significant articles from this period, see S. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, JSNTSup 115 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 13-14, nn. 12-15.

²E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 28, n. 39.

³See, e.g., Moyise, 14.

⁴United Bible Society, *Greek New Testament*, 897-911.

⁵See, e.g., G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984); and idem, *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, JSNTSup 166 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); J. M. Vogelgesang, “The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation” (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1985); J. Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretations of Revelation 8:7-12*, Andrews University Doctoral Dissertation Series 21 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1987); J. -P. Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16:17–19:10*, European University Studies 23/376 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989); J. Fekkes,

This article seeks to explore the background and use of one of the richest themes in the biblical tradition—the theme of the exodus.⁶ Although the presence and theological significance of the exodus motif in Revelation has gradually been recognized to be “conscious and deliberate,”⁷ a thorough investigation focusing on individual passages has not been made. This article will focus on the exodus motif in the vision of the “Seven Bowls” (Rev 15–16), which provides the most systematic and theologically significant presentation of the exodus motif in Revelation. I will examine in this article the exodus tradition as the background of Rev 15–16, the general background of bowl imagery in biblical and Second Temple literature, and the extent and nature of the exodus motif in Rev 15–16.

*The Exodus Tradition as the Background
of Revelation 15–16*

The theological background for the exodus motif in the vision of the “Seven Bowls” in the book of Revelation is the exodus account in the Hexateuch. The exodus tradition should be seen as a complex motif network that includes a cluster of events: the deliverance of Egypt, preceded by YHWH’s judgment on Egypt; the making of the covenant and building of the sanctuary at Sinai; and the conquest of the Promised Land.⁸ Therefore, it could be divided into

Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and Their Developments, JSNTSup 93 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); R. J. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993).

⁶J. S. Casey demonstrates that the exodus motif pervades the OT, especially the prophets. It is also present in the apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, Qumran Scrolls, rabbinic literature, and in almost all NT books, including Revelation. His primary purpose, however, was to explore the exodus motif in Revelation, by isolating those texts that typologically utilize the exodus motif, evaluating the function and significance of the isolated texts in their books, and assessing the development of the exodus motif in the biblical and Second Temple literature (*Exodus Typology in the Book of Revelation* [Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981], 1-134). See also A. Frisch, *The Exodus Motif in 1 Kings 1–14*, JSOT 87 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 2000), 3-21; S. Sanborn, “The New Exodus in the Risen Lamb: Revelation 1:4-8,” *Kernex* 14 (1999): 18-24; R. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1997); W. D. Davies, *Paul and the New Exodus: Quest for the Context and Meaning*, Biblical Series of Interpretation 28 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 443-463; R. Pablo, “Plagues in the Bible: Exodus and Apocalypse,” *Concilium* 199 (1997): 45-54; S. Cheon, *The Exodus Story in the Wisdom of Solomon: A Study in Biblical Interpretation*, JSPSup 23 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); C. J. A. Hickling, “Paul’s Use of Exodus in the Corinthian Correspondence,” in *The Corinthian Correspondence*, ed. Reimund Bieringer, BETHL 125 (Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1996), 367-376; S. C. Keesmat, “Paul and His Story: Exodus and Tradition in Galatians,” *HBT* 18 (1996): 133-168; W. Webb, *Returning Home: New Covenant and Second Exodus as the Context for 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1*, JSNTSup 85 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

⁷G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 155, 233.

⁸See G. E. Wright, “Book of Exodus,” *IDB*, 2: 188-197. He outlines the book of

several thematic components: deliverance, judgment, covenant, presence of the liberator, and conquest/inheritance.⁹ While these components will not be thoroughly investigated here, their major features will be noted, keeping in mind their relevance for the exegetical study of Rev 15–16.¹⁰

Deliverance

The theological significance of the exodus lies in the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage, effected by YHWH,¹¹ whose decisive acts prove him to be greater than the Egyptian gods and the Pharaoh, who functions as a quasi-divine figure.¹² The goal of the miraculous deliverance of the Israelites was for the purpose of creating a nation that would serve YHWH. Political, material, and economic freedom would flow from this deliverance into a spiritual freedom.¹³ T. E. Fretheim argues that the book of Exodus moves from Israel's slavery to Pharaoh to service to YHWH—a movement from oppression to freedom, or from one form of service to another.¹⁴

Judgment

The judgment on the Egyptians was manifested in the miracle of the ten plagues that afflicted the land of Egypt¹⁵ as a result of the Egyptians' refusal to allow the

Exodus as follows: judgment on Egypt, Israel's deliverance from slavery, and journey in the wilderness (1–18); making of the covenant, with its breach and renewal (19–24; 32–34); liberator's presence in camp—the sanctuary (25–31; 35–40).

⁹Wright, 188–197, notes three elements of the exodus tradition: deliverance, covenant, and tabernacle. Casey, 1–6, on the other hand, suggests the following: events in Egypt, the wilderness, Sinai, and conquest.

¹⁰This article does not deal with the typological use of the exodus motif in the OT. For such a study, see F. Ninow, *Indicators of Typology within the Old Testament: The Exodus Motif*, Friedensauer Schriftenreihe 4 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001).

¹¹For discussion on the nature of YHWH's intervention on behalf of Israel, see G. V. Pixley, "In What Sense Did Yahweh Bring Israel Out of Egypt?" in *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics*, ed. N. K. Gottwald and R. A. Horsley (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993).

¹²J. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003).

¹³E. Carpenter, "Theology of Exodus," *NIDOTE*, 4:612.

¹⁴T. E. Fretheim, "Because the Whole Earth is Mine," *Int* 50 (1996): 230.

¹⁵Five unique aspects of the plagues demonstrate their miraculous character: intensification (although frogs and insects were known in Egypt, they were intensified beyond their ordinary occurrence); prediction (Moses' prediction of the phenomena sets them apart from natural occurrence); discrimination (plagues did not occur in Goshen, the location of the people of Israel in Egypt); orderliness (there is an increase in the intensity of the plagues, culminating in the death of the firstborn); moral purpose (plagues were designed to teach moral lessons) (J. P. Free, cited in J. J. Davies, *Moses and*

Israelites to leave the country at the command of YHWH.¹⁶ It has been convincingly argued by W. D. Davies that the order and designed sequences of the plagues should be understood as a showdown between two forces: YHWH and the deities of Egypt, including the Pharaoh.¹⁷ The purpose of the showdown was to reveal the impotence of the Egyptian religious system.¹⁸ The plagues expressed YHWH's judgment upon the Egyptian concept of the universe, based upon the Pharaoh's claim to almighty rule¹⁹ and demonstrated YHWH's sovereignty right to act on behalf of his people by defeating their enemies, while they simultaneously unmask Pharaoh's claim of deity and rule over the universe.²⁰

Covenant

The centrality of the covenant in OT theology has been widely debated by scholars such as W. Eichrodt, E. Mendenhall, G. Hasel, and E. W. Nicholson.²¹

the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986], 93).

¹⁶The book of Exodus uses various terminologies to denote the plagues: signs (4:17, 28, 30), wonders (3:20), disease (15:26), stroke (12:13), and blows (9:14).

¹⁷A similar position is argued by Petrie, Cassuto, and Aling (see J. K. Hoffmeier, "Plagues of Egypt," *NIDOTE*, 4: 1056). From Exod 12:12, it is apparent that at least one of the plagues was directed against the gods of Egypt. However, Num 33:4 may indicate that the Egyptian gods were the target of all the plagues. For a detailed elaboration of the Egyptian deities' connection with the plagues, see Davies, 118-137.

¹⁸The Egyptian Pharaoh did not merely rule for the gods, such as other rulers in the ancient Near East, but he was considered, in a literal sense, to be a god. His inability to control the plagues, and the clear fact that he called Moses and Aaron rather than the wise men of Egypt to intervene during the time of distress, reveals his defeat (Davies, 97-98).

