

**FAITHFULNESS TO CHRIST AS COVENANT FIDELITY:  
THE PASTORAL PURPOSE BEHIND THE OLD TESTAMENT  
ALLUSIONS IN THE SEVEN MESSAGES OF REVELATION 2–3**

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*Abstract*

The multivalent symbols in the seven messages of Rev 2–3 come from three primary sources: (1) the socio-historical setting of Asia Minor, (2) the opening chapter of Revelation, and (3) Old Testament allusions. It is the last of these that is of interest in this essay. Specifically, the character of these allusions displays a covenantal quality akin to the Israelite pact initiated at Mt. Sinai. While many have sought to demonstrate the covenantal background of the seven messages through shared structure, none has considered the nature of the Old Testament allusions themselves, as well as the paraenetic function they have for the recipients of the message. This article seeks to demonstrate that the Old Testament allusions in Rev 2–3 convey a covenantal character for the pastoral purpose of encouraging the churches to remain faithful to Jesus, their covenant suzerain/king.

*Keywords:* Revelation, covenant, seven messages, Old Testament allusions

*Introduction*

Scholars have demonstrated that the major elements of biblical covenants are similar to Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) suzerain/vassal treaties and land grants.<sup>1</sup> For the covenant participants, it implied a shared reign as viceroys under the king. The people identified themselves with their king (e.g., “the people of YHWH”) as his chosen or elect group. Additionally, the king promised to bless them with prosperity in a lush and fertile land wherein he could dwell with them. In the case of cultic worship, the deity would deign

<sup>1</sup>George E. Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” *BA* 17.3 (1954): 50–76; idem, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Biblical Colloquium, 1955); James Muilenburg, “Form and Structure of the Covenantal Formulations,” *VT* 9.4 (1959): 347–365; Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963). Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum described these two aspects of ANE covenant: “The first type is a diplomatic treaty between a great king or suzerain and client kings or vassals . . . . The second type of treaty involves a grant of property or even a privileged position of a priestly or royal office given as a favour by a god or king” (*Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012], 133).

to dwell with the people, typically in a temple. However, the stipulations of the covenant required obedience on the part of the people. Should they seek after another king (e.g., allegiance to Rome) or participate with another god (e.g., the Roman imperial cult or pagan idolatry) and thus violate the covenant, the king would be forced to take measures of punishment, which often involved removal from the land or even death. This was the relationship that YHWH had with Israel as presented in the Old Testament (OT). It was also the basis of John's pastoral encouragement and call to repentance to the seven new covenant communities of Christians in the book of Revelation.

These covenantal elements abound throughout the OT allusions used in the seven messages of Rev 2–3.<sup>2</sup> They paint a picture of covenantal blessings and curses, as well as display Christ as the churches' suzerain. In a recent article, this author argued that the OT allusions found in the seventh message to Laodicea (Rev 3:14–22) had a very distinct covenantal character to them, emphasizing Jesus's suzerain aspect of rule, the presence of God, and exile as punishment.<sup>3</sup> That was a focused study which demonstrated that the message to Laodicea utilized a covenantal backdrop *through its OT allusions*. It went beyond arguments of covenant structures typically made by those who maintain a covenantal theme in either Revelation as a whole or just the seven messages.<sup>4</sup>

This article is an attempt at a broader approach of that same study, being applied to the other six preceding messages. From such a task, one is able to glean pastoral and paraenetic motives for using covenantal OT allusions—namely, to unleash a rigorous faithfulness to Christ as well as warn against

<sup>2</sup>The generic designation “message” is purposefully used since there is not agreement as to the genre of the messages. Options consist of “letters” patterned after the Greco-Roman style (William Mitchell Ramsay, *The Letters of the Seven Churches of Asia and Their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse* [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904], 35–36; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002], 104–107), something consistent with Greek oratory (John T. Kirby, “The Rhetorical Situations of Revelation 1–3,” *NTS* 34.2 [1988]: 200), “prophetic oracles” based on covenantal lawsuit patterns (Alan S. Bandy, “Patterns of Prophetic Lawsuits in the Oracles to the Seven Churches,” *Neot* 45.2 [2011]: 178–205), a “covenant treaty” (Gordon Campbell, *Reading Revelation: A Thematic Approach*, English ed. [Cambridge: James Clarke, 2012], 280), and most popularly as “imperial edicts” (David E. Aune, “The Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches [Revelation 2–3],” *NTS* 36.2 [1990]: 182–204).

<sup>3</sup>Timothy L. Decker, “‘Live Long in the Land’: The Covenantal Character of the Old Testament Allusions in the Message to Laodicea (Revelation 3:14–22),” *Neot* 48.2 (2014): 417–446.

<sup>4</sup>See James Du Preez, “Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties and the Book of Revelation: Possible Links,” *RSA* 2.2 (1981): 33–43; William H. Shea, “The Covenantal Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches,” *AUSS* 21.1 (1983): 71–84; Kenneth A. Strand, “A Further Note on the Covenantal Form in the Book of Revelation,” *AUSS* 21.3 (1983): 251–64; David E. Graves, “The Influence of Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties on the Seven Prophetic Messages in Revelation with Special Reference to the Message to Smyrna” (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 2008); Bandy, “Patterns of Prophetic Lawsuits.”

the punishments of infidelity. This article will seek to demonstrate that these messages use the backdrop of Israel's covenant to emphasize to these churches a new covenant awareness. Some churches were in violation of their covenantal status in Christ by participating in the Roman imperial cult or other syncretistic problems. Conversely, there were some churches that experienced persecution for their extreme fidelity to Jesus. These needed encouragement and hope. And then there were others on the verge of dissension and in need of a stern warning. Based on ANE covenantal treaties and especially God's covenant with Israel, the prophetic or pastoral emphasis can be deduced by way of covenantal blessings or curses—blessings by way of enjoying the presence of God in the place God has designated (i.e., the Promised Land) or curses, primarily exile from God's presence and place.<sup>5</sup> John masterfully incorporated OT allusions in these messages to convey either the blessing for covenant fidelity to Christ or cursing for covenant breach.

Due to the size of this task and the limitations of space, the depth of investigation will not be as comprehensive as the previous study. There can only be observations of verbal or thematic links without lengthy displays of evidence to confirm the allusion.<sup>6</sup> There will also be a limit to the first

<sup>5</sup>Particularly, these allusions are thematically reminiscent of covenantal stipulations, curses, and blessings as found in the summary of Israel's covenant in Deut 27–30. Concerning the connection between ANE covenants and Deuteronomy, Meredith G. Kline said, "When suzerainty covenants were renewed, new documents were prepared in which the stipulations were brought up to date. Deuteronomy is such a covenant renewal document" ("The Two Tables of the Covenant," *WTJ* 22.2 [1960]: 140). N. T. Wright insisted, "Deuteronomy is the major work of covenant theology" (*The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992], 261). Muilenburg said, "The Book of Deuteronomy is the covenant book κατ' ἐξοχήν." ("Form and Structure," 350). James Du Preez referred to Deuteronomy as "the Covenant book *par excellence*" ("Mission Perspective in the Book of Revelation," *EvQ* 42.3 [1970]: 154).

<sup>6</sup>The methodology for determining and assessing OT allusions espoused here is generally patterned after the works proposed by G. K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, JSNTSup 166 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998); idem, "The Use of the Old Testament in Revelation," in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Text? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994); idem, "A Response to Jon Paulien on the Use of the Old Testament in Revelation," *AUSS* 39.1 (2001): 23–33; as well as Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), xi, 298; and con. the views held by Steve Moyise, "Authorial Intention and the Book of Revelation," *AUSS* 39.1 (2001): 35–40; idem, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, JSNTSup 115 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 153. For a helpful summary of the debate between Beale and Moyise, see Jon Paulien, "Dreading the Whirlwind: Intertextuality and the Use of the Old Testament in Revelation," *AUSS* 39.1 (2001): 5–22. As mentioned in the previous study, the categories of clear allusions, probable allusions, and possible allusions according to Beale, *John's Use*, 62–63, and an adaption of Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and Their*

six messages, since there is no need to plod again through old terrain. Nevertheless, there are enough notable and obvious OT allusions, in addition to some less confident ones in the first six messages, that will help to confirm the hypothesis posed here that the OT allusions draw from covenantal themes and imagery in order to demonstrate a pastoral emphasis for the readers.<sup>7</sup>

*Old Testament Allusions in the Messages  
to Ephesus (Revelation 2:1–7)*

The initial message to Ephesus is rich with imagery and allusions from the OT. It serves as an *inclusio* with the final message to Laodicea in terms of their shared narrative of creation to new creation.<sup>8</sup> A prominent OT image in the first message is the reference to the Garden of Eden (Rev 2:7), “To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”<sup>9</sup> However, there are other subtler references to the Garden of Eden, as well as themes of temple and removal from the presence of God.

At the beginning of the message, Jesus is described as walking among the seven golden lampstands (Rev 2:1). The first mention of these lampstands occurred in Rev 1:12–13, and John provided their interpretation as representing the seven churches (Rev 1:20). This allusion in Rev 2:1 is a dual reference to both the scene in Eden and the tabernacle/temple furniture. Beale noted some significant features of this OT image. First, while the general background is from Exod 25, 37 and Num 8 (in regards to the tabernacle furniture),<sup>10</sup> the direct allusion comes from Zech 4:2, 10: “And he said to

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*Development*, LNTS 93 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 280, will again be the demarcation of allusions.

<sup>7</sup>While some messages are replete with OT imagery, others have very little. To avoid partiality, the messages will be examined in the order they appear in Rev 2–3. In addition, the allusions chosen for analysis appear from the list compiled from Susan Mathews, “A Critical Evaluation of the Allusions to the Old Testament in Apocalypse 1:1–8:5” (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 1987), as well as Beale and Sean McDonough’s list in their chapter “Revelation,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1081–1162. There are also additional allusions for consideration not cited by these two sources.

<sup>8</sup>Though not recognized as an *inclusio*, Matthijs Den Dulk is closest to this assertion (“The Promises of the Conquerors in the Book of Revelation,” *Bib* 87.4 [2006]: 516–517). For the themes of new creation in the message to Laodicea, see Decker, “The Covenantal Character,” and Beale, “The Old Testament Background of Rev 3.14,” *NTS* 42.1 (1996): 133–152.

<sup>9</sup>All Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2001) unless otherwise noted.

