

## **“Christ Worship: Q&A”– Revelation 1:4-8**

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com).]*

Take your Bible and meet me in Revelation 1.

The topic before us today has to do with worship, particularly the worship of Christ. I wonder, how would you define worship? In my experience, people usually think of worship primarily in terms of music. We partition a church service in traditional ways, being sure to mark out a time for “worship” that is distinguishable from other elements like the “preaching” and “offertory.”

Even if “worship” has broader associations in your mind, it’s often still limited to what takes place in a corporate gathering on Sunday morning. We ask things like, “How was worship today?”, by which we mean, “Did you enjoy the things you did in the church service this morning? How was the music? The preaching? The experience?” But, once again, this conception of worship is too narrow. If you limit worship to what you do on Sunday morning then you basically engage in worship for one hour a week, which amounts to about half of a percent of your weekly activity (assuming you show up on Sunday). Aren’t you pious?

Still there is more to be said. Even if we narrow our focus to corporate worship that occurs when the people of God gather on Sundays, the “worship” associations I’ve mentioned suffer from another inadequacy. They tend to be pretty self-centered. You evaluate a worship time based on how it makes you *feel*. What you don’t realize, however, is that when your perspective on worship is shaped by what you feel, then ultimately your worship is about *you*. It’s centered on you. It’s no longer about God. It’s about you. Your tastes. Your comforts. Your experience. What you gain. How you benefit.<sup>1</sup> It’s about you.

But *you* are not worthy to be the center of worship.

God alone deserves that distinction. And when we realize this then our worship can be far more Gospel-shaped and God-centered. It will focus more on the revelation of God than the traditions of men. It will focus more on what God commands for us to do in worship than it does on our preferences and feelings. And it will magnify the glory of God instead of magnifying the worth of worms like us, whose only glory derives from their Creator.

Our text this morning is about worship. It’s dripping with Gospel and has God at the center. It focuses especially on Christ and helps us to see that Christ is worthy of our worship. That’s the sermon in a sentence. Christ is worthy of our worship. So let’s reflect on this unavoidable truth we encounter in this portion of God’s Word. Listen as I read from Revelation 1, starting in verse 4. This is God’s Word...

*“John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,<sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood<sup>6</sup> and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.<sup>7</sup> Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of*

him. Even so. Amen. <sup>8</sup> *'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'*" (Revelation 1:4-8)

What we just read is typically regarded as the letter's greeting. It identifies the author ("*John*"), the recipients ("*seven churches that are in Asia*"), expresses hopeful blessing ("*Grace to you and peace*"),<sup>2</sup> and even contains an outburst of worship. This last feature is usually referred to as a "doxology" and it's one of several we find in Revelation, many of which seem quite spontaneous.<sup>3</sup> The term "doxology" derives from two Greek words: *doxa* (meaning, "glory") and *logos* (meaning, "word" or "saying"). So a doxology is some saying of that ascribes glory. It's an outburst of praise, a statement of worship. The doxology here is directed specifically to Christ, which anticipates the central role that Christ will play in the pages ahead. But the mere fact that the doxology is addressed to Jesus in verse 5 demonstrates that Jesus is worthy of our worship.

What I want us to do with our remaining time is ask some questions that will help us engage the content of this text, where we find the answers. So let's do some Q&A. Let me just lay out the first question and answer and then I'll show you how the text answers the question. So here it is...

**Q: Why Is Christ Worthy of Our Worship?**

**A: Christ Is Worthy of Our Worship Because He Is God.**

Christ isn't merely like God, or almost God, or half God, or close to God. He *is* God. He is the second person of the Trinity and therefore fully and eternally God. There was never a day when He was not and there never will be a day when He will cease to be God. And since He is the eternal God, then He is worthy of our worship because God alone is worthy of our worship.

Where do we find this taught in this text? We see it in the Trinitarian formula that the greeting unfolds, beginning in verse 4. John gives a description of God the Father, God the Spirit, and God the Son.<sup>4</sup> The Triune God is the source of the "*grace*" and "*peace*" that John mentions. He signals this with the threefold repetition of the word "*from*."

The first "*from*" is in verse 4—"*from him who is and who was and who is to come...*" This is a reference to God the Father. This is perhaps easier to detect when you notice that verse 8 repeats and expands the description a bit—"*I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'*"