¹⁹J. H. Sailhamer demonstrates that within the Egyptian religion the universe is seen to exist as a harmonious whole, in which each part contributes to the well-balanced system. The Pharaoh was responsible for the maintenance of this balance, so the plagues challenged this basic concept, showing the Pharaoh's powerlessness before YHWH (*The Pentateuch as Narrative* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992], 252-253).

²⁰Carpenter, 612.

²¹W. Eichrodt argued for the centrality of the covenant in OT theology (*Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961]). E. Mendenhall's emphasis on the legal background of the Mosaic covenant undergirds Eichrodt's suggestion (*Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient East* [Pittsburgh: Presbyterian Board of Colportage of Western Pennsylvania, 1955]); idem, "Covenant," in *IDB*, 1: 714-723. G. Hasel does not deny the importance of the covenant theme in OT theology, but addresses the question of whether the covenant concept is broad enough to adequately include the totality of OT reality (*Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972], 118-119). For a survey of discussion on the covenant, see E. W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 3-117.

Without doubt, it is one of the most prominent biblical metaphors for the relationship between YHWH and his people. Thus it is not surprising that N. M. Sarna has suggested that the Sinai covenant was the most significant contribution of the exodus to the religion of Israel.²²

The importance of the Sinai covenant lies in the formalization of Israel's relationship with YHWH, who as the initiator, called Israel to obedience on the basis of what he had done for them. The content of the covenant was spelled out in the Decalogue and other laws (Exod 20–23), which served as a seal on the relationship. The covenant and the law became so closely related that obedience to the law and obedience to the covenant became synonymous.²³ Obedience to the covenant meant life and freedom, while disobedience resulted in destruction, bondage, and curse.

Presence of the Liberator

The climax of the book of Exodus is YHWH's decision to permanently dwell in the midst of his people in a tabernacle built especially for him.²⁴ The basis for his tabernacling presence among his people was his miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage and the establishment of a covenant with Israel at Sinai.²⁵ T. D. Alexander pointed to three aspects of the tabernacle: a royal tent, a holy tent, and a tent of meeting. He links the first two with YHWH's sovereign and holy nature and the third with the relationship that YHWH established with Israel through the covenant.²⁶ The primary purpose of YHWH's tabernacling presence was the revelation of his character as a God who is not a wrathful being to be propitiated, but a loving God who has concern for his people, who initiates a relationship with them, and who should be worshiped.²⁷ So although the sanctuary served formally as the earthly dwelling place for YHWH,²⁸ it also

²²N. M. Sarna, "Book of Exodus," *ABD*, 2: 699.

²³For a discussion of the relationship between the covenant and the law in Exodus, see R. L. Smith, "Covenant and Law in Exodus," *SJT* 20 (1977): 33-41.

²⁴The tabernacle is designated by different names in the Pentateuch: sanctuary (Exod 25:8), tabernacle (Exod 25:9), tent (Exod 26:36), tent of meeting (Exod 29:42), and tabernacle of testimony (Num 17:23). Each name sheds light either on the tabernacle's nature or function. See R. E. Hendrix, "*Miskan* and *Obel Moed*: Etymology, Lexical Definitions, and Extrabiblical Usage," *AUSS* 29 (1991): 213-224; and idem, "The Use of *Miskan* and *Obel Moed* in Exodus 25–40," *AUSS* 30 (1992): 3-13.

²⁵A. M. Rodriguez, "Sanctuary Theology in the Book of Exodus," *AUSS* 24 (1986): 128-129.

²⁶T. D. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Main Themes of the Pentateuch* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), 98-107.

²⁷Rodriguez, 131.

²⁸It must be emphasized that while YHWH's glory dwelt in the tabernacle, his real and permanent abode was in heaven. For an interesting discussion of the tension between YHWH's immanence and transcendence in the context of the tabernacle, see Rodriguez, 135-137.

functioned as his meeting place with his people.²⁹

Inheritance

The exodus tradition is not complete without the theme of conquest and inheritance, extending beyond the Pentateuch to the book of Joshua.³⁰ The fulfillment of YHWH's promises began long before the conquest of the Promised Land and the receiving of the inheritance with his promises for deliverance while the people still languished in Egypt.³¹ This point is significant for understanding the exodus motif as presented in the book of Revelation. The possession of the land was not considered to be its occupation; rather Israel's occupation of the land was contingent upon their fulfillment of the covenant. YHWH was the land's ultimate owner; thus the land was not an unchanging possession for the people of Israel, but a promised rest that could be withdrawn as a consequence of disobedience to the covenant.

With the conquest of Canaan, the exodus was realized. Israel was delivered, its oppressor judged, and it entered into a covenant relationship with YHWH. On the basis of the covenant relationship, YHWH permanently dwelt among them, finally granting them the Promised Land.

The General Background of Bowl Imagery in Biblical and Second Temple Literature

Revelation 15–16 describes the pouring out of seven bowls to designate a new series of divine judgments on the earth. Bowl imagery (φιάλη), in which the contents of the bowl are “poured out,” has a rich background and a deep theological meaning that reinforces the basic emphasis of the exodus motif in the vision of Rev 15–16. The general background of bowl imagery in biblical and Second Temple literature determines the theological meaning of the exodus and its implication for understanding the nature of the exodus motif in the vision of the “Seven Bowls.”

²⁹Exod 25:8; 29:43-46.

³⁰Y. Zakovitch proposes four reasons why the exodus story ends only when the Israelites entered the land of Canaan: the ultimate purpose of the exodus is returning to Canaan; the life story of Moses that starts at the beginning of the book of Exodus and ends immediately before the conquest of the Promised Land; the miraculous crossings of the Red Sea and the Jordan River that provide the framework for the exodus story; and the journey into the desert as an integral part of the exodus (“*And You Shall Tell Your Son*”: *The Concept of the Exodus in the Bible* [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1991], 9-10).

³¹E. A. Martens notes that “the schema or plot of the literature from Genesis to Joshua is a promise-fulfillment schema,” of which the land is the major component. It was first promised to Abraham (Gen 12:1ff.) and confirmed to him (Gen 13:14-16; 15:18-21; 17:8) and to his descendants (Isaac—Gen 26:3-4, 24; Jacob—Gen 28:3, 13-15; 35:9-12). The promise was repeated to Moses (Exod 6:8), and in Joshua's time it became reality (Josh 23:15) (*Plot and Purpose in the Old Testament* [Leicester: InterVarsity, 1981], 98-102).

Bowl Imagery in the Old Testament

The bowl is a well-known OT metaphor for judgment that is poured out by YHWH. It can function either positively or negatively as the cup of YHWH's blessings or his wrath and can denote the fate of an individual or nation. G. Braumann correctly notes that the image of drinking from a bowl figuratively designates YHWH's judgment on humanity, which results either in life or destruction.³² The vision of the "Seven Bowls" recalls the so-called "cup of wrath" passages, which are the most prominent theological references to bowl imagery in the OT. The bowl in these passages represents the fullness of YHWH's judgment on the wicked.³³

YHWH's wrath in the OT is generally understood within the framework of covenant theology as "an expression of rejected and wounded love."³⁴ This idea becomes significant for understanding the relationship between the themes of YHWH's wrath and the people's breach of the covenant in Rev 15–16. E. C. Hostetter notes the positive aspect of the bowl imagery, stating that it carries the idea of liberation when used in a cultic setting.³⁵ The practice of spilling wine on the altar functioned as a thanksgiving offering and was a visible witness of YHWH's salvation. The connection between the image of the bowl as a libation and the idea of divine deliverance, which is pointed out in Ps 116:12-19, culminated in the expression "the cup of salvation." It is possible that the function of the bowls in Rev 15–16 should be understood against this background of cultic libation.³⁶

Bowl Imagery in Second Temple Literature

While bowl symbolism is not as prominent in Second Temple literature as in the OT, it functions similarly as a symbol of YHWH's wrath or his blessing.