<sup>10</sup>Of the significance of the lampstands and its relationship to the theme of covenant, Gordon Campbell said, “The seven lampstands (1:12–13, 20) evoke the lamps and seven-branched candlestick of Tabernacle worship (Exod 25:31, 37) described for Moses in the covenant ratification narrated by Exod 24” (“Findings, Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls: Variations upon the Theme of Covenant Rupture and Restoration in the Book of Revelation,” *WTJ* 66.1 [2004]: 74).

me, ‘What do you see?’ I said, ‘I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it’. . . . For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. ‘These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth.’” Second, the lampstands are a synecdoche “by which part of the temple furniture stands for the whole temple.”<sup>11</sup> Third and quite obvious, the presence of God was located in the tabernacle/temple. Finally, “[T]he lamps on the lampstand in Zech. 4.2–5 are interpreted in 4.6 as representing God’s presence or Spirit, which served to empower Israel (as the lampstand) to finish re-building the temple.”<sup>12</sup> What occurs in this allusion is a reference to an expanding biblical theological theme and a New Testament metaphor that God’s temple is now the church, the new covenant people of God.<sup>13</sup>

In so doing, John connected the concept of God’s presence in the temple and the Garden of Eden together in this message.<sup>14</sup> The first instance of this connection is the surreptitious concept of Jesus as “the one walking in the midst of the golden lampstands” (ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν λυχνιῶν τῶν χρυσοῦν). John already pictured Jesus “in the midst of the lamps” (ἐν μέσῳ τῶν λυχνιῶν) in Rev 1:13. The mention of “walking” in Rev 2:1 is a subtle addition that gives a quiet echo from Gen 3. Considering where Jesus is walking and to what or whom it refers, this is similar to God walking in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve.<sup>15</sup> Genesis 3:8 notes two important points: (1) God *walks* in his garden-temple (“God walking”; τοῦ θεοῦ περιπατοῦντος), and (2) Adam and Eve, having already sinned, are avoiding the presence of God in *the midst* of the tree[s] of the garden (“the presence of the Lord God

<sup>11</sup>Beale, *John’s Use*, 105.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Beale, “Eden, the Temple, and the Church’s Mission in the New Creation,” *JETS* 48.1 (2005): 19–24. For an extended treatment of this theme, see idem, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 201–363.

<sup>14</sup>For the Garden of Eden as a temple or sanctuary, see Gordon J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” in *I Studied Inscriptions Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 19–25; Beale, *The Temple*, 66–80; idem, “Eden, the Temple,” 7–12; Daniel T. Lioy, “The Garden of Eden as a Primordial Temple or Sacred Space for Humankind,” *Conspectus* 10.1 (2010): 25–57; Lifsa Schachter, “The Garden of Eden as God’s First Sanctuary,” *JBQ* 41.2 (2013): 73–77; Richard M. Davidson, “Earth’s First Sanctuary: Genesis 1–3 and Parallel Creation Accounts,” *AUSS* 53.1 (2015): 65–89.

<sup>15</sup>Con. David A. deSilva, who believes that this is simply a statement of close proximity to elicit in the readers of Ephesus a fear that Jesus can and will carry out the threat about to be leveled (“The Strategic Arousal of Emotions in the Apocalypse of John: A Rhetorical-Critical Investigation of the Oracles to the Seven Churches,” *NTS* 54.1 [2008]: 102). This plays into the pastoral purpose of John with this kind of language, although there is disagreement as to the meaning of Jesus walking.

in the midst of the tree of paradise”; προσώπου κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ ξύλου τοῦ παραδείσου). There is even a connection between the tree of life in the Garden and the lampstand within the temple. “[T]he ‘tree of life’ itself was probably the model for the lampstand placed directly outside the ‘Holy of Holies’ in Israel’s temple: it looked like a small tree trunk with seven protruding branches, three on one side and three on the other, and one branch going straight up from the trunk in the middle.”<sup>16</sup> The similarity between this picture in Gen 3:8 and Rev 2:1 implies that “walking” is also a synecdoche referring to God’s presence with his people. However, in Gen 3 Adam and Eve were avoiding his presence, whereas in Rev 2:1 Jesus is still walking in the midst of his people.

This pleasant picture makes the resulting threat all the graver, “[R]epent, . . . If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent” (Rev 2:5). The dual threats “I will come” and “I will remove” is reminiscent of the scene of God coming to dwell/walk among his people and then removing Adam and Eve from the garden-temple for their sin in Gen 3.<sup>17</sup> This threat, clothed in OT wardrobe, produced a connection with the ensemble of Edenic references in the final promise to Ephesus in Rev 2:7. As Gordon Campbell noted, “The threat of removal hanging over the menorah (2.5) suggests the banishment of the man and his wife. By contrast the promise of renewed access to the tree of life in the paradise of God . . . points to its accomplishment in the end-time paradise-city where it is a central element of new covenant fulfillment (22.2, 14, and 19).”<sup>18</sup> While the image of the tree of life and the paradise of God is an obvious allusion in its own right,<sup>19</sup> the surrounding allusions sharpen the image and smooth the edges.<sup>20</sup> The presence of God dwelling with his people in the land, the

<sup>16</sup>Beale, “Eden, the Temple,” 8.

<sup>17</sup>Perhaps there is another similarity to Adam and Eve’s exile from the Garden of Eden to the *east* (Gen 3:24) that corresponds with the geography of Ephesus. With naught but the Aegean Sea to their west and the order of the letters’ location moving north, then east, there is a similar geographical threat to the Ephesians as well.

<sup>18</sup>Campbell, *Reading Revelation*, 276.

<sup>19</sup>However, there are some that take the tree of life to refer to Jesus’s crucifixion or cross. See Charles H. Giblin, *The Book of Revelation: The Open Book of Prophecy*, GNS 34 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 54; Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 42–44. For an argument against this view, see Daniel K. K. Wong, “The Tree of Life in Revelation 2:7,” *BSac* 155.618 (1998): 215–217. Considering the many references to Eden, it seems forced to interpret the “tree of life” as a reference to something other than the tree of life found in God’s paradise in Genesis.

<sup>20</sup>There is a temptation to explain John’s temple and paradisaic imagery through means of socio-historical references of ancient Ephesus. Hemer said, “[T]his Old Testament idea was chosen and applied to the case of Ephesus because it was peculiarly applicable, because in fact it had an analogue in the Artemis cult” (*The Letters*, 42). He drew many parallels of the tree of life and paradise with the Artemisian cult (*ibid.*, 41–52). Aune correctly criticizes this assessment, calling Hemer’s presentation

prominent blessing of Israel's covenant with YHWH, is readily accessible in the message to the Ephesians. When sin or violation of the covenant occurs, exile or removal is the consequence. This threat loomed large upon the ears of the new covenant congregation of Ephesus, should they have ears to hear.

*Old Testament Allusions in the Messages  
to Smyrna (Revelation 2:8–11)*

In contrast to the message of Ephesus, that of Smyrna has very few OT images or allusions. It is also the shortest of the seven messages. However, the allusions that do appear still center upon covenantal features between YHWH and Israel. The first is only a possible allusion found in Rev 2:10 in the prediction “for ten days you will have tribulation,” perhaps evoking Daniel’s ten-day food test in Dan 1:12–15.<sup>21</sup> The allusion would be fitting considering that the meat offered to idols exists in both historical contexts. It has long been thought that Daniel deemed such an act of mastication as participation in the pagan cult and therefore a clear violation of Israel’s covenant treaty (Dan 1:8).<sup>22</sup> This

“unconvincing” and a “manipulation of language” (see Aune’s “Forward” in *ibid.*, xxi). Historians commonly acknowledge that the Roman imperial cult had a large influence in Ephesus. For example, see Steven J. Friesen, “The Cult of the Roman Emperors in Ephesus Temple Wardens, City Titles, and the Interpretation of the Revelation of John,” in *Ephesos, Metropolis of Asia: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Its Archaeology, Religion, and Culture* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 229–250; Giancarlo Biguzzi, “Ephesus, Its Artemision, Its Temple to the Flavian Emperors, and Idolatry in Revelation,” *NovT* 40.3 (1998): 276–290; K. Cukrowski, “The Influence of the Emperor Cult on the Book of Revelation,” *ResQ* 45.1 (2003): 51–64. For an extended treatment on Ephesus and its imperial cult, see Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia, and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

<sup>21</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 242–243; Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 122. Con. those whose focus is less on OT allusions and more on socio-historical imagery and ancient symbolism. For example, Edmondo F. Lupieri said, “Inasmuch as the number ‘ten’ is also used to designate a totality, it follows that the period in question, regardless of whether it is short or long, represents the whole of the persecution” (*A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, trans. Maria Poggi Johnson and Adam Kamesar [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006], 119; emphasis added). In her study, Mathews denies that this is an OT allusion at all, in “A Critical Evaluation,” 189–190. Therefore, this allusion is classified as “possible.”

<sup>22</sup>Theodoret of Cyrus said, “For those who love God do not seek after the God of all in just one place, but even in the midst of this misfortune they worshiped as if in the house of the Creator. In that place there are many wondrous moments to be found. For having been reared on the teachings of the Jews and having learned the customary service to God, they now were dwelling in a foreign land and were being forced into slavery exactly at the prime of their life. They were forced to abide under the foreign customs. But having seen the Babylonians offer defiled meat to the idols and the polluted libations at the temple, they took heed and, neglecting their own safety, rejected the king’s banquet, beseeching the chief eunuch to allow them to be excused from partaking of the king’s food” (*Commentary on Daniel*, 1.8), as quoted in Kenneth

resonates harmoniously with Revelation's theme of eating meat offered to idols (Rev 2:14, 20).<sup>23</sup> Daniel exhibited extreme fidelity to YHWH in the midst of foreign cultic pressure. Considering that John calls the opponents to the Christians in Smyrna "Jews" who "are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (Rev 2:9), this is an ironic OT allusion picturing the local Jews of Smyrna as the pagan influences.<sup>24</sup>

This irony continues into Rev 2:10c–11, commanding faithfulness to the point of *death* upon which a crown of *life* is the reward and that the conqueror not be hurt by the second *death*.<sup>25</sup> The second allusion, the mention of "second death" in Rev 2:11, is questionable, as it relies upon thematic rather than verbal similarities. Some have cited the Targums to ascertain a literary source.<sup>26</sup> Beasley-Murray similarly agreed that the ancient Jews were familiar with the concept (though not the term) as an idea of eternal doom and punishment. He concluded, "The pertinence of the thought in verse 11 is clear: the church of Smyrna faces a period of trial in which some shall surely die. But to die under the wrath of man is small compared with the prospect of suffering the judgment of God."<sup>27</sup> Dulk agreed with the Targumic sources, but posited an alternate theory about the meaning of "second death" that continues the theme of expulsion from the Garden of Eden in the message to Ephesus.

