

Title: In the book of Revelation what does it tell us about Jesus Christ, what does it tell us about the people of God, and what does it tell us about the future? **(40%)**

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DECLARATION

I certify that this ASSIGNMENT is my own work. I have acknowledged all material and sources used in it, and that I have not plagiarised in part or whole the work of others without stating the references.

Introduction

The Book of Revelation was written during a time of turmoil for Christians throughout the known world¹. Even in the opening words its writer, John, speaks of being ‘*your brother and partner ... in the patient endurance*’ through his own exile on Patmos² for the sake of Jesus (Revelation 1:9).

For the most part, the early followers of Christ did not have an easy life – persecution and hardship met them at every turn. On the one hand, the Roman Empire demanded allegiance to Caesar above all else and did not hesitate to use force to get its way; while on the other, the Judaism of the synagogue offered an easy way out through state acceptance.³

It is within this context that Christ sends His message to His church – a reassurance of hope and eventual victory, no matter what may come.

Jesus Christ – The First and the Last

John is intimately familiar with the Old Testament⁴ – his lengthy letter “contains more Old Testament references than any other New Testament book”⁵, perhaps around 350 or so⁶. He especially draws from the prophetic sections to describe his own inspired visions⁷.

Revelation “is a book designed to be read in constant intertextual relationship with the Old Testament.”⁸ Indeed, “...the Old Testament was the thought-world in which Jesus, the disciples and the other first Christians lived”⁹. To this end, a healthy knowledge of the Old Testament helps the reader to grasp a fuller picture of its message: “The book pools ideas. It sees types. It sees

¹ Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Gospel in Revelation: Gospel and Apocalypse* (Carlisle/UK: The Paternoster Press, 1994), 32-33.

² D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Michigan/USA: Zondervan, 2005), 707.

³ Colin Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*. In: *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, Supplement Series 11. (JSOT Press: 1986), 1-2.

⁴ Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 712.

⁵ G. K. Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (Sheffield/UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 60-61.

⁶ Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey* (MI/USA: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 358.

⁷ Richard Bauckham, *The theology of the Book of Revelation (New Testament Theology)* (Cambridge/UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4-5, 11.

⁸ Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), p. xi. quoted in Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, 23.

⁹ Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (Sheffield/UK: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 1995), Perlego Edition, 12-13.

foreshadows. It takes little bits and pieces and clusters from different passages and weaves them together into a new composition. ... There's a lot floating around in John's head, and he feels very free to mix things."¹⁰

John uses this intertextuality which “the strongly Jewish character of most of these churches”¹¹ would have recognized to drive home a key point – that Jesus Christ is the very same YHWH of the Old Testament. This is done by according Jesus the ‘Honour, Attributes, Names, Deeds and Seat’ ascribed only to YHWH in the Old Testament – or more memorably: “We summarize these five categories using an acronym based on the word HANDS.”¹² To this end, even within the very introduction of Revelation (which we today refer to as Chapter 1), John applies unto Jesus multiple references of YHWH.

For example, Revelation 1:4's ‘*who is and who was and who is to come*’ likely contains a reference to the divine name ‘*I AM*’ of Exodus 3:14, as indicated by the apparent solecism¹³ which is John's case is actually “an intentional mistake of Greek grammar”¹⁴.

Revelation 1:5-6 ascribes all rulership and dominion to Jesus – a prerogative of YHWH who is ‘*lord of lords*’ (Deuteronomy 10:17, Psalm 136:3). This title is further repeated in Revelation 17:14 & 19:16.

Revelation 1:7 (and later 14:14) describes Jesus as coming with the clouds, which – apart from the ‘*one like a son of man*’ in Daniel 7:13-14 – always refers to YHWH (Deuteronomy 33:26, Psalm 68:33-34 & 104:3, Isaiah 19:1). That this imagery is considered descriptive of divinity is clearly seen when Jesus applied it to Himself at His trial, causing the High Priest to exclaim: ‘*You have heard his blasphemy*’ (Mark 14:62). Daniel 7 was also a passage that rabbis warned students

¹⁰ Michael S. Heiser, “Naked Bible 352: Introducing The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation,” *The Naked Bible Podcast* (accessed 05-Apr-2023): <https://nakedbiblepodcast.com/podcast/naked-bible-352-introducing-the-old-testament-in-the-book-of-revelation/> [p.14 of transcript]

¹¹ Bauckham, *The theology of the Book of Revelation*, 18.