³²G. Braumann, "πίνω," *NIDNTT*, 2: 275.

³³כּוּס is the most frequently used term for designation of the "cup" in the cup-of-wrath passages. See Jer 25:15-29; Lam 4:21; Ezek 23:31-33; Ps 75:8-9. Isaiah 51:17-23 places alongside כּוּס ("cup") a second term, קַבְעָה ("bowl"). Zech 12:2 uses yet a different term, יָרֵךְ ("bowl, basin"). Two other Hebrew terms for the designation of a cup are worthy of mentioning apart from the "cup of wrath" passages. כַּלִּי is used for cultic vessels (e.g., Lev 14:5) and pottery (Jer 18:4), while כַּפֵּי is used to denote Joseph's silver cup (Gen 44:2).

³⁴H-C. Hahn, "ὄργή," *NIDNTT*, 1:109.

³⁵E. C. Hostetter, "כּוּס" *NIDOTE*, 2:617-618.

³⁶The interpretation of the "cup of salvation" as a libation in Ps 116:13 seems the most sound, although there are other viable alternatives. Anderson, who is cited by C. Brown and J. Schneider, notes four possible interpretations of the "cup of salvation" image: libation, a drink offering of wine that was part of the thank offering; a metaphor of deliverance, which was opposite in significance to YHWH's wrath; a cup connected with some particular ordeal; and a cup of wine, used at the thanksgiving meal. Anderson prefers the first alternative. Brown, being attracted by the idea that the "cup of salvation" stands in contrast with the cup of YHWH's wrath, suggests combining Anderson's first two proposed interpretations (C. Brown and J. Schneider, "σώζω," *NIDNTT*, 3: 208).

The theme of YHWH's anger in Second Temple literature, although frequently expressed with the image of the bowl of wrath, is not always tied to this symbolism. Where it is used, its primary meaning is eschatological.³⁷ A new development in the meaning of bowl symbolism occurs in *Jos. Asen*,³⁸ where the phrase "blessed bread, cup and ointment" suggests a positive meaning, although the precise meaning of the phrase is debated. It most likely refers to the ordinary Jewish diet, which is symbolic of the manna sent from heaven and is connected with life, immortality, and incorruption.³⁹ The phrase may possibly refer to ritual practices, such as cultic meals,⁴⁰ although some even see it as a Christian interpolation.⁴¹

Bowl Imagery in the New Testament

The term *φιάλη* used for bowl imagery in Revelation, is absent from the rest of the NT. Bowl imagery in the rest of NT literature is designated by the term *ποτήριον* ("cup") and plays an important role in NT symbolism, especially in the context of the Last Supper,⁴² where the content of the cup represents the death and resurrection of Christ and recalls the theme of the Sinai covenant. R. T. France notes that the expression "this is my blood of covenant" is an allusion to the sacrificial offering, which instituted the old covenant of Sinai (Exod 24:8).⁴³ Thus Christ's sacrificial, poured-out blood functions as the seal of the new covenant.⁴⁴ Importantly for this study, the meaning of the cup in Christ's struggle in Gethsemane⁴⁵ returns to the basic OT meaning of the bowl imagery, as does the book of Revelation, and represents the fate of its drinker. Davies suggests that the cup that Christ drank from was the cup of YHWH's wrath. By drinking of it, he transformed it into the cup of life.⁴⁶

³⁷1 *Enoch* 62:12; 1QM 3:9; 1QH 15:17; 1QS 4:12.

³⁸*Jos. Asen.* 8:5, 9; 15:5; 16:16; 19:5; 21:13, 21.

³⁹This position is defended, e.g., by C. Burchard, "Joseph and Aseneth," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 2:191.

⁴⁰For the possibility of the cultic sacramental interpretation of the meal formula, see *ibid.*, 212.

⁴¹This position is advocated, e.g., by T. Holtz, "Christliche Interpretationen," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 1:212.

⁴²Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-25.

⁴³R. T. France emphasizes that, with this expression, the old covenant was replaced by the new (cf. Jer 31:31-34), and was sealed by Jesus' sacrificial death ("ἐκχέω," *NIDNTT*, 2: 854).

⁴⁴R. H. Stein, "Last Supper," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. J. B. Green and S. McKnight (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 448.

⁴⁵Matt 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42.

⁴⁶T. W. Davies, "Cup," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. W. A. Elwell

Bowl Imagery in the Book of Revelation

The term *φιάλη* occurs twelve times in the book of Revelation.⁴⁷ Bowl imagery is limited to two contexts in the book of Revelation: for example, Rev 5:8 mentions the “golden bowls full of incense” (*φιάλας χρυσᾶς γεμούσας θυμιαμάτων*), which represents the prayers of the saints, while Rev 15:7 speaks of the “golden bowls full of God’s wrath” (*φιάλας χρυσᾶς γεμούσας τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ*), employing the most prominent OT meaning of the symbol as a designation of YHWH’s judgment. R. W. Wall, R. H. Mounce, G. E. Ladd, D. E. Aune, and G. B. Caird recognize the connection between the two passages and their theological significance. The relationship between the bowls of prayer and retribution suggests that the divine retribution in Rev 15–16 is an answer to the prayers symbolized by the incense in Rev 5:8.⁴⁸

Aune emphasizes the cultic context in the interpretation of bowl imagery in Rev 15–16. Building on arguments based upon Greek, Roman, OT, and Second Temple literature,⁴⁹ he notes that the angels function in the vision as heavenly priests, ministering with cultic utensils, such as libation bowls, harps, trumpets, and censers.⁵⁰ It seems reasonable to conclude then that the image of the bowl in Rev 15–16 primarily functions as a symbol of YHWH’s wrath⁵¹ and judgment, carried out by angels who act as ministering priests.

*The Extent and Nature of the Exodus
Motif in Revelation 15–16*

Although there is consensus among scholars concerning the dependence of the

(Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 138-139.

⁴⁷Rev 5:8; 15:7; 16:1-4, 8, 10, 12, 17; 17:1; 21:9.

⁴⁸Some prominent commentators do not pay attention to the connection between the two “cup contexts” of Revelation. Cf., e.g., R. W. Wall, *Revelation*, NIBC (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 195; R. H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 289-290; G. E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 207; D. E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 879-880; G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 209; Beasley-Murray, 237-238.

⁴⁹For references to the Greek, Roman, Second Temple, and OT literature, see Aune, 879-880.

⁵⁰J. M. Ford argues similarly to Aune when she recognizes the cultic element in the vision of the “Seven Bowls” in connection with bowl imagery and suggests that the reason the cups were made from gold may be explained by its association with the liturgy carried out by angels (*Revelation*, AB [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975], 254).

⁵¹G. H. C. McGregor, in his discussion of the wrath of YHWH in the NT, ignores the book of Revelation. He sees Paul’s contribution as the most important in the development of the concept in the NT. Although Paul’s concept of the wrath of YHWH cannot be neglected, the topic is much more central in the theology of Revelation (“The Concept of the Wrath of YHWH in the New Testament,” *NTS* [1960-1961]: 101-109).

vision of the “Seven Bowls” on the exodus tradition, there is disagreement concerning the extent of its influence. This section will explore the points of dependence of Rev 15–16 on the exodus tradition in order to determine the extent of its influence on the conceptual background of the vision and the nature of the motif.