[N]otions associated with creation and fall are close at hand if the subject is death and whether one will be harmed by it or not. The entrance of death into biblical history is found in Gen 2,17, where it is said of the "tree of the

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Stevenson and Michael Glerup, eds., *Ezekiel, Daniel*, ACCS OT 13 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 158–159.

<sup>23</sup>Ben Witherington III has made a strong case for the use of the word εἰδωλόθυτον as not just a reference to eating meat sacrificed to idols but "meat sacrificed to and eaten in the presence of an idol, or in the temple precincts" ("Not So Idle Thoughts about *Eidolothuton*," *TynBul* 44.2 [1993]: 237; emphasis added). Should Christians be accused of such a thing, this would be a clear violation and infidelity to the terms of the covenant.

<sup>24</sup>Schüssler Fiorenza helpfully explained the nature of the historical predicament for Jewish Christians: "Jewish Christians like John were less and less able to claim their political privileges . . . of practicing their religion in any part of the Roman empire, but . . . were exempted from obligations from military service as well as giving obeisance to the Roman religion. Under the Flavians, however, the situation of the Jewish people became more precarious . . . . If Jews were excluded from the synagogue because they were confessing Christians, such Jews could no longer claim the protection granted by Roman law to Judaism" (*Revelation: Vision of a Just World* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991], 54–55).

<sup>25</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 244.

<sup>26</sup>Many commentators suggest Tg. Isa. 65:15; Tg. Jer. 51:39, 47; and Tg. Deut. 33:6. See David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, WBC 52a (Waco, TX: Word, 1997), 168; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 245n65; Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, BNTC 19 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 57.

<sup>27</sup>George R. Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation: Based on the Revised Standard Version*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 83.

knowledge of good and evil” that “in the day that you eat of it you shall die”. Once the first human couple has eaten, however, they do not literally die that same day but are cursed and driven out of Eden. It can be little more than a suspicion in the absence of any clear evidence, but it seems possible John connected the notion of first and second death with the strange, partial death of the first human couple . . . . This implies the first death preceded living in this world. Accordingly, this first death could be the death of Gen 2,17 that Adam and Eve died upon entrance into the world (as opposed to Eden).<sup>28</sup>

While Dulk is probably correct that such a conjecture is “little more than a suspicion,” it does fit with his theory that the blessings in the seven messages are a progression of the OT’s redemptive-historical narrative of God’s people.<sup>29</sup> One can only observe the full import of the “second death” in its later fulfillment in Rev 20:6, 14, and 21:8. But that is not the concern of this article at present.

The lack of OT imagery in the message to Smyrna is not unexpected. Many question the presence of the two allusions above. In keeping with the covenantal background, there would be little reason to force the issue if the Christians in Smyrna were not in covenant violation. Quite the opposite; they were remaining faithful to Jesus in the midst of persecution. While Jesus did not promise them an immediate respite from their anguish, he reminded them of the full and final reward of the covenant yet to take place in its ultimate consummation.

*Old Testament Allusions in the Message  
to Pergamum (Revelation 2:12–17)*

While there are numerous local and historical references in the message to Pergamum (Satan’s throne, the death of Antipas, participation in idolatry, and the Nicolaitans), John also used OT imagery in the background to convey the church’s problems. This congregation is the ideal example of one that has acquiesced to the Roman cultic influences around them. The church at Pergamum not only gave an ear to the enigmatic Nicolaitans, they also allowed their teachings to infiltrate the church with “some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans” (Rev 2:15).<sup>30</sup> John likened such a grievous offense to Israel’s affiliation with Balaam found in Num 22–25 and 31. They were warned twice, implicitly and explicitly, that the sword would follow such treason to the covenant (Rev 2:12, 16), which happened to be the same method of Balaam’s execution (Num 31:8).

<sup>28</sup>Dulk, “Promises of the Conquerors,” 517. Dulk cited Frg. Tg. P (MS Paris 110) Deut 33:6, “Let Reuben live in this world and die not in the second death in which death the wicked die in the world to come.” Campbell’s take on this is slightly different in that the idea of life and death is a reference to the exodus event and even the concept of Joseph “coming back from death to life” (*Reading Revelation*, 276).

<sup>29</sup>For a similar reading of the seven messages, see *ibid.*, 275–279.

<sup>30</sup>According to Schüssler Fiorenza, the Nicolaitans were a group of Christians, who syncretized with the Roman pagan cults (*The Book of Revelation*, 116–117).

Israel's exodus from Egypt is the archetypal story for redemption and covenantal themes, such as a king over his vassals, as well as the journey from wilderness to the promised land. On that journey to the land, Israel came upon king Balak and the Moabites. Fearing the nation of Israel and her mighty God, Balak commissioned Balaam the diviner to curse the people in a way directly contrary to the covenant with Abraham (cf. Num 22:6, recalled again in 24:9, with Gen 12:2–3). However, God intervened and forced Balaam to bless Israel in the presence of the Moabite king. Though it was not plainly detailed, Balaam apparently found a way around God's initial intervention and provided Balak with advice that would cause Israel to break covenant with YHWH and curse themselves (Num 31:16). The sin was fornication, both literal with the women of Moab and metaphorical with the gods of Moab (Num 25:1–3).<sup>31</sup> As punishment, a plague killed 24,000 men (Num 25:9). The message is loud and clear: Jesus would consider assimilation or even participation with the pagan cults to be a violation of the covenant pact. Allowing groups like the Nicolaitans or a prophet like Balaam to influence the church into idolatry only leads to severe repercussions, according to the covenant terms.

If that was all of the OT imagery, such would suffice for a link with the covenantal character. However, the conquerors' rewards in Rev 2:17 contain one certain OT allusion ("manna")<sup>32</sup> and two other possibilities ("I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone.") that further relate to the Israelites' wilderness-wandering. The manna was the heavenly bread provided by God during the exodus to sustain the Israelites while they roamed in the wilderness for forty years.<sup>33</sup> According to Exod 16:35, it directly related to the promised land.<sup>34</sup> The manna's sole purpose was to sustain the people

<sup>31</sup>This seems to indicate that the mention of *πορνείω* in Rev 2:14 is both literal and metaphorical, so *ibid.*, 116. However, many opt for one view or the other. For literal sexual promiscuity, see Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, 85–87; Panayotis Coutsoumpos, "The Social Implications of Idolatry in Revelation 2:14: Christ or Caesar?" *BTB* 27.1 (1997): 25–26; Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 77. For the metaphorical view typically picturing idolatry in the LXX, see Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 188; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 250; Boxall, *Revelation of Saint John*, 60; James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 91.

<sup>32</sup>Stephen S. Smalley agreed, saying, "The identity of the manna is fairly straightforward" (*The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005], 70). Of course, dealing in certainties is a dangerous enterprise where allusions in Revelation are concerned. For example, Osborne believes that the reference to "hidden manna" is just as elusive as the "white stone," though he admitted that many of the proposed interpretations for the manna are not exclusive to one another, but probably inclusive of each other (*Revelation*, 148).

<sup>33</sup>Beale poses a natural link to the manna imagery due to the Balaam reference, which also took place in the forty-year wilderness period (*The Book of Revelation*, 252).

<sup>34</sup>"The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan."

of God *until* they reached paradise.<sup>35</sup> In what way the manna is “hidden” is uncertain.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the reference to manna is certainly plain.

The conquerors’ prize of a “white stone” and a “new name” is exponentially more elusive than the “hidden manna.”<sup>37</sup> Rodney Thomas summarized the dilemma, “The problem is not, as is often the case, that there is nothing with which to relate this imagery, it is the fact that there are such a great number of contemporary practices that could have possibly contributed to John’s choice to make use of this expression.”<sup>38</sup> Yet, considering the rarity of the term “stone” (ψῆφος) in the Greek OT and NT, it would appear that John expected his audience had the ability to ascertain its meaning.<sup>39</sup> Such a problem might indicate that, all things being equal, the easiest explanation is the preferred one.

Beale offered a simple understanding of the white stones in relation to the hidden manna, saying, “The ‘white stone’ also enforces the idea of the ‘manna’ as a heavenly reward, since the OT describes the heavenly manna as resembling white bdellium stones (cf. Exod. 16:31 and Num. 11:7).”<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup>Craig S. Keener went so far as to say, “[T]he manna probably symbolizes especially the new exodus and God’s promise of eternal sustenance without labor” (*Revelation*, NIVAC [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000], 126).

<sup>36</sup>Stefanovic, citing 2 Bar 29:8 and Sib. Or. 7:149, understood the hidden manna as a reference to Jewish tradition of the manna placed in the ark of the covenant and hidden that would later be recovered and distributed by the Messiah as the “bread of the angels” from Ps 78:25 in order to highlight the “contrast to eating the food sacrificed to idols” (*Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 127). Beale opts for an eschatological understanding for “hidden” in the sense that it will be revealed at the end (*The Book of Revelation*, 252). This is based on his earlier assessment that the Greek of Revelation has Semitic influences (see Kenneth G. C. Newport, “The Use of *EK* in Revelation: Evidence of Semitic Influence,” *AUSS* 24.3 [1986]: 223–230; idem, “Semitic Influence in Revelation: Some Further Evidence,” *AUSS* 25.3 [1987]: 249–256). Newport argued, “In the context of the passage and in the light of the possible Semitic influence, the verb might better be translated ‘stored up’” (“Some Greek Words with Hebrew Meanings in the Book of Revelation,” *AUSS* 26.1 [1988]: 31). Lupieri opted for a spiritual understanding wherein the manna “remained hidden from fleshly Israel” (*Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 121). Wong argued for a Christological understanding of Jesus as the manna (“The Hidden Manna and the White Stone in Revelation 2:17,” *BSac* 155.619 [1998]: 348–349). Aune provides even further options (*Revelation 1–5*, 189).

<sup>37</sup>For a comprehensive list of interpretations for the “white stone” as a symbol, see Wong, “The Hidden Manna,” 349–353; Hemer, *The Letters*, 96–104; Rodney Thomas, “Magical Motifs in the Book of Revelation” (PhD diss., University of Durham, 2007), 187–208. Of these interpretations Osborne conceded pessimistically, “It is impossible to know for certain which of these is the best source for the imagery” (*Revelation*, 149).