¹² Robert Bowman and Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (MI, USA: Kregel Publications, 2007), 22.

¹³ Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, 324-327.

¹⁴ Michael S. Heiser, “Naked Bible 353: Revelation 1:4,” *The Naked Bible Podcast* (accessed 04-Apr-2023): <https://nakedbiblepodcast.com/podcast/naked-bible-353-revelation-14/> [pp.3-4 of transcript]

against studying without proper guidance, as it was considered a proof-text¹⁵ for the pre-Christian Jewish ‘Two Powers in Heaven’ belief in a multipersonal YHWH¹⁶.

Revelation 1:7 also quotes Zechariah 12:10, which intriguingly describes YHWH as being ‘pierced’. When looking backwards from the Crucifixion and remembering the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:5, that the infinite YHWH could be pierced makes perfect sense.¹⁷

In Revelation 1:13 (and later in 14:14), again “John carefully uses the exact phrase from Daniel, ‘one like a son of man’”¹⁸ (Daniel 7:13-14) – and also describes a golden sash around the chest, as in Daniel’s terrifying vision (Daniel 10:5). Revelation 1:14 further depicts this figure as having white hair, which is a feature of the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9). The fire, bronze, deafening voice and blinding brightness simultaneously recall the terrifying one (Daniel 10:5-6) and YHWH Himself (Ezekiel 1:24-28).

Revelation 1:16 (and later 2:12&15) mentions a sword, which in the Old Testament is the weapon wielded by the earthly manifestation of YHWH (Joshua 5:3-15, Numbers 22:22-23&31, 1 Chronicles 21:16). The motifs of ‘eyes like a flame of fire’ and ‘from his mouth comes a sharp sword’ from Revelation 1:14-16 will be repeated at Jesus’s triumphal return (Revelation 19:11-15&21) – in the latter case, with the additional YHWH imagery of ‘robe dipped in blood’ (Isaiah 63:1-6).

Revelation 1:17 has John fall down, before the figure places a comforting hand on him – once more recalling Daniel’s terrifying vision (Daniel 10:9-11). Revelation 1:17 (and 22:13) also has the figure refer to himself as ‘the first and the last’, a title of YHWH (Isaiah 44:6 & 48:12) – and interestingly, also used by Muslims of their own deity Allah (e.g. Sura 57:3)¹⁹.

Revelation 1:18 then leaves no ambiguity as to whom all these descriptions of divinity are being applied to – it is Jesus Christ, proclaiming ‘I died, and behold I am alive forevermore’.

¹⁵ Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (N/p.: Brill, 1977), 33-36.

¹⁶ For a brief summary of this doctrine, see: Michael S. Heiser, “Michael Heiser - Two Powers of the Godhead”, *Yesod Bible Center* (accessed 05-Apr-2023): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrY-uAblOeQ> [9:49 to 11:55]; Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (N/p.: Brill, 1977), ix; and Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (IL/USA: Crossway Books, 2013), 116-118.

¹⁷ Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, 102-103.

¹⁸ Bauckham, *The theology of the Book of Revelation*, 97.

¹⁹ Quran.com, “Surat Al-Ĥadīd (The Iron) - سورة الحديد,” *Quran.com* (accessed 04-Apr-2023): <https://legacy.quran.com/57/3>

This is but a glimpse of how the Book of Revelation repeatedly depicts Jesus as YHWH, as John continues to blur the identification of the two. For instance, the Lamb receives the same worship as YHWH²⁰ in Revelation 5:3-14. Similarly, Revelation 22:3 has ‘*the throne of God and the Lamb*’ with the throne being singular²¹. Revelation 11:1-13 harkens back to Zechariah 4, thereby identifying YHWH (‘*the Lord of the earth*’ in Revelation 11:4 and ‘*the Lord of the whole earth*’ in Zechariah 4:14) with Jesus (‘*their Lord was crucified*’ in Revelation 11:8).