Victorious Scene by the Sea of Glass (15:1-4)

Revelation 15:1-8, the introduction to the vision of the “Seven Bowls,” consists of two separate scenes: 15:1-4, introduced with *καὶ εἶδον* (“and I saw”); and 15:5-8, introduced with *καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον* (“and after this I saw”).⁵² The first scene depicts the celebration of the victorious saints by the celestial Sea of Glass (15:2-4), emphasizing the theme of deliverance, while the second introduces the seven angels who are in charge of pouring out the bowls of wrath (15:5-8), which stresses the theme of judgment. These two reworked exodus themes are in tension, with the same events meaning redemption for one group of people (those who keep the covenant) and judgment for the other (those who do not keep the covenant).

G. R. Beasley-Murray notes that the historical order of the exodus narrative is reversed in Rev 15–16 so that the celebration of redemption precedes the somber plague of judgment.⁵³ H. K. LaRondelle suggests that the reason for the reversal of the thematic order is the author’s impression of the certainty in the eschatological event.⁵⁴ R. Stefanovic notes that Rev 15:2-4 functions as a “springboard passage,” serving, on one hand, as a conclusion of the previous section (Rev 12–14), but, at the same time, as the introduction to the outpouring of the seven bowls.⁵⁵ Without doubt, it is the chronological conclusion and the climax of both sections.

The scene by the Sea of Glass is strongly modeled on the exodus tradition, depicting a new eschatological Red Sea scene, analogous to Exod 14–15. Three key elements of the scene that are reminiscent of the exodus narrative are the Sea of Glass mixed with fire, the Song of Moses, and victory.

Sea of Glass Mixed with Fire

The image of the Sea of Glass appears in two contexts in Revelation. In 4:6, it is “as crystal” (*ὁμοία κρυστάλλῳ*), perfectly serene, without ripple, symbolizing

⁵²G. K. Beale, contrary to this division, sees Rev 15:2-4 as a kind of interruption of the introductory vision, whereas 15:1 is continued in 15:5-8. He notes that 15:2-4 functions as a kind of parenthetical transition on the literary and thematic level for it is the conclusion of 12:1–14:20 and the introduction to the following section (*The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 784).

⁵³Beasley-Murray, 232.

⁵⁴H. K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible: The Biblical-Contextual Approach* (Sarasota: First Impressions, 1997), 380.

⁵⁵R. Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2002), 475.

harmony. By way of contrast, in 15:2 it becomes “mixed by fire” (μεμιγμένην πυρὶ). Since πυρὶ is an instrumental dative, the fire becomes the instrument that troubles the crystal sea.⁵⁶ Although there is disagreement concerning the meaning of this unusual image, the combination of the motifs of the celestial sea and the river of fire that flows from YHWH’s throne with that of the exodus are well known from OT and Second Temple literature.⁵⁷ These motifs are clearly connected with the exodus events at the Red Sea, meaning deliverance for Israel and becoming the instruments of YHWH’s judgment on Pharaoh’s army.⁵⁸ For instance, Beale notes that there is a tendency in Second Temple literature to associate the image of the Sea of Glass with the Red Sea of the exodus.⁵⁹ According to *Mek* 5:15 and ARN 30a, one of the miracles of the Red Sea was that the sea became congealed and appeared like a glass vessel. ARN states that fire was present in the midst of the glass, while *Midr. Ps.* 136:7 claims that the sea appeared as “a crystallized . . . kind of glass.” John stands in line with Second Temple tradition in his association of the Sea of Glass with the Red Sea and the further details of the scene of Rev 15:2-4 make clear that John obviously has exodus imagery in mind.

The Song of Moses (15:1-4)

The Song of Moses clearly alludes to the exodus narrative. There is ambiguity concerning the location of the singing that comes from the issue of translation of the preposition ἐπὶ. The expression ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν (15:2) can be understood either as “standing upon” or “standing by” the sea. Although Bauckham argues for the former, claiming the Sea of Glass to be “the floor of heaven,”⁶⁰ the latter “standing by” seems to fit more accurately the exodus narrative because the Song of Moses has been historically understood to have been sung after the crossing of the Red Sea.

The content of the Song of Moses has caused some difficulties due to the

⁵⁶T. F. Torrance does not limit his examination of the image of the Sea of Glass in Revelation to these two passages, claiming that the sea in Rev 13:1, out of which a beast emerges in chap. 13, is the same sea as the Sea of Glass (*The Apocalypse Today* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959], 126-127).

⁵⁷See, e.g., Dan 7:10; *1 Enoch* 14:19; 71:2; *3 Enoch* 18:19; 19:4; 36:1-2; 37:1; *Rosh Hasb.* 581; *Midr. Rab. Gen.* 4:7.

⁵⁸There is no consensus concerning the meaning of this image in Rev 15:2. A. Farrer suggests that the image of the sea mixed with fire symbolizes the saints’ baptism by which they are sanctified, but this view seems hardly possible because such an idea is not explicitly mentioned in the text (*The Revelation of St. John Divine* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1964], 171). Mounce, 789-790, tries to simplify the issue, but he oversimplifies it, claiming that the mention of fire is just a “descriptive detail intended to heighten the splendor of the scene.” See also Aune, 870-871.

⁵⁹Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 791-792.

⁶⁰Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 791-792.

lack of verbal parallels with any song of Moses in the OT.⁶¹ The vast majority of commentators consider the Song of Moses to be a compilation of OT allusions,⁶² “an amalgam of various Old Testament themes.”⁶³ Yet, some type of relationship with Exod 15 seems possible, as the motifs of sea, song, and victory are shared with both passages.⁶⁴ However, the difference in the focus of the two songs, as noted by W. J. Harrington, cannot be ignored. While the Song of Moses in Exod 15 focuses on the triumph over enemies, the song in Revelation is solely in praise to YHWH.⁶⁵

The singing of the Song of Moses by the Sea of Glass is reminiscent of rabbinic tradition, which states that just as Moses sang a song at the Red Sea, so he will sing a “new song” of praise in the world to come.⁶⁶ The similarity is obvious and allows for the possibility that John’s use of the idea might be influenced by his awareness of this tradition.

Victory

The people standing by the Sea of Glass, singing the Song of Moses, are referred to in Rev 15:2 as those who are “victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name” (νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνης αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ).⁶⁷ The idea of victory presupposes a conflict between the victors and their adversaries. This expression links the scene of 15:1-4 to the previous section of the book (chaps. 12–14), in which the conflict motif in the book is climactic. The theme of victory is shared by the Red Sea and the Sea of Glass scenes. Victory is, in both cases, the primary reason for celebration and the singing of a song of praise to YHWH. However, a contrast exists between the Israel of the exodus and the νικῶντας of Rev 15:2 concerning the extent of each group’s participation in the battle with the enemy. While Israel was not involved in an actual battle—for YHWH fought for them—the νικῶντας seem to be active participants, fighting

⁶¹The OT mentions three Songs of Moses: Exod 15; Deut 31:30–32:43; and Ps 90.

⁶²For an alternative explanation of the nature and source of Rev 15:2-4, see S. Moyise, “Singing the Song of Moses and the Lamb: John’s Dialogical Use of Scripture,” *AUSS* 42 (2004): 347-360.

⁶³Schüssler Fiorenza, 135.

⁶⁴Aune, 872.

⁶⁵W. J. Harrington, *Revelation*, Sacra Pagina Series 16 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 159.

⁶⁶*Qob. Rab.* 1:9; *Mek. Exod.* 15:1; *Tanh. Exod.* 30b.

