

Christology of the Apocalypse
The Deity of Christ in the Book of Revelation

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2022

In the opening chapter of John's Revelation, John uses two verses that are derived from the Old Testament: "Grace to you and peace from Him who is, who was and who is to come..." (Rev. 1:4a)¹ and "I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8). These verses take us back to Exodus 3:14 where Yahweh describes Himself as "I am who I Am." In Isaiah 41:4, God asks: "Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he." These descriptions are also found in Isaiah 43:10, 44:6 and 48:12. Isaiah 43:10 provides further clarification that "Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me" as well as Isaiah 44:6 "besides me there is no god." There is no ambiguity that the God of Israel is the one true God. In Revelation 1:7-18 that same phrases "first and last" is applied to Jesus who "was dead and behold I am alive forevermore." These descriptions, as well as others, will be used by John and applied to Jesus. In this paper I will show the intentional high Christology in Revelation that would leave readers no doubt that the Jesus that they knew of, and are hearing about, is one and the same as Yahweh.

HIGH CHRISTOLOGY

Dr. Michael S. Heiser provides a full grammatical exegesis of the opening verses in Revelation regarding the connection between the *Alpha and Omega*, *First and Last* and Exodus 3:14.² Heiser notes the John is accomplishing two goals with the opening passages. The first is

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the New America Standard Bible (NASB).

² Dr. Michael S. Heiser, *The Old Testament in Revelation* (Las Vegas, Nv.: Naked Bible Press, 2021), 7-21.

that “John wants readers to know that the God of Moses, the God of Israel, who is, was, and is coming, will deliver believers under persecution as he delivered the remnant of Israel in the past. And more than that, for John, this God became the man in Jesus Christ. John will specifically link his description of God in Revelation 1:4a and 1:8 with Jesus in Revelation 1:17...who died and yet lives, and has the keys to everlasting life and death...”³

Dr. Bruce Metzger expands on the opening of Revelation noting that in the pagan world, Zeus was their chief god, and in *Pausanias 10.12.10* says “Zeus was, Zeus is, Zeus shall be, O mighty Zeus.”⁴ Metzger comments on the use of Exodus 3:14 and says John “extends it in a polemical competition with pagan claims. God, not Zeus, is the eternal one. In a major twist, John proclaims not merely a God who ‘shall be,’ but a God who ‘is coming’-in judgement upon those who give God’s glory to another (Rev. 9:20-21;14:6-7).”⁵ Heiser also adds that Zeus was considered the Most High god so “John was making a specific, bold, theological claim in the Greco-Roman world: that the God of Israel was what Zeus claimed to be: the one who is, was, and who is coming...the source of true existence, who existed from eternity, and will always exist, not Zeus. As such, the God of Israel is the true Most High.”⁶ Since John further links Jesus with the Alpha and Omega, he is stating Jesus is the Most-High. This is high Christology.

³ Ibid., 15.

⁴ Dr. Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2019), 30.

⁵ Ibid., 30.

⁶ Heiser, *The Old Testament in Revelation*, 13.

In Daniel 7, there is a scene in the throne room where the *Ancient of Days* is described as having “clothes like white snow and hair on his head like pure wool” (Dan. 7:9-10). This figure is Yahweh. The fiery throne with wheels matches Ezekiel’s vision of a human on the throne (Ez. 1:26-27). Commentator Steve Moyise writes “John’s use of Ezekiel’s vision involves abbreviation, some recasting and some expansion, particularly under the influence of Isaiah 6.”⁷ In Isaiah 6:1-3, Isaiah saw God on his throne. John connects Christ with this in John 12:41-43 “These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.” Charles R. Swindoll expands on Isaiah 6 passage connection: “As John continued to peer into the open temple, he saw it, ‘filled with smoke from the glory of God’ (Rev. 15:8). As in the days of Moses after the earthly tabernacle was completed (Ex. 40:33-35), the heavenly tabernacle was filled with the glorious holy presence of God. Similarly, when Isaiah witnessed the Lord sitting on his throne ‘lofty and exalted’ (Is. 6:1), he saw the heavenly temple ‘filled with smoke’ (Is. 6:4).”⁸ John’s high Christology is apparent. Daniel continues with the *Son of Man* who is approaching Yahweh and is “given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion shall be everlasting...and shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:13-14). God is often referred to as a *cloud rider*. The Old Testament uses passages such as God, “rides through the heavens” (Duet. 33:26), and “who rides in the highest heavens” (Ps. 68:32-33), “who makes the clouds his chariot” (Ps. 104:1-4), and “rides on a swift cold” (Is. 19:1) which all demonstrate a cloud rider motif. Daniel 7:13 now notes that it is the Son of Man is coming on the clouds.