John thus makes it exceedingly clear to his readers that Jesus is no mere created being or ascended human – He is the very same YHWH whom all creation rightfully worships (Revelation 5:8-14). In contrast, mere men (Acts 10:25-26 & 14:11-18) and even glorious angels (Revelation 19:10 & 22:8-9) refuse the worship that belongs to God alone.

“It was God and God alone who was to be worshiped ... Yet the early Christian church worshipped Christ as God”²². Followers of Christ “could be willing to be put to death rather than say ‘Caesar is god’ and then in the next breath say ‘I’m going to pray to Jesus’ and not feel at all like he violated monotheism.”²³

For Jesus is the one same God of all creation, YHWH who is alone worthy of worship.

The People of God – Following in His Footsteps

The people of God are called to temporal suffering and to eternal triumph – and this has always been the way of His followers. Jesus challenged anyone who wished to follow Him to take up their cross in order to gain life and soul (Matthew 16:24-26). He told Ananias that Paul would suffer much for the sake of His Name (Acts 9:16) – and so Paul did, all the way to the end of his mortal race (2 Timothy 4:7).

²⁰ Bauckham, *The theology of the Book of Revelation*, 60.

²¹ Bible Hub, “Interlinear Revelation 22:3,” *Bible Hub* (accessed 04-Apr-2023): <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/revelation/22-3.htm>

²² Alister McGrath, “Christian Theology: An Introduction,” Oxford: Blackwell (1994): 280, quoted in Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict* (TN/USA: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 144-145.

²³ Michael S. Heiser, “The Jewish Trinity - Dr. Michael Heiser - A Walk Through The Old Testament Concerning The Trinity,” *A Victorious Church* (accessed 04-Apr-2023): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IS22MPVFngs> [3:30:49 to 3:31:13]

Jesus told the disciples that in the world they would have tribulation [thlipsin]²⁴, but to take heart – for He has overcome the world (John 16:33). An elder explains to John that believers face a great tribulation [megales tes thlipseos]²⁵ but will find peace with their Lamb and shepherd (Revelation 7:13-17).

The witnesses for Christ will be slain (Revelation 6:9 & 13:10), warred upon (12:17, 13:7), their blood shed (16:6, 19:2), and even beheaded (20:4). Yet the reward for their steadfast faithfulness is everlasting rest (14:13), rejoicing at the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:6-9), and even rulership with Christ (20:4-6). And the final culmination of all history awaits the faithful bride of Christ as they forevermore enjoy His presence (chapters 21 & 22): “Every aspect of the hope of Israel-covenant, redemption, promised land, temple, Zion, Davidic prince, new Eden,-is woven into this one simple and yet profound statement: *the dwelling of God is with men.*”²⁶.

Under such a great weight of persecution, God’s people cry out ‘*How long?*’ (6:10) – and the reply is to trust and wait, ‘*a little longer*’ (6:11). For Christ knows the exact time He will bring about the final judgment of the world and the righting of all wrongs.

The Future – The Beginning and the End

So it is all well and good that loyalty to Jesus is loyalty to YHWH, and those who swear such allegiance are counted as His people. But with such seemingly unstoppable forces as the pagan Roman Empire controlling the known world, to what avail was being counted as Christ’s? Could such a mournful dirge really turn into a triumphant fanfare?