<sup>38</sup>Thomas, “Magical Motifs,” 187.

<sup>39</sup>Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: MacMillan, 1911), 39; Thomas, “Magical Motifs,” 195.

<sup>40</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 253. See also David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Fort Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 110. G. B. Caird also connected the manna with the white stone, interpreting the former

Chilton further connected the “new name” with both the “white stone” and thus the “hidden manna” in that two onyx stones were placed on the High Priest’s shoulders (Exod 28:9–12), upon which the name of the tribes of Israel were written. Conceding that these onyx stones were black, he sees this as a combination of OT imagery, where the two stones of bdellium and onyx join together in God’s paradisaal garden. “The connecting link here is the bdellium: it is associated in Genesis 2:12 with *onyx*, and in Numbers 11:7 with *manna*. Together, they speak of the restoration of Eden in the blessings of salvation.”<sup>41</sup>

The “new name” (ὄνομα καινόν) written on the stone is a loaded symbol that is later revealed in Rev 3:12 to be “the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.” Beale deduced,

Separate meanings are not to be assigned to each of these names. They all refer to the intimate eschatological presence of God and Christ with his people, as expressed most clearly by [Rev] 22:3–4 . . . Therefore, to receive the “new name” is to receive Jesus’ victorious, kingly “name . . . no one knows except himself” (19:12–16) . . . [B]elievers’ reception of this name represents their final reward of consummate identification and unity with the intimate, end-time presence and power of Christ in his kingdom . . . [Also] the “new name” is a mark of genuine membership in the community of the redeemed, without which entry into the eternal “city of God” is impossible.<sup>42</sup>

He confirmed this conclusion by noting that the source for the “new name” is Isa 62:2 and 65:15, where Israel will be called by a “new name” (ὄνομα καινόν).<sup>43</sup> The immediate context of Isa 62:2 demonstrates the results of Israel’s new name: kingly terminology (Isa 62:3), as well as marriage imagery and prosperity in the land (Isa 62:4). These are strong ANE covenantal concepts carried over to the related theme of manna. Similarly, in the immediate context of Isa 65:15, there is talk of dwelling in the land (Isa 65:9). As observed in the Laodicean message, there is a strong relationship between dwelling in the land and new creation (Isa 65:16–17).<sup>44</sup> These prophecies probably came to John’s mind with the reference to “sword,”<sup>45</sup> which was used

in reference to the messianic banquet and feasting on the heavenly bread/manna with the white stone as a “Conqueror’s ticket of admission to the heavenly banquet” (*The Revelation of Saint John*, BNTC 19 [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993], 42).

<sup>41</sup>Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 110.

<sup>42</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 253–255. Rev 22:3–4 says, “No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.”

<sup>43</sup>See also E. W. Hengstenberg, *The Revelation of St John: Expounded for Those Who Search the Scriptures*, trans. Patrick Fairbairn (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1851), 153; Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 40–41.

<sup>44</sup>See Beale, “Old Testament Background of Rev 3.14.”

<sup>45</sup>Du Preez connects the mention of swords with ANE vassal treaties, saying, “According to the old vassal treaties the great king had the right to bring a disloyal vassal to his senses, if need be with military force . . . Lev. 26:25: ‘I will send out the sword against you, to avenge the Covenant’ (The Jerusalem Bible). Now in Rev. 2:16 a

twice in this message (Rev 2:12, 16), as well as in Isa 65:12, “I will destine you to the sword” referring to those who forsake God in contrast to the righteous servants who possess the land and blessings of God (Isa 65:9–12).<sup>46</sup>

The cumulative result of all of these allusions is that they share common features with respect to ANE covenants. The blessing of the promised land and presence of God along with the corporate vassal rule promised to the overcomers are highly consistent with the features and function of ANE covenants. However, it was not the curses of the covenant that the OT allusions highlighted here, but rather the blessings. Pastorally, it seems John is positively encouraging repentance through the blessing of reward rather than fear of punishment.

*Old Testament Allusions in the Message  
to Thyatira (Revelation 2:18–29)*

Quite in line with the previous message’s use of the negative figure Balaam, notorious for his schemes against Israel, John epitomizes covenant fissure with the self-proclaimed “prophetess” at the church at Thyatira as the nefarious queen Jezebel, the wife to king Ahab of Israel.<sup>47</sup> In the OT, Jezebel was daughter of the king of the Sidonians and led Israel into the worship of Baal (1 Kgs 16:31). The correspondence between Israel’s Baal worship and Thyatira compromising with the Roman imperial cults could not be more appropriate. Like the previous message to Pergamum, the message to Thyatira also utilizes OT imagery to preach against religious syncretism.<sup>48</sup>

Jezebel’s affiliation and loyalty to the god Baal is infamous. Her influence not only over King Ahab but also the rest of Israel is a fitting match as John’s

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similar warning is issued by the Great King ‘with the sharp, two-edged sword’, against the unfaithful members of his vassal people in Pergamum” (“Vassal Treaties,” 39).

<sup>46</sup>However, Beale linked “sword” not with Isa 65:12, the most likely considering its immediate context, but with “the rod of his mouth” in Isa 11:4 similar to the “sword of my mouth” in Rev 2:16 as well as Isa 49:2: “he made my mouth like a sharp sword” (*The Book of Revelation*, 256). It is a strong possibility that all three references were in mind.

<sup>47</sup>There is no certainty for the identity of “Jezebel” in Rev 2:20–23. There are, however, various ways to describe her, her influence, her methods, and her teachings. In light of the mention of “her children” in Rev 2:23, Schüssler Fiorenza believes Jezebel to be the head of a prophetic school (*The Book of Revelation*, 144–145). Aune claims she is John’s “chief opponent” in this prophetic rivalry (*Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008], 178). Paul B. Duff argued that Jezebel, far from Christian, used witchcraft to fool the churches in Asia minor (“‘I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve’: Witchcraft Accusations and the Fiery-Eyed Son of God in Rev 2.18–23,” *NTS* 43.1 [1997]: 116–133). Nestor Paulo Friedrich refers to this prophetess as “a local version of the prostitute Babylon (Rev. 17–18).” See “Adapt or Resist? A Socio-Political Reading of Revelation 2.18–29,” *JSNT* 25.2 (2002): 203.

<sup>48</sup>Domingo Muñoz León, “El Culto Imperial En El Apocalipsis,” *RevistB* 57.4 (1995): 223–230.

prophetic rival. The climax of the Elijah narratives is the showdown between the single prophet of YHWH versus Jezebel's 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18). Yet, even after this major victory, Elijah still feared the wrath of Jezebel. Quite ironically, though he was faithful to the covenant, he instead is the one fleeing to the *wilderness* south of Judah (1 Kgs 19:2–4). However, Elijah foretold Jezebel's doom, saying she would die within the walls of Jezreel and her body eaten by dogs (1 Kgs 21:23).<sup>49</sup> Her husband, Ahab, was said to be burned up and his progeny cut off from Israel (1 Kgs 21:21).<sup>50</sup>

To those who accompany “Jezebel” in her sexual immorality, Jesus also accused them of adultery (Rev 2:22). Marital infidelity is a customary OT expression of Israel's unfaithfulness to YHWH, with the backdrop of a covenantal marriage with YHWH as the husband and Israel as the wife (cf. Isa 54:6; Ezek 16:8–16).<sup>51</sup> Revelation 2:23 further employs other routine OT sayings. First, considering the context of threats in Rev 2:22–23a, the phrase “all the churches will know that I am he” (γνώσονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι) is a stock expression of retribution used once in Isa 49:23 and *thirty* times in Ezekiel, the closest being Ezek 7:6 (LXX): “you will know that I am the LORD who strikes” (ἐπιγνώσῃ διότι ἐγὼ εἰμι κύριος ὁ τύπτων). Other occasions of this phrase in Ezekiel consist of punishment by exile, “I will bring them out of the land . . . but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD” (Ezek 20:38; see also 25:4–5, 7) or promise of covenantal restoration, “My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD . . . when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore” (Ezek 37:28; see also 28:26; 36:10–11). Lastly, the reference to Jesus searching “mind and heart” is similar to “God's knowledge of ‘kidneys and hearts’ [as] a stock idea throughout biblical literature.”<sup>52</sup> This even strikes a chord with Jer 17:10, “I the LORD search the heart and test

<sup>49</sup>Such a punishment probably likens Jezebel to meat torn by beasts in the field (thus exiled outside of the walls) and must be given to the dogs, according to Exod 22:30–31. Another possible reference is to the exodus event in the final plague, where “not a dog shall growl against my people,” indicating that Jezebel had truly been cut off from the people she had come to join (Exod 11:7). There is also a hint of remnant theology in Exod 11:7 where “the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.”

<sup>50</sup>This language of “cut off” relates heavily to covenantal terminology. Positively, it is the verb of action to “cut covenants” (e.g., Gen 15:18; 21:27, 32). Negatively, it is the punishment for breaching the covenant. For example, uncircumcised males were to be “cut off from his people” (Gen 17:14). For the Feast of Unleavened Bread, eating leaven would result in “that person shall be cut off from Israel” (Exod 12:15) and “cut off from the congregation of Israel” (Exod 12:19). This use, save three instances, is the consistent threat for disobedience to the Law in Leviticus leveled seventeen times. In each case, the covenant violator is cut off from the land, the people, or the presence of God.

<sup>51</sup>For example, see Raymond C. Ortlund Jr, *God's Unfaithful Wife: A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Adultery*, NSBT 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

<sup>52</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 264.

the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds,” where both minds/hearts are known and deeds are repaid, as in Rev 2:23, “Who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.”<sup>53</sup>

Revelation 2:24 also reverberates with the conflict between Elijah and the prophets of Baal under the leadership of Jezebel (1 Kgs 16–21). Pollard pointed out a remnant theology evoked in the Elijah cycles that appears in Rev 2:24 with the mention of τοῖς λοιποῖς (“the rest/remaining” or “the remnant”) saying,

The λοιπός in 2:24 represents the future continuity of the church after the judgment promised upon Jezebel and her followers in 2:22–23 . . . . In Thyatira, separation is necessary because the church consists not only of the remnant, but also of Jezebel, her followers, and her children . . . . Such separation is inherent in the affirmation of the remnant.<sup>54</sup>

This is a useful parallel with the remnant theology seen with Elijah, who incorrectly believed himself to be the sole worshipper of YHWH (1 Kgs 18:4, 22; 19:10). The creation of this remnant was their affinity for refusing idol worship, much in the same way “the rest/remnant” of Rev 2:24 had refused “Jezebel’s” teachings of pagan integration.<sup>55</sup> Talbert summarized well the pastoral nature here in this message saying, “The issue was simple for John: either assimilation to pagan culture with its non-Christian basis or non-assimilation.”<sup>56</sup>

An obvious OT allusion and near quotation was the use of Ps 2:8–9 in Rev 2:26–27.