⁷ Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (New York, New York: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 1995), 70.

⁸ Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights: New Testament Commentary Revelation, Vol 15* (Tyndale Publishing House, 2014), 226.

John applies this motif in Rev.1:7 where Jesus is “coming on the cloud” (Rev. 1:5-7). Heiser elaborates that “John proceeds in verses 12-15 to identify the Son of Man with Yahweh himself, the Ancient of Days. In effect, he fuses the imagery of the two into one.”⁹ This is John again using high Christology.

Commentator G.K. Beale also connects Daniel with Revelation. In Daniel 2:28 “he showed...what things must take place in the latter days” and “what would take place in the future...”(Dan. 2:29) and Dan. 2:45 “God has made known to the king what will take place in the future...” These are used in the same way in Rev 4:1 “I will show you what must come to pass after these things.”¹⁰ Beale writes “the Apocalypse contains more Old Testament references that any other New Testament book”¹¹ and that “when the Old Testament context of each allusion is studied one finds that, without exception, they are all from descriptions of theophany scenes, which function as introductory sections to an announcement of judgement either upon Israel or the nations.”¹² He contrasts: (1) Rev. 4:2 with Is. 6:1 and 1 Ki. 22:19; (2) Rev. 4:3 with Ez. 1:28 (3) Rev. 4:5 with Ez. 1:13 and Ex. 19:16 (4) Rev. 4:6 with Ez. 1:22 and Ez. 1:5 (5) Rev. 4:7 with Ez. 1:10 and Is. 6:2 (6) Rev. 4:8 with Is. 6:3 and (7) Rev. 4:9 with Is. 6:1.¹³ Beale summarizes that “the dominant influence of Dan. 7:9-13 throughout Revelation 4-5...this clearly

⁹ Heiser, *The Old Testament in Revelation*, 27.

¹⁰ G.K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (New York, New York: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 1998), 173.

¹¹ Ibid., 60.

¹² Ibid., 65.

¹³ Ibid., 64.

common motif is all the Old Testament allusions points toward a more intentional thematic formulation of texts to describe a similar theophany in Revelation.”¹⁴ Revelation 5:13 is a throne room scene where John is describing what he is hearing: “And I heard every created thing which is in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, or on the sea, and all the things in them, saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be the blessing, the honor, the glory, and the dominion forever and ever.’” In Revelation 5:8 and 5:14 John says that “when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders threw themselves to the ground before the Lamb.” Throwing yourself on the ground is a form of worship. Later in Rev. 19:9 we see John fall to the ground in front of an angel who instructs John, “Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.” In this high Christology motif, we see that we are to worship God alone and the Lamb is being worshipped, therefore, John, again is telling His audience that Jesus is God, who can be worshipped, because He is worthy.