Amidst tribulation of body and testing of faith, John reassures the reader that Jesus Christ is still – and always will be – above every power and threat. To this end, John expounds the superiority

²⁴ Bible Hub, “Interlinear John 16:33,” *Bible Hub* (accessed 04-Apr-2023): <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/john/16-33.htm>

²⁵ Bible Hub, “Interlinear Revelation 7:14,” *Bible Hub* (accessed 04-Apr-2023): <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/revelation/7-14.htm>

²⁶ Goldsworthy, *The Gospel in Revelation*, 145.

of Christ over all competitors who dare attempt to oppose His sovereign plans. Revelation definitively answers that apocalyptic question: “who is Lord over the world?”²⁷

As previously mentioned, Revelation 1:17 describes Jesus as coming on the clouds which is a symbol of YHWH’s divinity – however, this Old Testament symbolism was itself a co-opting of Baal’s well-known status in the Ancient Near East as the cloud rider²⁸. Such polemical appropriation of divine appellations is a running theme throughout the Old Testament – for example, Genesis & Exodus as ‘polemical theology’²⁹; Genesis 6 discrediting Babylonian apkallu³⁰; Psalm 29’s one-upmanship over Baal³¹; or YHWH taking yet more epithets ascribed to Baal and culminating in Elijah’s defeat of Baal’s prophets³². And true to John’s carrying on prophetic tradition, such polemics continue on against the Greco-Roman backdrop of his time.

For example, Revelation 1:4&8’s famous phrase (later echoed in 4:8), ‘*who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*’, originally belonged to Zeus^{33 34} or other Greek gods³⁵.

In 1:18, Jesus holds the keys of Death and Hades. and we should remember that Hades is not just the name of the Greek abode of the dead – it is also the name of the deity who rules it. Jesus holds the keys to the prison of the dead because He confiscates them “from Death and the underworld—take the keys and let those people out that are aligned with him, that are righteous, that follow him.”³⁶

²⁷ Bauckham, *The theology of the Book of Revelation*, 8.

²⁸ James S. Anderson, *Monotheism and Yahweh's Appropriation of Baal* (Edinburgh/UK: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2018), 86-87.

²⁹ John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* (IL/USA: Crossway Books, 2013) Perlego Edition, Chapters 3-10.

³⁰ Amar Annus, “On the Origin of Watchers: A Comparative Study of the Antediluvian Wisdom in Mesopotamian and Jewish Traditions,” *Journal for the study of the Pseudepigrapha* (2010): 283. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/4570714/On_the_Origin_of_Watchers_A_Comparative_Study_of_the_Antediluvian_Wisdom_in_Mesopotamian_and_Jewish_Traditions

³¹ Jed Ostoich, “Yahweh vs. Baal: The Psalms as Apologetic,” *Discovery Series* (accessed 04-Apr-2023): <https://discoveryseries.org/courses/yahweh-vs-baal-the-psalms-as-apologetic/>

³² Anderson, *Monotheism and Yahweh's Appropriation of Baal*, 63-97.

³³ Michael S. Heiser, “Naked Bible 353: Revelation 1:4,” *The Naked Bible Podcast* (accessed 04-Apr-2023): <https://nakedbiblepodcast.com/podcast/naked-bible-353-revelation-14/> [pp.5-7 of transcript]

³⁴ W. H. S. Jones, “PAUSANIAS 10. 1 - 16,” *Classical Texts Library* (accessed 04-Apr-2023): <https://www.theoi.com/Text/Pausanias10A.html> [paragraph 10.12.10]

³⁵ Bauckham, *The theology of the Book of Revelation*, 29.

³⁶ Michael S. Heiser, “Naked Bible 363: Revelation 3 Part 2,” *The Naked Bible Podcast* (accessed 04-Apr-2023): <https://nakedbiblepodcast.com/podcast/naked-bible-363-revelation-3-part-2/> [p.10 of transcript]

In 22:13 it is Jesus who is *'the beginning and the end'*, while to the Greeks and Romans this referred to Hekate^{37 38} – and yet also, the same phrase recalls YHWH as the one who is *'declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose''* (Isaiah 46:10).

All these usages are not borrowing from polytheistic paganism, but as mentioned earlier are part of a pattern which Revelation draws from the Old Testament: “it is employed to picture the God of Israel assaulting the pagan pantheon”³⁹ – a defeat of all pretenders to the heavenly throne.