<sup>53</sup>Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 133, 135.

<sup>54</sup>Leslie N. Pollard, “The Function of Λοῖπος in the Letter to Thyatira,” *AUSS* 46.1 (2008): 51, 54.

<sup>55</sup>Pollard said, “[T]he remnant in Thyatira represent determined resistance to doctrinal deviation” (ibid., 57).

<sup>56</sup>Charles H. Talbert, *The Apocalypse: A Reading of the Revelation of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 20. J. Nelson Kraybill similarly summarized, “Rome did not demand exclusive allegiance to the emperor or to the gods. As long as Roman subjects showed due reverence for the gods and the emperors, they were free to also worship Jesus or almost any other deity. But most Christians did not permit such reciprocity within their ranks. For them there was ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all’ (Eph. 4:5–6). That radical exclusivity set the stage for a showdown with the empire” (*Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010], 62). DeSilva used the rhetorical analysis of *pathos* to reach a similar conclusion, “The juxtaposition of arousing fear in connection with following Jezebel’s teaching and confidence in connection with distance from the same, of course, clearly serves the rhetorical goal of distancing the Christians in Thyatira from this prophetess, even potentially motivating them to put an end to her teaching within the congregation” (“Strategic Arousal of Emotions,” 103–104).

**Table 1.** Verbal Similarities of Psalm 2:8–9 with Revelation 2:26–27

Psalm 2:8–9 (ESV; LXX)	Revelation 2:26–27 (ESV)
<p>“Ask of me, and <b>I will make the nations</b> your heritage (δώσω σοι ἔθνη τὴν κληρονομίαν σου), and the ends of the earth your possession. <b>You shall break them with a rod of iron</b> (ποιμανεῖς αὐτούς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ) <b>and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel</b> (ὡς σκεῦος κεραμέως συντρίψεις αὐτούς).”</p>	<p>“The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him <b>I will give authority over the nations</b> (δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν), and <b>he will rule them with a rod of iron</b> (ποιμανεῖς αὐτούς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ), <b>as when earthen pots are broken in pieces</b> (ὡς τὰ σκεῦη τὰ κεραμικὰ συντρίβεται), even as I myself have received authority from my Father.”</p>

Note: Bolded portions represent an exact verbal match. Underlined portions are thematic parallels.

<sup>4</sup>For insight on the very strange rendering of ποιμανεῖς for the Hebrew word מַשְׁפִּיט, see Steve Moyise, “The Psalms in the Book of Revelation,” in *The Psalms in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise and M. J. J. Menken (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 233–234. Also see n62 below.

Taking his cues from Ps 2:7, Jesus bears the title “Son of God” only here in Rev 2:18.<sup>57</sup> This messianic notion promised to the “King on Zion” is extended or universalized to all those who conquer and persevere until the end.<sup>58</sup> They receive the right to take part in the messianic blessing of dominion or rule much like vassals (cf. Rev 20:6; 22:5). Jesus promises a similar blessing in Rev 3:21, also in line with universalization.<sup>59</sup>

There is a further link with another OT concept of “the morning star” (τὸν ἄστῆρα τὸν πρωῒνόν) in Rev 2:28. Considering Jesus’s claim to be “the bright morning star” (ὁ ἄστηρ ὁ λαμπρὸς ὁ πρωῒνός) just after referring to himself as “the root and the descendant of David” in Rev 22:16,<sup>60</sup> there seems to be further universalizing of the Davidic reign of Jesus conferred to the victors in Rev 2.<sup>61</sup> There are verbal, structural, and thematic links between

<sup>57</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 267.

<sup>58</sup>The author of Revelation does use Ps 2:9 messianically in Rev 12:5 and 19:15.

<sup>59</sup>Joseph L. Trafton, *Reading Revelation: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 53.

<sup>60</sup>Beale takes these Davidic and messianic references to Jesus back to Isa 11 and 60. Isa 11:1, 10 speaks of a “shoot from the stump of Jesse, a branch from his roots” as well as a “root of Jesse.” Isa 60:1–3 says “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you . . . And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness [λαμπρότητι] of your rising.” See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1146–1147.

<sup>61</sup>Aune cogently pointed out that the reward in Rev 2:28 is about “receiving” the morning star rather than “being” the morning star. Of this distinction he said,

Ps 2:8–9 and Num 24:17 (from the Balaam narratives), “A star [ἄστρον] shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter [ὑψῆ]”<sup>62</sup> shall rise out of Israel,” which may be the source for “the morning star” in Rev 2:28. Just as the Messiah will “break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces” in Ps 2:8, so also will he “crush the forehead [LXX “princes”] of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth” (Num 24:17c).<sup>63</sup> Beale explained the use of “morning” as a reference to an inaugurated messianic reign also inspired from Num 24:17, “A star will arise” (ἀνατελεῖ ἄστρον) where the verb is sometimes a reference to the morning sunrise or dawn.<sup>64</sup>

In conclusion, the allusion to Ps 2:8–9 in Rev 2:26–27 has verbal, thematic, and structural links with the allusion to Num 24:17 in Rev 2:28. These allusions work together in tandem to convey a major ANE covenantal theme: the overcomers reign with the Messiah as his vassals, ruling over the land. This corporate rule sees its messianic culmination in new creation with Jesus (cf. Rev 19:15; 22:16). With the backdrop of the Jezebel figure, there is a warning and threat for covenant violation. It could even be that the mention of dogs outside of the land in the new creation (Rev 22:15) is an intratextual link to the Jezebel narrative from Rev 2, further warning these Christians of the consequences of covenant fissure. However, like the message to Pergamum, John pastorally calls this church back from its participation with the Roman imperial cult with positive notions of covenantal blessings of a shared reign with the Messiah as his vassals.

*Old Testament Allusions in the Message  
to Sardis (Revelation 3:1–6)*

The situation and thus the message to Sardis are the most akin to Laodicea.<sup>65</sup> They have a reputation of life, though they are in actuality dead (Rev 3:1). There is no commendation save the possible “I know your works” (Rev 3:1); however, that could imply negative connotations just as easily as positive ones. Nevertheless, there are a few Christians in Sardis that Jesus found worthy because they have not violated the covenant pact (Rev 3:4).

The first possible OT allusion is the threat of Jesus coming “like a thief” (Rev 3:3) in an unknown hour.<sup>66</sup> The initial reaction is to seek out a parallel

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“The gift of the morning star must refer to the fact that the exalted Christ shares his messianic status with the believer who conquers” (*Revelation 1–5*, 212).

<sup>62</sup>The LXX translated this word as simply ἄνθρωπος (“man”). However, Ps 2:9 translated ὑψῆ (the same word as in Num 24:17) as ἐν ῥάβδῳ (“with a rod/scepter”) which does appear in Rev 2:27.

<sup>63</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 268.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 269.

<sup>65</sup>Decker, “The Covenantal Character,” 420.

<sup>66</sup>Rev 16:15 uses this same imagery, along with similar concepts of nakedness and clothing seen from the Laodicean message: “Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”

from the synoptic Gospel accounts, such as the parables of the thief and the watching servants (Matt 24:42–44 and Luke 12:35–40).<sup>67</sup> Equally, the use of a thief in the night is an apocalyptic image that is unique to Christianity.<sup>68</sup> Further, Stanley states, “The image of Christ coming ‘like a thief in the night’ works by playing *on a common stock of cultural lore*.”<sup>69</sup> In other words, the image is a common enough one that it does not necessarily have to reach back to the parables of the synoptic accounts to gain its significance.

Nevertheless, there may be a link further back in the biblical narrative right out of one of Israel’s covenantal documents—Exod 22:2–3, which reads, “If a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him, but if the sun has risen on him, there shall be bloodguilt for him. He shall surely pay. If he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.” The law in Exod 22:2 assumed a thief would come in the evening. It instructs that the thief caught stealing at night could be killed with impunity. According to Exod 22:3, however, the opposite was true during the daytime.<sup>70</sup> The contextual or thematic links between Exod 22 and Rev 3:3 are stronger than the synoptic parables of Matt 24 and Luke 12. Paul Penley insisted,

One *context* is about waking up and the other about staying awake (stated explicitly in Mt. 24.42)—repentance versus readiness again. The distinction is minimal, but it nevertheless shows the difference between disciples who need to maintain their watchfulness (i.e. readiness) and a complacent church that needs to change her actions and remove her soiled garments (i.e. repentance).<sup>71</sup>

Compare this with the context of Exod 22 and Rev 3 and the parallels are much closer. Both passages assume the thief is breaking in at night while the victims are asleep (i.e., Jer 49:9 and Obad 1:5). And the common form in these seven messages to give a command and warning is the equivalent of a call for repentance. Although the clarification for a daytime robbery in Exod 22:3 would be more appropriate with Matthew and Luke’s theme of watchfulness, the command (“Wake up”) and warning (“If you will not wake up”) of Rev 3:2–3 is the call for repentance of the church at Sardis. Thus, Rev 3

<sup>67</sup>See Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 92–117, originally published as “Synoptic Parousia Parables and the Apocalypse,” *NTS* 23.2 (1977): 162–176; idem, “Synoptic Parousia Parables Again,” *NTS* 29.1 (1983): 129–134. Also see Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 221–222. However, Paul T. Penley argued that there is a weak contextual link with the synoptic parables from Matthew and Luke, though he admits the strong verbal affinity (*The Common Tradition Behind Synoptic Sayings of Judgment and John’s Apocalypse: An Oral Interpretive Tradition of Old Testament Prophetic Material* [New York: T&T Clark, 2010], 8–10). He explained the verbal similarities on the grounds of Sardis’s history of its “impregnable acropolis” being “sacked by a surprise attack at night.” This, Penley says, weakens the verbal links but does not discount it altogether.

<sup>68</sup>Christopher D. Stanley, “Who’s Afraid of a Thief in the Night?,” *NTS* 48.4 (2002): 468.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 485; emphasis added.

<sup>70</sup>This was the law in Greco-Roman custom as well. See *ibid.*, 475.