Commentator Paige Patterson says John starts the prologue with the divine authority of Christ. In John’s gospel John refers to Jesus as the Word of God, who is God, and who created all things and became flesh to dwell (i.e., tabernacle) among us (John 1:1-14). In Revelation 1:1 John says God gave Him the revelation of Jesus Christ and that this testimony of Jesus was the word of God (Rev. 1:1-2). Paige writes “Here the author is claiming that this ‘revelation [from] Jesus Christ’ is a direct word from God, and unveiling of his plan and purpose. This claim

¹⁴ Ibid., 65.

excludes the possibility that this prophecy is human speculation or mere religious refection.”¹⁵

The opening benediction “grace and peace...” is from God and from Jesus Christ who is the ruler of the kings of the earth. God spoke to Moses in Ex. 19:6 and said “And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.” We see in Rev. 1:5 it is Jesus “who by his blood freed us from sin and made us into a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.” John is connecting Jesus with the same verses the God of Israel is associated with. Other connections that are made include Isaiah 44:24, “I am the LORD, who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens all alone, who spreads abroad the earth by Myself” Yet John writes earlier that Jesus creates all things (John 1:3) and again in Revelation 4:11: “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.” In Revelation 14:7, the angel says to “fear God” and to “Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all the springs of water.” Since Jesus is the creator of all things, and we are to worship him who creates all things, John is connecting Jesus as God the creator. God is also the Savior: Isaiah 43:11 states ...” I am the Lord and apart from me there is no savior” yet John writes that Jesus “released us from our sins by his blood” (Rev. 1:8) which aligns with earlier writings from John: “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world” (Jn. 4:42) and “We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world” (1Jn. 4:14). Jesus does the things only God can do therefore John is communicating Jesus is God of the Old Testament.

¹⁵ Paige Patterson, *Revelation: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture. The New American Commentary* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 52.

In Revelation 1:5, John refers to Jesus as the “firstborn” (*prototokos*). Commentator David E. Aune says that the term was an “important and debated Christological term in early Christianity.”¹⁶ The term means *preeminent*. First born does not mean first created. David was called firstborn (Ps. 89:20) but was the youngest son of Jesse. In Ex. 4:22 God says “Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD: Israel is My son, My firstborn’” but we know Israel was not the first nation in the world. Jeremiah 31:9 records “For I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn” and we know Ephraim was not the first son of Joseph; Manasseh was (Gen. 41:51-52). Jesus, in His human nature, was to be firstborn (Ps. 89.27) as a descendent of David who’s “throne as the days of heaven.” Also, Paul writes in Col. 1:18 that Jesus is firstborn of the dead. He is not the first dead person. This verse is referring to Jesus as the preeminent of the resurrected dead. With this in mind, Aune writes “the figurative extensions of meaning are based primarily on the great prestige and status enjoyed by the firstborn son in a family and involves notions of primacy in time and rank and privilege in inheritance and succession (Deut. 21:15-17).”¹⁷ Aune emphasize adoption rather than birth and “the point of the metaphor is the exalted status of the king by virtue of his special relationship to God.”¹⁸ Aune also references “a functionally equivalent phrase about Christ is found in Revelation 3:14...’the beginning of God’s creation.’” In Colossian 1:15, *prototokos*, “appears to have been borrowed from, or at least influenced by, Jewish Wisdom speculation, which used language of primacy and

¹⁶ David E. Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary Revelation 1-5*, ed. David E. Aune, Glenn W. Barker, John D.W. Watts, Ralph P. Martin (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1997), 38.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

priority to speak of Wisdom as the first of God's creation and even as preexistent (Prov. 8:22)."¹⁹

The author of Hebrews also talks of the Son of God as being the heir of all things, through who also He made the world. And he is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of his nature, and upholds all things by the word of his power" (Heb:1:1-3). This high Christology is using the terms of inheritance similar to one that is firstborn. Hebrews 1:6 then says "And he again brings the firstborn into the world, he says. 'And let the angles of God worship him.'" John says only God is worshipped (Rev. 19:9). Another term used with firstborn is "begotten" (*Monogeneses*) which means unique or one of a kind. Jesus is the unique one-of-a-kind savior, which bolsters the preeminent title.