⁶⁷A difficult form of expression is employed here. The construction νικᾶω + ἐκ is unexpected because it does not occur in any other Greek texts. The presence of the preposition ἐκ is surprising because its absence would be appropriate. For a discussion of this problem, see D. E. Aune, “A Latinism in Revelation,” *JBL* 110 (1991): 691-692; and K. G. C. Newport, “The Use of ἐκ in the Revelation: Evidence of Semitic Influence,” *AUSS* 24 (1986): 223-230.

with the weapons of the “blood of the Lamb . . . the word of their testimony . . . [and] their lives” (Rev 12:11).⁶⁸

The Introductory Sanctuary Scene to
the Seven-Bowls Judgment (15:5-8)

The author uses the exodus narrative as a model for arranging the events of the vision.⁶⁹ Two components of the exodus tradition clearly reappear in 15:5-8: the preparation for the outpouring of YHWH’s wrath that results in judgment (15:7), and the close association of the wrath-of-YHWH theme with heavenly temple imagery that recalls the exodus theme of YHWH’s tabernacling presence.

YHWH’s Judgment: The Plagues

The introductory scene in 15:5-8 describes the preparation for the outpouring of the seven bowls and introduces the basic theological meaning of the plague-judgments as the last manifestation of the wrath of YHWH in human history. The plagues as YHWH’s judgments are clearly modeled on the exodus-plague tradition, and it will be demonstrated below how the particular plagues of Rev 16 depend on the exodus narrative.

Aune notes that the difference in the number of plagues of the Egyptian exodus and those in the book of Revelation is not surprising due to the strong tendency in OT and Second Temple literature to reduce the number of the plagues from ten to seven.⁷⁰ The reason for this tendency should be sought in the significance of the number seven, which is indicative of the severity and completeness of YHWH’s judgment.⁷¹

It is also not surprising that John decided to employ the exodus-plague

⁶⁸Although the tension is obvious between the people of YHWH and their enemies, the conflict is not direct—YHWH’s people in Revelation are never characterized by an offensive activity, but the nature of their victory is the same as the Lamb’s: through suffering and death (S. Pattemore, *The People of YHWH in the Apocalypse*, SNTS Monographs Series 128 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 177-178).

⁶⁹It has been cautiously suggested by some scholars that the order of some exodus components in Rev 15:1-8 might suggest structural parallel. The listing of the “tabernacle of witness” (15:5) after the allusion to the Red Sea (Sea of Glass, 15:2) resembles the order of the exodus event, when, after crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites came to Sinai, received the law from YHWH, and erected the sanctuary. See, e.g., Caird, 199-200; Wall, 194. The structural parallel seems unlikely, however, because the other components of the exodus tradition do not follow successively; e.g., the reverse order of the plagues and the celebration of the victory have already been pointed out.

⁷⁰The following texts favor a seven-plague exodus pattern: Pss 78:43-51; 105:27-36; Amos 4:6-11; *Art. Wis.* 11:1–19:9; *T. Benj.* 7:1-4; *M. Ab.* 5:8. It must be noted that *T. Benj.* 7:1-4 and *M. Abot.* 5:8 do not have direct connection with the exodus-plague tradition, but they are in line with the tendency to adopt seven as a number appropriate for a climatic series of judgments (Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 506).

⁷¹Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 803.

tradition to vividly and creatively depict YHWH's eschatological judgment because it is a recurring theme in Second Temple literature, which John was probably familiar with. He could hardly find a better means for creatively spelling out the idea of judgment than to rework and typologically employ the exodus-plague tradition.

The Tabernacle of the Testimony

In Rev 15:5, the heavenly temple is qualified as ὁ ναὸς τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου (“the tabernacle of the testimony”). This unusual qualification is clearly an allusion to the exodus tabernacle, although it is debated which Hebrew expression it precisely corresponds to.⁷² The phrase ὁ ναὸς τῆς σκηνῆς is probably an appositional genitive (i.e., “the temple which is the tabernacle”), while σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου is a descriptive genitive.⁷³ The τοῦ μαρτυρίου (“testimony”) is a reference to YHWH's law,⁷⁴ which was housed in the tabernacle⁷⁵ and seems to recall the exodus theme of “covenant.” The law was regarded as a permanent reminder that YHWH's relationship with Israel was covenantal.⁷⁶

The imagery of theophanic smoke (καπνός) that fills the temple and hinders the service (15:8) is a clear thematic allusion to the dedication of the tabernacle at Sinai and the temple of Solomon,⁷⁷ but it is also a reference to YHWH's presence in certain prophetic visions.⁷⁸ Ford suggests that the

⁷²E. Lohmeyer and W. Bousset suggest אהל-מועד (the tabernacle of the tent of meeting; Exod 40:2, 6, 29), but it seems unlikely because אהל-מועד is never translated ναὸς in the LXX and מועד means “meeting” and not “testimony.” Aune's suggestion, 877-878, for אהל-מועד makes more sense because the phrase is translated in the LXX version of Num 9:15 (τὴν σκηνὴν τὸν οἶκον τοῦ μαρτυρίου, “the tent, the house of testimony”), although T. Neof. Num. 9:15 and Tg. Ps.-J. Num. 9:15 read “the tent of testimony” (Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 877).

⁷³Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 801; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 877.

⁷⁴LaRondelle notes the significance of the law in Rom 15:5. Here Paul stresses the development of the law in the apocalyptic conflict of YHWH's people with the antichrist (LaRondelle, 379).

⁷⁵Beasley-Murray, 237.

⁷⁶Wall, 194.

⁷⁷The LXX uses the term, e.g., as in the accounts of the dedications of the sanctuary at Sinai (Exod 40:34-35) and Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 8:10-12); the LXX uses the term νεφέλη (“cloud”) for the designation of the theophanic appearance and not καπνός (“smoke”), as in Rev 15:8.

⁷⁸Fekkes argues for the specific influence of Isa 6:1, 4 on Rev 15:8, suggesting a more definite connection than with other similar passages in Ezek 1:28; 3:12, 23; 10:3-4; 43:5; 44:4; and Acts 7:55. Beale agrees that Isa 6:1, 4 are the only OT verses that speak of “smoke” filling the temple. Other texts use “cloud” or “glory.” But he gives equal attention to the scene in Ezek 10, which introduces an announcement of judgment. He holds that John probably combined Ezek 10 with Isa 6:1, 4 (Fekkes, 200; Beale, *The*

theophanic smoke, or cloud, occurs at strategic points in Israel's history. All the cases are associated with the dwelling place of YHWH and the destiny of Israel.⁷⁹ It always has positive connotation in the OT. However, in Rev 15:8 its function is primarily negative since it designates YHWH's presence to execute his judgments through his agents.⁸⁰

The First Bowl (Revelation 16:2)

The result of the outpouring of the first bowl was that “ugly and painful sores” (ἔλκος κακὸν καὶ πονηρὸν) broke out on the worshipers of the beast's image. This imagery is modeled on the Egyptian plague of boils (Exod 9:8-12; קַח־ is translated ἔλκος in LXX), although it is significantly modified. The difference lies in the replacement of Moses' use of ashes tossed into the air as a source of the boils with the image of the bowl of wrath as a symbol of judgment. Of more significance is the difference between the affected victims. While the exodus plague affected both humans and animals, John mentions only humans as victims.⁸¹

The exodus theme of covenant is constantly recalled throughout Rev 16. The plagues function as covenant curses in the vision as the consequence of the breach of the covenant, foretold in Lev 26 and Deut 28. The association of the plague of boils with the idolatrous worship of the beast's image recalls the covenant curses of Deut 28:27, 35,⁸² where the curse of boils is seen as a consequence of the sin of apostasy.⁸³

The Second and Third Bowls (Revelation 16:3-7)

The second and third bowls target the sea, rivers, and springs, turning them into blood. They are both modeled on the Egyptian plague that struck the Nile (Exod 7:14-25). The Egyptian plague is thoroughly reworked and two apocalyptic plagues are made out of it, broadening the scale of their effects. Such types of intensification seem to be a conscious decision of the author, who repeatedly uses the same literary device in his description of the plagues. The author's purpose for using intensification could be to emphasize the typological nature of the exodus motif in Rev 15–16, in which the antitype surpasses the type.