<sup>71</sup>Penley, *Synoptic Sayings of Judgment*, 10.

is in line with wakefulness (or repentance) as in Exod 22 rather than the exhortation of watchfulness in Matthew and Luke.<sup>72</sup>

Jeremiah eventually turned this law of Exod 22 into a simile for Israel in Jer 2:26a, “As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed.” This was set in the context of Israel’s idolatry (Jer 2:11–37). There is yet a further connection in Jer 2, Exod 22, and the message to Sardis. The “soiled garments” in Rev 3:4 is similar to the idolatry imaged: “Also on your skirts is found the lifeblood of the guiltless poor” (Jer 2:34).<sup>73</sup> This verse in Jer 2 continues to make links back to Exod 22 and the picture of robbery saying, “guiltless poor; [yet] you did not find them breaking in.”<sup>74</sup> From soiled garments and possible reference to child sacrifice to thieves breaking in, the links between Exod 22 and Jer 2 demonstrate a clear covenant violation, which the message to Sardis bears out.<sup>75</sup> The irony in Revelation is that Jesus assumes the role of thief in order to punish the wayward church of Sardis.

The latter two allusions are far more recognizable. Beale took the imagery of “they will walk with me in white [garments]” (περιπατήσουσιν μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς) back to Dan 11 and 12.<sup>76</sup> This is now the second time the verb “walk” has been used in Revelation, both regarding the presence of Jesus with his people. The first (Rev 2:1) was a probable reference to the story of God walking in the Garden of Eden (see above). A similar allusion is also possible here since both Rev 3:4–5 and Gen 3 center around themes of walking in fellowship (presence of God) *and* the provision of clothing from God, as with Adam and Eve. However, Beale’s focus was on the source of the “white garments.” First, Dan 11:35 says the “wise” who “know their God” (Dan 11:32–33) will stumble *in order* to be refined and “made white” (Dan 11:35; כִּי־לֵלִי; LXX ἀποκαλυφθῆναι). These “wise” ones are explicitly set in opposition to “those who forsake *the holy covenant*” (Dan 11:30).<sup>77</sup> They are in league with a king that will “profane the temple,” “take away the regular

<sup>72</sup>Nevertheless, one cannot deny the parallel of the “unknown hour” (cf. Matt 24:44; Luke 12:39–40; and Rev 3:3).

<sup>73</sup>This is perhaps a reference to child sacrifices offered to Molech, later mentioned in Jer 32:35.

<sup>74</sup>The words “blood” (דָּמָא/דָּמָא) and “breaking in” (תִּבְרַחְתָּ; LXX διορύγματι/διορύγματος) are found in both Exod 22:2–3 and Jer 2:34. See William L. Holladay, “Jeremiah 2:34b—A Fresh Approach,” *VT* 25.2 (1975): 222.

<sup>75</sup>Joel S. Burnett sets Jer 2 in contrast to the new covenant passage of Jer 31, saying, “Just as Jeremiah 2 reflects on a sad history in the land under the covenant, so Jer 31:31–34 portrays Israel’s genuine obedience to that covenant as intended from the start. Just as Jeremiah 31 offers some of the greatest hope in the book, so Jeremiah 2 offers some of its harshest condemnation” (“Changing Gods: An Exposition of Jeremiah 2,” *Rev&Exp* 101.2 [2004]: 289).

<sup>76</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 278. Mathews believed that one should not rule out the possibility of an allusion from Eccl 9:8a, “Let your garments be always white,” though she readily admitted the lack of thematic or contextual similarities (“A Critical Evaluation,” 197).

<sup>77</sup>Emphasis added.

burnt offering,” and erect the notorious “abomination that makes desolation” (Dan 11:31). Daniel 12:1, 10 is similar where tribulation precedes being “made white” (אֲבֵלֵי; LXX: ἐκλευκανθῶσιν).

Beale also contended that the link to Dan 12 is bolstered by the mention of “your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book” (Dan 12:1) similar to Rev 3:5, “The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life [οὐ μὴ ἐξάλειψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς].”<sup>78</sup> However, a more likely referent to the removal of the book (and probably the source for Daniel’s book image) is Exod 32:32–33, “‘But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book [ἐξάλειψόν με ἐκ τῆς βίβλου σου] that you have written.’ But the LORD said to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book [ἐξάλειψς αὐτὸν ἐκ τῆς βίβλου μου].’”<sup>79</sup> This is amidst the egregious sin of the golden calf incident at the foot of Mount Sinai. Most significant is that, in the context, God promises to punish the wicked (Exod 32:34–35), honor his promise to give the promised land to Israel (Exod 33:1–2), but warns them that his presence will not follow them into the land (the express purpose for the promised land and the covenantal relationship with YHWH; Exod 33:3). This led to mass repentance among the people of Israel (Exod 33:4–6).

The message to Sardis made use of OT imagery and allusions centered upon Israel’s covenant purpose and consequences. John used it positively to speak of the reward to those faithful to the covenant being made white. Conversely, John delineated the consequences via covenantal allusions, such as blotting one’s name from the book of life and the judgment of Jesus coming like a thief in the night, both of which are related to sin, death, and the separation from the presence of God.

*Old Testament Allusions in the Message  
to Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7–13)*

The message to Philadelphia, just as to Smyrna (Rev 2:8–11), lacks an accusation and seems to have similar opponents.<sup>80</sup> In contrast to the letter to Smyrna, it contains more apparent OT allusions and mentions less about persecution. There is even a great reversal not only in one of the OT allusions,

<sup>78</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 278.

<sup>79</sup>See Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 223–225; Dulk, “Promises of the Conquerors,” 520; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 141. Con. J. William Fuller, “‘I Will Not Erase His Name from the Book of Life’ (Revelation 3:5),” *JETS* 26.3 (1983): 301. However, the purpose behind Fuller’s article is to defend the doctrine of eternal security with Rev 3:5. He saw a theological inconsistency with the meaning in Exod 32 and John’s use in Rev 3. His argument against an allusion to Exod 32 is not convincing due to its lack of acknowledgement of the verbal identity and his sole reliance upon theological argumentation.

<sup>80</sup>Both messages mention the “synagogue of Satan,” as well as those who “say they are Jews and are not” (in Rev 2:9 and 3:9, though the order is reversed).

but also in contrast with the message to Smyrna (see below). And again, covenantal tones can be overheard in the allusions.

The first OT allusion is the mention of the one “who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens” (Rev 3:7). There is agreement among scholars that this is a clear reference to Isa 22:22, “I will place on his [Eliakim’s] shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.”<sup>81</sup> As in most of the descriptions of Jesus at the start of each message, it is probably a development from the opening vision in Rev 1:18, “I have the keys of Death and Hades.”<sup>82</sup> The “key” imagery evokes two pictures. First, it is likely attached with the “open door, which no one is able to shut” in Rev 3:8, based on thematic and verbal affinity.<sup>83</sup> Second, the key-holder is often a symbol of authority.<sup>84</sup> Similar to Jesus’s authority over “Death and Hades” in Rev 1:18, Jesus also has power over salvation and judgment.<sup>85</sup>

What is significant is the context of Isa 22. There, Eliakim is Hezekiah’s chief steward, replacing the former steward Shebna (Isa 22:15–20). The messianic suggestions are clear: Eliakim is called “my servant” (עַבְדִּי; Isa 22:20), is bestowed vestures of regal authority (Isa 22:21), is given the key to the house of David (Isa 22:22), and “will become a throne of honor” (Isa 22:23). Osborne took this reference to Jesus typologically, but offers little more than mere analogy.<sup>86</sup> Beale, on the other hand, saw more than a simple analogy and argues that the allusion is an indirect typological prophecy.<sup>87</sup> He made the comparison between Eliakim, who was head over Israel, and

<sup>81</sup>Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 53–54; R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols., ICC 44 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 1:86; Caird, *Revelation of Saint John*, 51; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 235; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 238–285; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 66; Osborne, *Revelation*, 187; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 88–89. Koester called this a paraphrase, Aune a clear allusion, and Beale a quotation.

<sup>82</sup>The textual variants here confirm this when Δαυίδ was replaced with either ᾠδου (“Hades”) or τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾠδου (“death and Hades”). See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 283–284, who calls this an amplification of Rev 1:18. For an extended list of manuscript evidence, see Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 73.

<sup>83</sup>Osborne, *Revelation*, 188–189.

<sup>84</sup>Keener, *Revelation*, 97–98.

<sup>85</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 284. “In 1:18 the stress is on his sovereignty over death and judgment, while in 3:7 the emphasis is on his authority over those entering the kingdom” (ibid.).

<sup>86</sup>Osborne, *Revelation*, 187–188.

<sup>87</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 284–285. He offers five points of proof. The most notable messianic link is the mention of placing the key of David’s house on “his shoulder” reminiscent of Isa 9:6, “the government shall be upon his shoulder.” Eliakim was also pictured as regal, as well as priestly, based on Tg. Isa. 22:22, Midr. Exod 37:1, and Exod Rab. 37:1.

Jesus, head over the church. This allusion, then, sets Jesus up as God's servant and typologically relates the Christians as the new covenant people of God. The image of opening and shutting a door from Rev 3:7 continues into Rev 3:8, "Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut." Beale said, "This entrance into covenantal life is also referred to as entry into the 'house of David' (v 7) and into the city and temple of God (v 12)."<sup>88</sup>

The next allusion is an example of an inversion or an inverted use of the OT.<sup>89</sup> In Rev 3:9, the Jews "who are not" will be forced to bow down (προσκυνήσουσιν)<sup>90</sup> at the feet of the true people of God in order to "learn that I have loved you." According to Beale, this "is a collective allusion to Isa. 45.14, 49.23, 60.14, and Ps. 86.9" which "collectively makes reference to the Isaianic prophecies that the Gentiles would come and bow down before Israel and recognize them as God's chosen people."<sup>91</sup> However, Revelation's use of this passage ironically inverts the players of this scene by making it appear as if those who call themselves "Jews and are not" will come and bow down before the saints at the church in Philadelphia (who are assumed to be Gentile).<sup>92</sup>

<sup>88</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 285.

<sup>89</sup>See Beale, *John's Use*, 122–123. This kind of OT allusion seemingly misuses the OT by contradicting the contextual meaning of the OT passage referenced. However, it is not so much changing the OT text itself, but rather an ironic use of the OT for its *shock value*.

<sup>90</sup>Aune described this not as worship, but "simply the traditional (oriental) expression of homage and honor, which we have chosen to translate 'grovel'" (*Revelation 1–5*, 238).