In Revelation 14:14-20 John writes "Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, 'Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.' So, he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped." In Mark 14:62, Jesus was asked by the high priest, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." Christ is both seated and coming in these verses. In Psalm 110:1: "The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." The Messiah is also seated on the throne. Aune observes the connection between Daniel 7:13 and Ps. 110:1²⁰ In Matthew 24:36 Jesus says about His coming, "But about that day

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ David E. c, *Vol. 52B*, ed. David E. Aune, Bruce M. Metzger, John D.W. Watts, James W. Watts, Ralph P. Martin, Lynn Allan Losie (Nashville, Tn: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 841.

and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” In revelation 14:15, another angel (messenger) comes out and Heiser notes “Here’s when the Father says, ‘Now is the time.’”²¹ Aune adds that “This angel emerges from the heavenly temple implies divine authorization of his command to the ‘one sitting on the cloud’ to begin the harvest.”²² Beale reminds us that “the coming of the Son of man on clouds in the Synoptic eschatological discourses and elsewhere is always Christ (Matt. 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27; also Matt. 26:64; Mark 14:62; the Messiah in 4 Ezra 13:1ff.)”²³ In Joel 3:12-13, Yahweh is going to judge the nations and will use a sickle. In Rev. 14:14, it is Jesus using the sickle. Joel references the fullness of the wine vats from the presses and this same imagery. Aune says “This clause is an allusion to Is. 63:1–6, which depicts the Lord as the divine warrior coming with garments stained with the blood of his enemies, compared with the garments of one who treads grapes in the winepress... The identity of the one who treads the winepress is also not made clear... However, in 19:15 it is the rider on the white horse (i.e., the exalted Christ returning with his heavenly armies in judgment) who treads the grapes in the winepress of God’s wrath.”²⁴ Heiser summarizes the Christological point:

²¹ Dr. Michael S. Heiser, “Naked Bible Podcast Transcript Episode 384 Revelation 14 July 10, 2021,” <https://nakedbiblepodcast.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/NB-384-Transcript.pdf>, page 14 (accessed October 5, 2022).

²² Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary Revelation 6-16*, 842.

²³ Heiser, <https://nakedbiblepodcast.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/NB-384-Transcript.pdf>, page 15.

²⁴ Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary Revelation 6-16*, 846-849.

When the Messiah returns, all of the contexts are apocalyptic and cast in terms of divine warrior judgment stuff. And this is another one. So, by virtue of John doing this, he's telling you who he thinks the wine-treader back in Isaiah 63 is. And if other people want to say he's God, well, John would be okay with that, because Jesus is God anyway. It's one of these things where there's an oblique reference to this character—this figure—in the Old Testament. And in John's mind, this is the Lord. The Lord is the divine warrior. And the divine warrior in the Old Testament, there's only one of those. It's God, or the Angel of the Lord, the captain of the Lord's host. The captain of the Lord's host would be the Lord of the hosts, ...²⁵

In the Old Testament, the Day of the Lord, is the day of Yahweh. In Psalm 75:7 “But it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another.” Psalm 50:6 and 96:13 also confirms it is God who judges. Isaiah 33:22 also says “For the Lord is our judge; the Lord is our lawgiver; the Lord is our king; he will save us.” Moses wrote in Genesis 18:25, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” These are just a few places where Old Testament authors clearly attribute judging of the earth to Yahweh. But it is John who says The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son” (Jn. 5:22). The person who is judging, who is not the father, is the Son. The Son who added a human nature (Jn. 1:14; Phil. 2:6-10) and atoned for the sin of the world is now the warrior who is judging. Skip Heitzig writes: “The Day of the Lord is the dark time in earth's history when God will deal with the planet in wrath and judgement. Think of this as heaven's harvest time....One day Christ will judge the earth...he comes with a sickle. He intends to reap the harvest of the earth...when next he comes, he will arrive as a sovereign king...as the Commander.”²⁶ As God and judge, it will be Christ on the *bema* seat. Ed Hinson writes “Every believer must stand before the judgement seat (Greek,

²⁵ Heiser, <https://nakedbiblepodcast.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/NB-384-Transcript.pdf>, page 19.