Book of Revelation, 806-807).

⁷⁹Ford, 258.

⁸⁰Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 881-882.

⁸¹Casey, 166.

⁸²The Hebrew term for boils employed in these texts is קַח־, the same term used in Exod 9:8-12, which is translated in the LXX as ἔλκος. This term is employed in Rev 16:2.

⁸³It is possible, as suggested by Ford, 270, that a form of leprosy is denoted here.

The intensification in the second and third plagues is clear from the fact that while the Egyptian plague struck the Nile and other rivers, canals, and pools of water, it did not affect the sea. However, in Revelation, the whole sea is affected, along with all the rivers and springs. The effect of the plague was the death of not only the fish, as in the case of the Egyptian plagues,⁸⁴ but of “every living creature” (πᾶσα ψυχὴ ζωῆς).⁸⁵

The hymn⁸⁶ of “the angel of the waters” (τοῦ ἀγγέλου τῶν ὑδάτων)⁸⁷ in Rev 16:5-7 is an interpretative elaboration of the third bowl, which deserves special attention because of its close connection with the exodus tradition. The hymn has been referred to as a “judgment doxology,” a brief hymnic passage, a theological motif that provides justification for YHWH’s judgment,⁸⁸ a “vindication formula,”⁸⁹ and an “eschatological vindication formula.”⁹⁰ The theme “judgment doxology” refers to YHWH’s punitive actions. The praise of YHWH’s righteousness and holiness is based on his “true and just judgments”

⁸⁴*Vit. Mos.* 1:110 extends the effects of the plague on the Nile (Exod 7:14-25) to include the death of people.

⁸⁵It is not clear to what the ψυχὴ ζωῆς refers to in this context. ζωῆς can be taken as a qualitative or adjectival genitive, and can be literally translated “every living soul.” Beale suggests that the expression refers to the death of humans because every other use of ψυχὴ in Revelation, except 8:9, refers to the death of people (6:9; 12:11; 18:13-14; 20:4). However, it seems more reasonable to understand the term in the sense of living beings, usually in the collective sense (Lev 11:10) (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 815). See also G. Harder and C. Brown, “ψυχὴ,” *NIDNTT*, 2: 676-689.

⁸⁶For different categories of the hymns in Revelation, see K. P. Jörens, *Das Hymnische Evangelium*, SNT 5 (Gütersloh, 1971); R. Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der Frühen Christenheit: Untersuchungen zur Form, Sprache, und Stil der frühchristlichen Hymnen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1967), 44-59; D. R. Carnegie, “Worthy is the Lamb: Hymns in Revelation,” in *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie*, ed. H. H. Rowdon (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1982), 243-256; John J. O’Rourke, “The Hymns of the Apocalypse,” *CBQ* 30 (1968): 400-409.

⁸⁷This designation is unique in the Bible, although the idea is well known from Second Temple literature (*1 Enoch* 61:10; 69:22; 75:3; *2 Enoch* 4-6; 19:1-4; *Jub.* 2:2; 1QH 1:8-13). The genitive expresses the angel’s sovereignty over the waters, and it may imply the idea from Second Temple literature that various material elements of the cosmos are presided over by particular angelic beings. *1 Enoch* 60:12-22 mentions the angels of the sea, hoarfrost, hail, snow, mist, dew, and rain. The idea is also present in rabbinic literature, where Ridja is the angel in charge of water, particularly rain (*b. Taan.* 25b; *b. T. Yom* 20b). The book of Revelation also mentions other angelic figures who are in charge of various aspects of the cosmos: 7:1-2 refers to angels who control the four winds, while 14:18 refers to an angel who has authority over fire. These parallels cannot be ignored and are indicators of John’s knowledge of the tradition.

⁸⁸Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 885.

⁸⁹P. Staples, “Rev. 16:4-6 and Its Vindication Formula,” *Nov T* 14 (1972): 280-293.

⁹⁰A. Y. Collins, “The History-of-Religion Approach to Apocalypticism and the ‘Angel of the Waters’ (Rev. 16:4-7),” *CBQ* 39 (1977): 367-381.

(ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις), according to the principle of *lex talionis*: “for they have shed the blood (αἷμα) of the holy ones and your prophets, you also have given them blood (αἷμα) to drink as they deserve (ἄξιοί εἰσιν).” Beale calls attention to the importance of the use of ἄξιοί in Wisdom for discerning the exodus background of the judgment doxology in Rev 16:5-7. He notes that the murderers of the saints in Rev 16:5-7 deserve (ἄξιοι) YHWH’s judgments, as the Egyptians had deserved (ἄξιοι) the plagues of “grasshoppers and flies” (Wis 16:9), “darkness” (Wis 18:4), and the punishment at the Red Sea (Wis 19:4).⁹¹

The Fourth Bowl (Revelation 16:8-9)

The result of the outpouring of the fourth bowl is intensified by the scorching of the sun. Scholarly opinion is divided over the source of this imagery. The main problem is that the fourth bowl is not modeled on the exodus catastrophes, as are the preceding three bowls and the following one. Many creative suggestions have been made in an attempt to resolve this difficulty, but it still seems reasonable to locate the source of the bowl plague within the exodus tradition because it is the conceptual background for the whole vision.⁹²

Beasley-Murray suggests that as the Egyptian plague on the Nile (Exod 7:14-25) was divided by John into the second and third bowls, so the exodus plague of darkness (Exod 10:21-29) was extended into the judgments of the fourth and fifth bowls. He notes that in the fourth bowl plague, contrary to the Egyptian plague of darkness, the sun intensifies its heat instead of darkening.⁹³ Ford proposes that the scorching of the sun is the reversal of the cloud by day that accompanied Israel in its journey in the wilderness,⁹⁴ which seems all the more reasonable due to the contrast between Rev 16:8-9 and 7:16. The reversed imagery parallel between the condition of the worshipers of the beast, scorched by the sun in Rev 16:8-9 (ἔξεχεεν . . . ἐπὶ τὸν ἥλιον, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ καυματίσαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐν πυρὶ, . . . ἐκαυματίσθησαν . . . καὶ μέγα), and the protection of the sealed people of YHWH from the sun and heat in 7:16 (οὐδὲ μὴ πέση ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς ὁ ἥλιος οὐδὲ πᾶν καῦμα) is apparent and recalls the exodus imagery of the protective cloud of YHWH’s presence.⁹⁵ The connection between the scorching sun and the exodus tradition is well known in Jewish writings, where the Egyptians are described as “scorched” by fire mixed with hail (*Midr. R. Exod.* 12:4) and by burning boils (*Pse.-K.* 7:11).⁹⁶ Although the

⁹¹Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 820.

⁹²Caird, 202-203, argues to the contrary that the intensification of the sun is a new “added” idea, unrelated to the exodus tradition. Casey, 167, advocates a similar position.

⁹³Beasley-Murray, 242.

⁹⁴Ford, “The Structure and Meaning of Revelation 16,” *ExpTim* 98 (1987): 328.

⁹⁵The parallel between Rev 16:8-9 and 7:16 is also acknowledged by Beasley-Murray, 242; see also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 822.

⁹⁶Jewish writers tend to understand the Egyptian plagues in a spiritual sense. This

nature of the fifth plague-judgment is different from the previous ones, it seems that the idea of intensification of the exodus judgments is not absent from it, but is suggested by the expression καὶ ἐκαυματίσθησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ μέγα (“scorched with a great scorching”).

The idea of blasphemy is repeated three times in Rev 16,⁹⁷ and is a further parallel with the exodus tradition of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. This becomes clear from the fact that blasphemy in 16:9 is the same as in the Pharaoh’s case:⁹⁸ the denial of YHWH’s sovereignty, emphasized by the divine passive ἐδόθη and the explicit statement that YHWH has control over the plagues.