<sup>91</sup>Beale, *John's Use*, 122. Isa 45:14, "[M]en of stature, shall come over to you and be yours; they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down [προσκυνήσουσιν] to you." Isa 49:23, "With their faces to the ground they shall bow down [προσκυνήσουσιν] to you, and lick the dust of your feet." Isa 60:14, "The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low [variants have προσκυνήσουσιν] to you, and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet." Ps 86:9, "All the nations you have made shall come and worship [προσκυνήσουσιν] before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name."

<sup>92</sup>Such a hard and fast determination of this kind of allusion here in Rev 3:9 is a thorny issue. Many contest the exact identity of the "synagogue of Satan," as well as the identity of the "Jews." A widely held view is that the so-called "Jews" in Rev 2:9 and 3:9 were part of the church itself or "within the Jesus movement who were claiming the label 'Jew' in a manner that John finds illegitimate" (David Frankfurter, "Jews or Not? Reconstructing the 'Other' in Rev 2:9 and 3:9," *HTR* 94.4 [2001]: 403). The issue is compounded when considering if the Nicolaitans, Balaam, and Jezebel are a separate opponent or one and the same with the "Jews and are not" sect. For those taking the "synagogue of Satan" and "Jews" as referencing ethnic Jews in literal, local synagogues in both Smyrna and Philadelphia, see Adela Yarbro Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition in the Book of Revelation," *HTR* 79.1–3 (1986): 308–320; David A. deSilva, "The Social Setting of the Revelation to John: Conflicts Within, Fears Without," *WTJ* 54.2 (1992): 273–302; Mark R. J. Bredin, "The Synagogue of Satan Accusation in Revelation 2:9," *BTB* 28.4 (1998): 160–164; J. Lambrecht, "Jewish Slander: A Note on Revelation 2,9–10," *ETL* 75.4 (1999): 421–429; Steven J. Friesen,

These texts from Isaiah all have in common Gentiles bowing down to Israel or worshipping Israel's God.<sup>93</sup> The inversion makes an earth-shattering point about the nature of God's new covenant people. While under the old covenant, Israel's status as God's chosen people promised them a position of priority over the Gentiles. Now, under the new covenant, Christians are in the position of priority regardless of ethnicity. The reversal is a startling promise that the "Jews who are not" will be the ones to bow before the feet of Christians (both Jew *and* Gentile)! This allusion to bow down continues the polemical theme begun in the previous allusion from Isa 22 in order to identify both the true master (holding the key of David) and his true people (standing over those bowing down to them).

John further enhances this reversal/inversion. The message to Smyrna (Rev 2:8–11) and this message have clear similarities. They faced the same sect of persecutors ("Jews who are not"), had a "synagogue of Satan," and broke the structural consistency of the seven messages, as Jesus scolded neither as in the other five messages. However, there is a stark contrast that parallels the reversal or inversion of the allusion above. Jesus warned Smyrna of an impending ten-day persecution (Rev 2:10), likely by the "Jews who are not." Though also attacked by the "Jews who are not," Jesus conversely promised the Christians at Philadelphia deliverance from their impending persecution (Rev 3:10).<sup>94</sup> Further, it appears that they themselves will stand over their adversaries, according to the inversion of the OT allusion in Rev 3:9. Such a transposition between these two similar communities and messages helps to enhance the inverted use of the OT in Rev 3:9.

Aune accepted the above Isaianic allusions and believed that a consideration with the final OT images in Rev 3:12 lent further confirmation.<sup>95</sup> This is not the first mention of the temple, at least by virtue of synecdoche with the elements from the temple (see Rev 2:1). Wilkinson offers an attractive interpretation to the picture of the "pillar":

It may in fact be rooted in established coronational rites as practiced in ancient Israel and in a number of other monarchies of the ancient Near East . . . . If the reference to the pillar in v. 12 is understood as relating to the so-called 'king's pillar' situation in the Temple of Solomon and associated

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"Sarcasm in Revelation 2–3: Churches, Christians, True Jews, and Satanic Synagogues," in *The Reality of the Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*, ed. David L. Barr, SymS 39 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 127–144; Paul B. Duff, "The Synagogue of Satan: Crisis Mongering and the Apocalypse of John," in *idem*, 147–168.

<sup>93</sup>In each passage, the same Greek word (προσκυνέω) is used as in Rev 3:9.

<sup>94</sup>Schuyler Brown, "Hour of Trial (Rev 3:10)," *JBL* 85.3 (1966): 308–314.

<sup>95</sup>Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 238. Rev 3:12, "The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name."

with a number of Judean coronations, then the pillar analogy is not at all intrusive, but rather, yet another kingship-coronation parallel.<sup>96</sup>

This has the benefit of thematic awareness of the royal themes surrounding this message (cf. Rev 3:7, 14, 21).

While some focus their attention on whether the pillar is to be taken as literal or metaphorical,<sup>97</sup> this misses the point of the allusion as it relates to the covenantal backdrop.<sup>98</sup> God promised Israel his blessed presence, which finds its OT culmination in Solomon's temple as the house of God.<sup>99</sup> He intended this presence to take place in a special land or place (Garden of Eden or Promised Land). Thus, the mention of "New Jerusalem" has its first appearance in Rev 3:12. In this case, the believers *are* the pillar of the temple and enjoying the presence of God. In fact, this presence is a permanent one, "Never shall he go out of it" (Rev 3:12). Further, they enjoy the benefits of the new covenant blessings by prospering in the divine place that God has set aside to dwell with his people—the New Jerusalem or new creation (Rev 21:3). The temple metamorphosis from structure to people will finally conclude in Rev 21–22.

*Summary and Evaluation of the Covenantal  
Allusions in the Seven Messages*

Thus far, it has been demonstrated that, for the purposes of pastoral encouragement or warning of judgment, John used OT covenantal allusions in Rev 2–3 to reflect the suzerain-vassal relationship between King Jesus and the overcomers who reign with him. In harmony with Israel's old covenant, there are the consistent elements of enjoying the divine presence of God, along with the backdrop of the Garden of Eden, tabernacle, or temple. Also akin to the ANE covenant, the land grant and thus expulsion from the land is the primary threat against the Christians who have compromised.<sup>100</sup> This

<sup>96</sup>Richard H. Wilkinson, "The ΣΤΥΛΟΣ of Revelation 3:12 and Ancient Coronation Rites," *JBL* 107.3 (1988): 499.

<sup>97</sup>Wong, "The Pillar and the Throne in Revelation 3:12, 21," *BSac* 156.623 (1999): 299.

<sup>98</sup>Con. James Valentine, who saw this as a reference to the imperial cult, saying, "This might be an allusion to the practice of the priest of the imperial cult who, at the end of his period of service, erected his statue in the temple and inscribed his name on it. In so doing he intended to gain prolonged communion with the power of the god" ("Theological Aspects of the Temple Motif in the Old Testament and Revelation [Holy War, Judgment, Tabernacle, City, Law]" [PhD diss., Boston University, 1985], 210).

<sup>99</sup>In keeping with the themes from Isa 22:22 begun in Rev 3:7, Beale noted, "[T]he believer's permanent identification with the 'sanctuary' in v 12 is the consummation of the process that began with Christ unlocking the doors of the invisible sanctuary of salvation to them, as expressed in 3:7b–8a: ' . . . I put before you an open door, which no one can shut' (note again the Targum's interpretive paraphrase of Isa. 22:22: 'I will place the key of the *sanctuary* and the authority of the house of David in his hand')" (*The Book of Revelation*, 294).

<sup>100</sup>See M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the

threat reaches fruition in the latter portions of Revelation and the exile from new creation in Rev 21–22. To complete this examination, these results must be tested against the rest of Revelation, especially the conclusion in Rev 19–22.<sup>101</sup> For as Stefanovic rightly said, “[T]he seven messages to the churches cannot be read apart from the rest of Revelation.”<sup>102</sup> This will further inform the theological and pastoral implications that these covenantal allusions have on the presentation of Jesus, the church, and new creation.

The message to Ephesus was rife with Edenic and temple imagery. John used them as promised blessings for covenant loyalty. Not a few scholars have made the connection between the temple motif’s consummation in Rev 21–22<sup>103</sup> as well as the Garden of Eden and other similar OT parallels.<sup>104</sup> The most notable link is the “tree of life” (Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19). As if it was not obvious enough, the mention of the tree of life in both contexts identifies the New Jerusalem garden-city as the new “paradise of God” (Rev 2:7). Perfect covenant fellowship, as was experienced in the Garden of Eden (God “walking” in the Garden; Jesus “walking” among the lampstands), will be restored,<sup>105</sup> and the place that God prepared to dwell with his people will be newly created (Rev 21:1–5; esp. 3).

The mention of the lampstands coinciding with the temple imagery in Rev 21–22 is not as significant as the threat of the lampstand’s removal (Rev 2:5). While open for those who have washed their robes (Rev 22:14), the

Ancient Near East,” *JAOS* 90.2 (1970): 184–203.

<sup>101</sup>Valentine proposed a simple list that will propel the idea of the intratextual nature of Revelation: the tree of life (Rev 2:7; 22:2), second death (Rev 2:11; 21:8), rod of iron (Rev 2:27; 19:15), book of life (Rev 3:5; 20:12), Temple (Rev 3:12; 21:3, 22), and throne of Christ (Rev 3:21; 22:3) (“Theological Aspects,” 284n42).

<sup>102</sup>Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 157.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 207–361; Robert Alan Briggs, “A Backgrounds Investigation of the Jewish Temple Imagery in the Book of Revelation” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1996), 162–171; Pilchan Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: A Study of Revelation 21–22 in the Light of Its Background in Jewish Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 239–304; Gregory Stevenson, *Power and Place: Temple and Identity in the Book of Revelation* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001), 279–302; Beale, *The Temple*, 365–373; *idem.*, “Eden, the Temple,” 25–29; R. Larry Overstreet, “The Temple of God in the Book of Revelation,” *BSac* 166.664 (2009): 460–462; Dan Liou, *Axis of Glory: A Biblical and Theological Analysis of the Temple Motif in Scripture*, *StBibLit* 138 (New York: Lang, 2010), 105–134.

<sup>104</sup>Bruce Norman, “The Restoration of the Primordial World of Genesis 1–3 in Revelation 21–22,” *JATS* 8.1–2 (1997): 161–169; Paul B. Decock, “The Scriptures in the Book of Revelation,” *Neot* 33.2 (1999): 379–386; Ryan S. Schellenberg, “Seeing the World Whole: Intertextuality and the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21–22),” *PRS* 33.4 (2006): 467–476; T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 138–170; Eric J. Gilchrest, *Revelation 21–22 in Light of Jewish and Greco-Roman Utopianism*, *BibInt* 118 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 201–269.