Furthermore, Revelation 4:6-8 describes four living creatures in service to YHWH, using terms lifted from Ezekiel 1 (and amalgamated with the seraphim of Isaiah 6:1-3)⁴⁰. It is notable that these living creatures match symbols from the Babylonian Zodiac⁴¹ which Ezekiel’s contemporary exiles would have recognized. The message being conveyed is that the stars do not control human lives, but rather: “The deity on the throne the God of Israel, YHWH, who controls the cycles of time and history - which again, the patterns of the stars make - is ultimately in control of their destiny.”⁴²

All this leads up to the ultimate false claimants to YHWH’s throne – the two beasts who will lead the whole world astray in worshipping the dragon (Revelation 13). Yet even these will be duly cast down by the true ruler of all the earth, Jesus Christ (19:19-20 & 20:1-10).

So whether it is pagan deities or the heavenly bodies above (which some would say are the same thing)⁴³, none can wrench control of the universe out of Jesus’s hands. He can declare the future (1:1-3&19, 2:10, 4:1, 10:4-11, 11:1-13, 17:7-18, 20:7, 22:6&10&16-19) – because He alone has the power and authority to bring it about: *'None can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"'* (Daniel 4:35)

³⁷ Heiser, “Naked Bible 363: Revelation 3 Part 2,” [pp.12-13 of transcript]

³⁸ “wherefore they call You Hekate ... Beginning And End are You, and You Alone rule All.” Johanne Opsopoeo, “Ecloga Ex Papyris Magicis: Liber I,” *Hermetic Library* (accessed 04-Apr-2023): <https://hermetic.com/pgm/ecloga-1#vi-miscellaneous> [VI. Miscellaneous, xxvii. Prayer to Selene for Any Spell]

³⁹ Currid, *Against the Gods*, Perlego Edition, Chapter 11.

⁴⁰ Bauckham, *The theology of the Book of Revelation*, 31-32.

⁴¹ Michael S. Heiser, “Ezekiel’s Vision, Part 2,” *DR. MICHAEL S. HEISER* (accessed 04-Apr-2023): <https://drms.com/ezeiels-vision-part-2/>

⁴² Michael S. Heiser, “UFOs in the Bible? What did Ezekiel see?” *FringePop321* (accessed 04-Apr-2023): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbCb451MPIU> [19:09 to 19:22]

⁴³ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham/USA: Lexham Press, 2015), 378.

Conclusion

All together, the message which the Book of Revelation conveys is that Jesus Christ is the very same YHWH of the Old Testament whom faithful believers placed their trust in. As it was with His people then, so it is also now (Romans 8:28-30, with reference to 11:2). He is fully and firmly in control over all history, events and even spiritual powers – the future is in His hands.

Christ is the progenitor and the culmination of all things: *'the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end'* (Revelation 22:13). In using these titles, John declares boldly: "God precedes all things, as their Creator, and he will bring all things to eschatological fulfilment. He is the origin and goal of all history. He has the first word, in creation, and the last word, in new creation."⁴⁴

A note of warning must, however, be appended: For if Jesus Christ is truly YHWH – the LORD God Almighty who reigns over all creation – then He accepts no compromise in absolute loyalty. Any person who pledges fealty to a system, king or deity (Revelation 13:4&8&12) other than Christ will reap the same fate as those pretenders (13:9-11); such people are "offered not consolation and encouragement, but severe warnings and calls to repent"⁴⁵.

To the original recipients of the Book of Revelation – and to all believers throughout the ages – it is a message of comfort and reassurance during times of tribulation for His name's sake: "from the early days of the church this book was turned to in times of persecution as a source of strength and encouragement. Of all the books in the Bible, it has the most panoramic sweep of history and of God's ultimate control over it."⁴⁶ For come what may, the One who started it all will bring it all to a joyous close (21:1-5).

"'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!' (22:20)

⁴⁴ Bauckham, *The theology of the Book of Revelation*, 27.

⁴⁵ Bauckham, *The theology of the Book of Revelation*, 15.

⁴⁶ Elwell and Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament*, 358.

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