The exodus theme of “covenant” is again recalled in the fourth bowl similarly to the previous plagues, where the “burning heat” recalls Deut 32:24 and functions as a covenant curse.

The Fifth Bowl (Revelation 16:10-11)

The outpouring of the fifth bowl effected the darkening of the beast’s kingdom. Commentators generally agree that this image recalls the Egyptian plague of darkness (Exod 10:21-29), although Ford suggests that this darkness is an antithesis of the pillar of fire by night that accompanied Israel on its journey to the Promised Land. Ford’s idea fits into her theological purpose that views the bowl judgments as a whole to be an irony, directed to a Jewish audience.⁹⁹ Still, the fifth bowl’s strong theological resemblance to the Egyptian plague of darkness seems more preferable, for there is marked theological similarity between the Egyptian plague of darkness (Exod 10:21-29) and the darkness over the kingdom of the beast (Rev 16:10-11). In both cases, the target of the plague is primarily a ruler and his sovereignty over his realm. While the fifth bowl is directed against the throne of the beast (ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον τοῦ θηρίου) and his ability to rule, similarly the Egyptian plague of darkness came primarily against Pharaoh, who regarded himself to be an incarnation of the sun god Ra and whose failure to provide light meant his humbling, striking at the very heart of the Egyptian religion.¹⁰⁰

is how the plague of fire in Exod 9:23 and Deut 32:24 is understood in *Targ. Onk. and Neof. Deut 32:24* and *Midr. Rab. Exod. 12:4*. The punishment of scorching sun was anticipated for the impious. According to *Gen. R. 78:5*, just as the sun baked Jacob and burned up Esau, so it will heal Jacob’s descendants (Israel) and burn up the Gentiles.

⁹⁷Rev 16:9, 11, 21 mentions the response of blaspheming YHWH on the part of the people who have been affected by the bowl judgments. This idea forms a distinct motif within Revelation that is found only in 16:1-21. Besides Rev 1, the book attributes blasphemy only to the beast (13:1, 5, 6; 17:3). Caird, 202, understands the meaning of this thrice-repeated motif of the blasphemy of YHWH in Rev 16 to be that the blasphemers “have wholly taken on the character of the false YHWH they serve.”

⁹⁸Exod 5:2.

⁹⁹Ford, “The Structure and Meaning of Revelation 16,” 327-331.

¹⁰⁰Davies, *Moses and the YHWHs of Egypt*, 133-136.

It is also possible that the darkness of the fifth bowl plague, understood in light of the exodus tradition, also reflects the theological background of the apocalyptic imagery of an interruption in the patterns of the cosmic lights that is prominent in OT and Second Temple literature.¹⁰¹

The intensification pattern reappears in the fifth bowl judgment. The description of people gnawing their tongues in anguish (Rev 16:10) suggests something more challenging than the Egyptian plague (Exod 10:21-29), so it is no wonder that the author repeats the motif of blasphemy to highlight the intensity of the fifth bowl plague and thus its function as a covenant curse. The phenomenon of blindness, madness, confusion of the mind, and groping about at noon (the brightest part of the day) mentioned in Deut 28:28-29 is clearly recalled by the darkness of Rev 16:10-11.

The Sixth Bowl (Revelation 16:12-16)

The difference between the last two bowl judgments and the others is widely recognized not only because they reflect additional elements from other biblical and apocalyptic sources, but because of their nature. We can rightly speak about the “fusion” of motifs in the sixth and seventh bowl judgments, of which the most prominent are the motifs of the fall of Babylon¹⁰² and divine warfare.¹⁰³ J. S. Casey correctly points out that these additional motifs serve to “embellish” the exodus plague motif.¹⁰⁴

The target of the sixth bowl is the River Euphrates, which dries up as a result of the plague. Although this is clearly a direct allusion to the fall of historical Babylon,¹⁰⁵ it must be pointed out that, in the OT, YHWH’s great redemptive acts are often associated with the drying up of water. We can find such examples within the exodus tradition: the drying up of the Red Sea¹⁰⁶ as the means of liberation and the drying up of the Jordan¹⁰⁷ as a means of entering the Promised Land, the promised inheritance. The miraculous phenomenon of dried-up waters is the prelude to the destruction of an enemy

¹⁰¹For extensive references and the theological significance of the interruption of patterns of cosmic lights in OT and Second Temple literature, see Beale’s excellent treatment of the topic in a separate excursus of his commentary (*The Book of Revelation*, 483-485).

¹⁰²For elaboration on the fall-of-Babylon motif, see H. K. LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation: The Biblical Drama of Armageddon* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1987), 82-107.

¹⁰³For significant treatment of the divine warfare motif in Revelation, see A. Y. Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, HDR 9 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976); T. Longman and D. G. Reid, *YHWH is a Warrior*, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), 180-192; LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation*, 108-121.

¹⁰⁴Casey, 168.

¹⁰⁵Isa 11:15; Zech 10:11.

¹⁰⁶Exod 14:21.

¹⁰⁷Josh 3:16.

of YHWH, enabling the passage of triumphant armies to a place of safety.¹⁰⁸

Another link of the sixth bowl judgment with the exodus tradition is the simile of the three unclean spirits in the form of frogs (πνεύματα τρία ἀκάθαρτα ὡς βάρραχοι). The imagery of frogs occurs only here in the NT, which is always understood in OT and Second Temple literature in association with the exodus plague tradition.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that the frogs of Rev 16:13 allude to the Egyptian plague of frogs (Exod 8:1-15) and thus maintains the sequence of creatively reworked exodus plague tradition.¹¹⁰ There are a number of similarities between the exodus frog plague and the frog plague of Revelation. In Lev 11:9-12, 41-47, frogs are counted among the unclean animals, while in Rev 16:13 they symbolize unclean spirits.¹¹¹ In both the exodus plague tradition and in Revelation, the frogs appear as destroying agents. This thought is especially developed in Second Temple literature, where frogs are considered to be the most severe Egyptian plague because of the physical pain they purportedly caused by their bites and the confusion brought about by their loud, meaningless, and maddening croaking.¹¹² In Rev 16, the destructive function of the frog-like spirits is much more cunning, for they appear as wise but spiritually corrupt counselors, whose activity influences the “kings of the earth” (βασιλεῖς τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης) and leads to the final destruction in the seventh plague.

It has been recognized that one of the central motifs in the second part of the book of Revelation is that of deception.¹¹³ It appears in the sixth bowl plague as the goal of the activities of the frog-like demonic spirits and shows a significant parallel with the Egyptian plague of frogs, for it was the last plague that Pharaoh’s magicians were able to imitate by their deceptive art. The three frog-like demonic spirits even use miraculous signs (σημεῖα) to prepare the world by their deceptive propaganda for the last battle, the Armageddon. They

¹⁰⁸Isa 11:15; Zech 10:11.

¹⁰⁹Exod 8:1-15; Pss 77:45; 104:30. See also Wis 19:10 and the accounts of the exodus in *Ant.* 2:298-298; *E. Sacr.* 69; *Migr. Abr.* 83; *Vit. Or.* 1:103-106, 144.

¹¹⁰For the most thorough treatment of the frog-plague tradition of the exodus motif of Revelation, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 832-833. I. T. Beckwith, contrary to Beale, views the frog image of Rev 16 as a reflection of some (possibly Persian) mythological tradition rather than reference to the Egyptian plague of frogs (*The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967], 683-684).

¹¹¹In the LXX version of Lev 11:9-12, 41-47, the category of unclean animals to which frogs belong is not attributed with ἀκάθαρτα, as in Rev 16:13, but with βδέλυγμά (“an abomination, a detestable thing). However, βδέλυγμά and ἀκάθαρτα are used interchangeably in Lev 11, denoting the same quality. Therefore, the lack of verbal parallel is insignificant.