<sup>105</sup>This theme of perfect fellowship “walking” with God may even be behind Rev 21:24, “By its light will the nations walk [περιπατήσουσιν].”

entrance into the garden-city is not only restricted for those who are unclean, detestable/abominable, and false (Rev 21:27), but there is also the mention of some “outside” (ἔξω). This is analogous to the removal of the lampstand from the presence of God—exiled outside. The one in Ephesus who has permanently lost his/her first love (Rev 2:4) is restricted from God’s presence because he/she “loves and practices falsehoods” (Rev 22:15).<sup>106</sup>

Smyrna, having far less material from the OT, experiences a bit of intratextual fulfillment. The “second death” (which some interpreted in regards to the Garden of Eden scene) was first mentioned in Rev 2:11 and is later referenced three times in Rev 20:6, 14; 20:8. The Smyrnians’ poverty and maltreatment, which was probably an effect of their covenant fidelity and would result in a further ten-day trial of persecution, is certainly overturned in Rev 21–22. That is why Jesus could say in Rev 2:9, “I know your tribulation and poverty (*but you are rich*).”<sup>107</sup> John measured their true wealth upon their loyalty to their king amidst persecution and spoke of it as a present eschatological reality later fulfilled in new creation.<sup>108</sup>

As far as Pergamum’s message is concerned, Valentine only listed the “white stone” (Rev 2:17) in his short list of fulfillments. However, he catalogued the fulfillment as a questionable “No correspondence? [*sic*]”<sup>109</sup> His uncertainty in this matter of intratextuality is understandable; nevertheless there were other OT images in Pergamum’s message he could have made use of. Perhaps there is better correspondence with the “new name” (Rev 2:17) and the royal status of the believer, specifically “a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it” (ὄνομα καινὸν . . . ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων). John likely revealed this name in Rev 3:12, wherein even Jesus has “a new name.”<sup>110</sup> But Jesus is later said to have “a name written that no one knows but himself” (ὄνομα . . . ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ αὐτός) in Rev 19:12 when he comes eventually to “rule [the nations] with a rod of iron” and has the name on his thigh “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev 19:15–16). Finally, Jesus’s threat of a sword protruding from his mouth, mentioned twice in this message (Rev 2:12, 17) as a threat for covenantal breach, is eventually wielded in judgment upon the wicked of the nations (Rev 19:15, 21).<sup>111</sup>

<sup>106</sup>Though this is not a verbatim verbal link between Rev 2:4’s “love” (τὴν ἀγάπην) and Rev 22:15’s “loves” (ὁ φιλῶν), the thematic tie is tight enough, since the theme of love is rather rare throughout Revelation.

<sup>107</sup>Emphasis added.

<sup>108</sup>Mark D. Mathews, *Riches, Poverty, and the Faithful: Perspectives on Wealth in the Second Temple Period and the Apocalypse of John*, SNTSMS 154 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 156–166. Boxall, playing on the semantic meaning of ἀποκάλυψις, said of this ironic idea, “This is a clear example of apocalyptic unveiling: what in the world’s eyes looks like poverty is revealed as true riches” (*Revelation of Saint John*, 53).

<sup>109</sup>Valentine, “Theological Aspects,” 284n41.

<sup>110</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 253.

<sup>111</sup>That this sword is said to come from his mouth (Rev 2:12; 19:15, 21) likely

Thyatira's message uses the evil OT figure Jezebel for the self-styled prophetess who brought many in that church into sexual immorality and adultery (Rev 2:20–24). The list of those exiled from the garden-city-temple, new creation, and thus God's presence in Rev 22:15 is a fitting description of the exploits of the OT Jezebel, "Outside are the dogs and sorcerers [οἱ φάρμακοὶ] and the sexually immoral [οἱ πόρνοι] and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." Jezebel was eaten by dogs because of her affiliation with the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:19), her idolatry was widely known (1 Kgs 16:31), she partook in numerous murders (1 Kgs 18:13; 21:1–26), and she schemed and lied her way into orchestrating Naboth's death in order for her husband to swindle his vineyard (1 Kgs 21). Her sorcery and sexual immorality were similarly described in 2 Kgs 9:22b, "What peace can there be, so long as the whorings [αἱ πορνεῖαι] and the sorceries [τὰ φάρμακα] of your mother Jezebel are so many?" It is possible that Jezebel is the OT backdrop of John's opponents in the first century, as well as the ideal picture of God's enemies exiled from new creation in Rev 22:15.

Perhaps the strongest intratextual link is the use of Ps 2:8–9 in Rev 2:26–27 for the blessing of the overcomers, as well as for Jesus in Rev 12:5, "She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron," and Rev 19:15, "And he will rule them with a rod of iron." This universalization of Jesus's reign continues with the conquerors' blessing of vice-regency by receiving "the morning star" in Rev 2:28. In the context of his Davidic authority and reign, John called Jesus "the morning star" in Rev 22:16, "I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

Those who did not follow Jezebel in her idolatry were referred to as "the remnant" (οἱ λοιποὶ) in Rev 2:24.<sup>112</sup> Revelation 12:17 pictures the mother of a "male child . . . who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron" having more offspring called οἱ λοιποὶ. Since this is a reference to the people of God, both uses of οἱ λοιποὶ likely have a remnant motif behind them. The final goal of the remnant is explicitly stated in the covenant terminology of

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indicates a symbolic sword rather than a literal one. Gorman said, "The scene corresponds to the *effect* of divine judgment on evil, not the *means* of judgment. This truth that the language of judgment in Revelation symbolizes God's effectively speaking evil into non-existence is perhaps most sharply represented by the vision of Jesus' victorious appearance as the Word of God on the white horse, with a sword in his mouth (19:11–16, 21). This signifies the effective word of God's judgment—the wrath of God and the Lamb—that needs no literal sword, and which a literal sword could never accomplish" (Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation* [Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011], 153).

<sup>112</sup>Pollard, "The Function of Λοιπος," 50, makes a strong case that there are verbal and thematic links between the use of οἱ λοιποὶ in Rev 2:24 and "Jezebel" from the Elijah cycle of 1 Kings. He notes, "From the Hebrew Scriptures to the LXX to the Greek NT, the story of the remnant in the Elijah cycle is appropriated as a touchstone of remnant theology" (*ibid.*). It is less than coincidental that these two concepts are present in the message to Thyatira.

Exod 29:45–46a; Lev 26:12–13a; Ezek 36:28, and especially Ezek 37:27 in Rev 21:3, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and *they will be his people*, and God himself will be with them as their God.”<sup>113</sup> Additionally, right after the covenant declaration in Ezek 37:27 is the statement “Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore” (Ezek 27:28). This verse finds its intertextual connection in Rev 2:23, “And all the churches will know that I am he,” continuing the theme of covenantal presence in the promised land.

The message to Sardis had a few “names” that had not soiled themselves. Jesus promised he would walk with them in white garments (Rev 3:4–5). Being clothed in white garments, probably an allusion to Dan 11 and 12, was a blessing for those who were refined through trials and remained faithful to the covenant while others within had forsaken their sacred oath. The white garments, also examined in the similarly negative message to Laodicea in Rev 3:18, is a recurring image throughout all of Revelation (Rev 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13, 14; 19:14).

Jesus also promised them as a blessing in the same context. He swore, “I will never blot his name out of the book of life” (Rev 3:5). Books or scrolls appear frequently in Revelation. The book of life with the occasional added title “the book of life of the Lamb” was a record of the faithful who remained committed to the covenant (Rev 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27). The inclusion of one’s name in this book became the measuring rod for judgment, “And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15; similarly, 21:27). Such a means of judgment brings to light the significance of Jesus’s promise to the overcomers in Sardis “never” (οὐ μὴ) to blot out their names from this book. This reassurance is more than comforting in light of his warning to come to the unfaithful as a thief in the night, also mentioned in Rev 16:15. For the Christians in Sardis, Jesus left them with the options of loyalty and blessing or unfaithfulness and death.

The messianic universalization continues in the message to Philadelphia when Jesus, holder of the Davidic keys and opener of doors, perhaps in reference to accessing God’s presence (Rev 3:7–8), forces the enemies of this church to bow down before their feet (an inverted allusion in itself), thus bestowing upon them messianic rule (Rev 3:9). The idea of reigning with Christ is consummated throughout the end of Revelation. Twice in Rev 20, saints are promised to “reign with Christ for a thousand years” (Rev 20:4, 6). However, the complete fruition of this picture is in Rev 22:5, “They [‘his servants’ from Rev 22:3] will reign forever and ever.” Such a scene is in accordance with the suzerain-vassal relationship noted in ANE covenants.

<sup>113</sup>Emphasis added. Exod 29:45–46a, “I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God . . . .” Lev 26:12–13a, “And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the LORD your God . . . .” Ezek 36:28, “You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.” Ezek 37:27, “My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

This message also explicitly references the temple and New Jerusalem for the first time (Rev 3:12). The complete expression of the dwelling place with God is a location with open access to enjoy God's presence, where John likened the entire garden-city to a temple. Therefore, there is no longer a need for a local enshrinement (Rev 21:22). This sacred place bears the name New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2, similarly, 10).

The final result of the cumulative evidence is that John reused every single OT allusion from Rev 2–3 as a means to convey fulfillment in Rev 19–22. John also veiled the same theme of blessing and curse in OT covenantal imagery. This confirms the assertion here that the OT allusions of Rev 2–3 were steeped in Israel's covenantal character and theology. John was casting a vision to these churches of their new covenant status before God to encourage and unleash faithfulness to Jesus. The churches should not take lightly such a standing, but it should inform these communities how to live in relationship to their suzerain. This is the paraenetic function of covenant in these messages. It sets out in covenantal ideology the simple choice these communities have. Either they could acquiesce to local pressures, assimilate with the Roman imperial cult, syncretize with the idolatry by eating meat offered to idols, and thus breach the covenant, or they could "come out of [Babylon], my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues" (Rev 18:4). They could remain faithful to the covenant pact initiated by the Lamb who had been slain, yet standing and enthroned with God (Rev 5:6). And Jesus promised them that they would receive the covenantal blessings ultimately fulfilled in new creation, should they remain faithful.

*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*