²⁶ Skip Heitzig, *You Can Understand the Book of Revelation: Exploring Its Mystery and Message* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2011), 155.

bema) of Christ to receive his or her rewards.”²⁷ God is the judge and John connects Christ as sitting on the judgement seat judging as God.

In Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar blessed the Most-High God and said “His dominion is an everlasting dominion” (Rev. 4:34), Beale and Carson write, “The basis for the Lamb’s victory in Rev. 17:14 is that ‘he is Lord of lords and King of kings.’ The same title occurs only twice in biblically related material prior to the New Testament (1 Enoch 9:41; Dan. 4:27 LXX).”²⁸ Daniel 4:37 LXX reads “because he himself is God of gods and Lord of lords and King of kings.” Beale and Carson assert that John is influenced by the Septuagint (LXX) and Rev. 17:14b says of Jesus “because he is Lord of lords, and King of kings.” The God Nebuchadnezzar gave that title to, is Christ.

The final chapter in John’s Revelation opens with a combined “prophetic pictures of a spring or river of ‘living water’ flowing out of latter-day Jerusalem (Zech. 14:8) and its temple (Ez. 47:1-9).”²⁹ The primeval garden in Genesis 2:10 with “a river was going forth from Eden.” There is gold and bdellium and onyx stone around the water. John describes precious stones surrounding the river in Rev. 22:1. Beale and Carson note that “God will make the end like the beginning...As in Ez. 47, the living water flows from the temple, though now God and the Lamb are the temple (21:22).”³⁰ The parallels continue with the fertile land and river and tree that will

²⁷ Ed Hinson, *The Harvest Handbook of Biblical Prophecy: A Comprehensive Survey for the World’s Foremost Experts*, Edited by Ed Hinson, Mark Hitchcock, Tim Lahaye (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2020), 186.

²⁸ G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, ed., *Commentary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 1139.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1153.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1154.

bear fruit each month with leaves for healing. This is modeled after Genesis 2:9-10 and matches Revelation 22:1. In the Garden in Genesis, God walked in the garden in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8). John says “God is Spirit” (Jn. 4:24) and that “no one has seen the Father” (Jn. 1:18; 2:46) but God was seen in the Old Testament (Gen 17:1; Genesis 22:11; Gen 32:22-30; Ex 6:2-3; Ex 24:9-11; Exod. 3:1-2; Jos. 5:14). Jesus said in John 5:46 - "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me." In Revelation 21, God once again creates the garden. The new Heavens and earth. John says he heard a voice from heaven saying “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and he will dwell among them, and they shall be his people and God himself will be among them.” God the Son, who has been seen, who Moses wrote about, is once again with the people. John again uses “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and then end” and Jesus says to the person who overcome “I will be his God and he will be my people.” Beale writes that there are a number of other relevant Old Testament passages that contain similar themes. One is “Lev. 26:11-12 which reads, ‘And I will make my abode...among you, and you shall be my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.’”³¹ Jesus concludes with “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End...I Jesus...”(Rev. 22:13-16).

CONCLUSION

Throughout John's Gospel and Revelation, John consistently connects Jesus, the Word, with God. The Book of Revelation has high Christology and leaves no doubt that the second person of the Trinity, who became flesh (Jn. 1:14) and dwelled among us, is the same eternal Son

³¹ David E. Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary Revelation 17-22*. ed. David E. Aune, Glenn W. Barker, John D.W. Watts, Ralph P. Martin (Grand rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1997), 1123.

who created all things, was the visible Yahweh Moses wrote about, is the judge and King of kings, Lord of Lords of the Old Testament, who saves. Only God can do the things of God, the Son does the things of God, therefore the Son is God.

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