¹¹²*Midr. Rab. Gen.* 10:7; *Midr. Rab. Exod.* 10:1, 6; 15:27; *Midr. Rab. Num.* 18:22; *T.d. Elyyū* 41; *Pes. K.* 7:11; *Pes. R.* 17:7; *Somm.* 2:259-260; *Sacr.* 69.

¹¹³See, e.g., Stefanovic, 368-373. Abir, 116-130.

are similar in their deceptive activities to the Pharaoh's magicians, who tried to counterfeit the signs of Moses.

The sixth bowl plague has a flavor of war. While it is the preparation for the battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:16), the battle itself is fought in the seventh bowl. The idea of war is dominant in the last two plagues and recalls the exodus theme of "covenant," for the war imagery is regarded as one of the covenant curses of the OT.¹¹⁴

The Seventh Bowl (Revelation 16:17-21)

The outpouring of the bowls reaches its climax in the seventh bowl judgment, which has wider significance than the other plagues because it affects the air (ἀέρα) that all humanity breathes.¹¹⁵ Its focus is on the finality of events, described as the destruction of the eschatological Babylon that becomes a new, eschatological Egypt in the context of the exodus motif of Rev 15–16. Two images of the seventh bowl that show close connection with the exodus tradition should be given special attention here: the image of the Sinai theophany, and the phenomenon of the unprecedented hail.

The natural phenomena, "lightenings, sounds, thunders, a great earthquake . . . and great hailstones" ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμὸς ἐγένετο μέγας . . . καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη; 16:18, 21) is commonly understood to be imagery reminiscent of the Sinai theophany described in Exod 19:16-18. The same allusion to the Sinai theophany appears four times in Revelation,¹¹⁶ linked together by the theme of final judgment. Furthermore, Bauckham, in his exploration of the motif of the eschatological earthquake, notes how these four events form a progressive sequence of allusions to the Sinai theophany, being built systematically one on another.¹¹⁷ The point of the progressive expansion of the formula is the emphasis on the increasing severity of each event in the series of judgments in Revelation.¹¹⁸ The climax is reached in the seventh bowl, in which YHWH's wrath is poured out in its fullness on the unrepentant and

¹¹⁴Lev 26:16-17; Deut 28:25, 49.

¹¹⁵H. B. Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 210; Ford, *Revelation*, 274.

¹¹⁶Rev 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18-21.

¹¹⁷See R. Bauckham, "The Eschatological Earthquake in the Apocalypse of John," *NovT* (1977): 224-233. The same article is reprinted in R. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 199-209.

¹¹⁸There is a tension between recapitulation and contrast in the septets of seals, trumpets, and bowls. The obvious contrast in the territorial limitations suggests a crescendo of judgment. While the horsemen operate in a quarter of the earth (6:8) and trumpets in a third, the bowl plagues fall on the earth as a whole (J. Paulien, "Interpreting the Seven Trumpets" [Unpublished paper, presented for the Daniel and Revelation Committee, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Berrien Springs, March 5-9, 1986], 4).

the description of a full destruction is given.¹¹⁹ It must also be pointed out that the phrase “lightenings, sounds, thunders and a great earthquake” has the flavor of a great cosmic quake, a frequent motif in OT and apocalyptic literature, symbolizing the coming of YHWH.¹²⁰ It is not coincidental that the day of the Lord is portrayed as a new Sinai theophany, a new divine intervention modeled on the pattern of the exodus tradition.¹²¹

The imagery of the “great hail” (χάλαζα μεγάλη) of Rev 16:21 is another important allusion to the exodus tradition.¹²² Although it is reminiscent of the Egyptian plague of hail (Exod 9:13-35), the possible influence of other traditions must also be recognized. The phenomenon of hail is regarded in the OT as a means of divine punishment. It is possible that the author of Revelation had in mind the judgment on Gog (Ezek 38:19-22), where the earthquake and hail appear together, but it seems more likely that the influence of the punitive hailstorm on the Amorites in Josh 10:11, which recalls the conquest of the Promised Land and the theme of inheritance, is more reflective of the final bowl judgment. The significance of the Egyptian plague of hail cannot be excluded because although the death of people is not stated, it was the first plague under which even the Pharaoh showed signs of repentance.¹²³ It is possible that the author of Revelation concludes the vision of the “Seven Bowls” with an intentional contrast between the Pharaoh and the people targeted by eschatological plagues. While even the Pharaoh showed signs of repentance under the pressure of the hail plague, the eschatological enemies of YHWH in the book of Revelation continue their blasphemy, suggesting that their hearts are even harder than Pharaoh’s.¹²⁴

Conclusion

It seems that despite the creativity in reworking the exodus tradition, the author of Revelation also shows, to some extent, respect for the chronological

¹¹⁹The deliberate stylistic device is obvious in comparison with the following texts: ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ (4:5), βρονταὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ ἀστραπαὶ καὶ σεισμός (8:5), ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη (11:9) and ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός . . . μέγας . . . καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη (16:18-21) (Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 202-204).

¹²⁰Judg 5:4-5; Joel 2:10; Mic 1:4; Pss 78:7-8; 97:5; 99:1; Isa 13:13; 24:18-20; 34:4; Jer 51:29; Ezek 38:20; Nah 1:5; Sir 16:18-19; Jdt 16:15; *T. Levi* 3:9; *1 Enoch* 1:3-9; 1-2:1-2; *T. Mos.* 10:1-7; 2 Bar 32:1.

¹²¹Hab 3; Isa 64; *1 Enoch* 1:3-9; *T. Mos.* 10:1-7.

¹²²Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 204-207; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 844-846.

¹²³Swete, 212.

¹²⁴S. B. Noegel regards the Egyptian plague of hail to be much more significant than it is generally viewed. He sees the hail plague, which was the seventh in the sequence of Egyptian plague judgments to be the most important, after the death of the first born (“The Significance of the Seventh Plague,” *Bib* 76 [1995]: 532-539). I, however, believe that Noegel pushes the significance of the hail plague too far.

sequence of the exodus event.¹²⁵ The imagery of the great hailstorm recalls the theme of inheritance, while the Sinai theophany recalls the themes of covenant and YHWH's presence. Thus the whole exodus tradition, from themes of plagues to the conquest, is comprehended in the vision of the "Seven Bowls" of Rev 15–16 in a creative way that shows to some extent respect for the chronological order.¹²⁶

The exodus tradition consists of several thematic components: deliverance, judgment, covenant, presence of the liberator, and conquest/inheritance. The author of Revelation weaves the various components of the exodus tradition into his picture. John's employment of the exodus tradition in the vision of the "Seven Bowls" is characterized by masterful creativity: he has not slavishly and consistently followed the sequence of the exodus narrative, but suited certain details of the exodus tradition to his theological purpose. Still, the use of the exodus tradition in Rev 15–16 is not limited to a single dominant cluster, but is holistic and comprehensive. All five themes of the exodus tradition appear in the vision, flexibly reworked with other added elements that are reminiscent of the exodus narrative. Although the theme of judgment is the dominant theme of the vision, the other components also receive significant attention. Only the idea of conquest/inheritance is not clearly emphasized, but still it is not entirely excluded. The possible reason for this neglect is the fact that the topic is addressed elsewhere in the book in more detail.¹²⁷

¹²⁵Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 204–205; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 844–845.

¹²⁶A similar pattern is used in the *Apoc. Abr.* 30, where the exodus pattern, as a type of end-time event, narrates ten eschatological plagues that are patterned on the exodus-plague tradition, to come on Gentiles. It concludes with a reference to the Sinai theophany.

¹²⁷See, e.g., 5:9–10; 21:1, 7; and 22:5, which focus on the church's triumphant exodus from the present world to the new earth.