So, taken together, verses 4 and 8 refer to the Father in three different ways. He calls Himself, "*the Alpha and the Omega*."<sup>5</sup> The first letter in the Greek alphabet is alpha (α, A) and the last is omega (ω, Ω).<sup>6</sup> There are two times in the book of Revelation when God the Father speaks directly and in both cases He uses this title of Himself (1:8; 21:6). Appropriately we don't just find the title at the beginning of the book but also in the final verses (22:13). In other words, you find it at the beginning and the end of the book (no coincidence there). Though it should be noted that the final occurrence is used by Christ to refer to Himself, so the title is not used exclusively for the Father. The interchangeability also confirms the divinity of Christ and His oneness with the Father.<sup>7</sup> We should also note that the title, "*the Alpha and the Omega*," is part of triad of divine titles in the book of Revelation—along with "*the First and the Last*" and "*The Beginning and the End*" (e.g., 22:13)<sup>8</sup>—that all make the same point. Each title reminds us that God transcends time because of His eternal nature and is sovereign over the course of human history. As one writer put it, "He is both the origin and goal of history—quite literally, the first and last word."<sup>9</sup> Imagine how encouraging this must have been for John's audience. In previous weeks we have noted that they lived in turbulent times, facing many pressures for their Christian convictions. In the midst of hostility though, they are reminded that God is in control. God will have the final word. Though our circumstances differ, this encouraging truth is just as potent on our lives today.

Next, notice that the Father is described as the one “*who is and who was and who is to come*” (1:4, 8). If you can read Greek, you’ll notice that John’s grammar is poor here and you’ll be tempted to reach for a red pen. Some have even considered this an error because it appears that John, in this verse, “ain’t write good.” I won’t bore you with technical discussions of Greek syntax. Suffice it to say, John’s (allegedly) poor grammar was intentional.<sup>10</sup> He writes it the way he does because he seems to be deliberately preserving the wording found in the Greek version of Exodus 3:14, where the divine name was first given to Moses during his encounter with the burning bush.<sup>11</sup> God said to Moses, “*I Am Who I Am*”. The wording of “Who I Am” is echoed here in Revelation. The connotations are the same as well. God simply is. His existence is not contingent on anything. He is unchanging and eternal. And, given the context of Exodus 3, it probably also points to God’s presence among His people.<sup>12</sup> This is yet another encouraging thought for John’s readers.

Finally, just for good measure, the Father is also referred to as “*the Almighty*” in Revelation 1:8.<sup>13</sup> God Almighty is a common way of referring to the Lord in the Scriptures. It points to His power to accomplish whatever He desires. He is the Almighty, not the emperor of Rome.<sup>14</sup> So, cumulatively, these three titles communicate God’s rule, complete sovereignty, and absolute power to accomplish His plans in history. I can think of nothing greater to say about the Father than what John has said in these verses.

So what does he say about the Spirit? Not much, as it turns out (at least, not yet). In fact, you may have trouble even catching the reference to the Holy Spirit in verse 4. But when John refers to the “*seven spirits who are before [God’s] throne*,” he is referring to the Spirit.<sup>15</sup> We should think of the image not as seven distinct spirits but rather as a “sevenfold Spirit.” Most argue that John has in mind the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit mentioned in Isaiah 11:2. This is a messianic text that assured Israel that “*the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon [Christ], the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.*”<sup>16</sup> Thus, seven characteristics of the Holy Spirit are mentioned. John is probably summarizing this imagery when he writes of the “*seven spirits*” before the throne. The number seven in Revelation and Isaiah is probably used to suggest the idea of “completeness” or “fullness.” The fullness of the Spirit is before the throne.<sup>17</sup> But I actually think the imagery is also drawn from Zechariah 3 and 4, but we won’t have time to explore that today.<sup>18</sup> It relates to the lampstands we will encounter later though, so we’ll come back to eventually.

After John calls to mind the Holy Spirit, he closes the Trinitarian reference with verse 5. He notes that “*grace and peace*” flow not only from God Father and God the Spirit, but also “*from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings on earth.*” So we have the full Trinity referred to here. Jesus Christ is divine. So in answer to the first question (“Why is Christ worthy of our worship?”) the answer is simply: He is worthy because He is God. He is the second member of the Trinity. He is worthy of our worship.

But John pushes even further to prove this point. He shows Jesus’ worth by describing itemizing certain facts about Him. This leads us to our next question.

### **Q: What Else About Christ Inspires a Response of Worship?**

To this question, I detect three answers in what John has written. Here is the first one...

#### **A1: *Who Christ Is Inspires Worship***

The threefold description found in verse 5 is an excellent (though by no means exhaustive) description of who Christ is. He is “*the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings on earth.*” Before we discuss each of these, it’s important to mention that all three descriptions John draws from Psalm 89. The Psalm begins like this,

*“I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations. <sup>2</sup> For I said, ‘Steadfast love will be built up forever; in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness.’ <sup>3</sup> You have said, ‘I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: <sup>4</sup> ‘I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.’” (Psalm 89:1-4)*

That covenant is the Davidic covenant, where God promised that David’s line would rule forever. Yet the song is lamenting the fact that David’s descendants, the kings, have not always been that great. With the ungodliness of these kings came the judgment of God and the psalmist is rehearsing God’s covenant with David so as to remind the congregation that, though it may look bad at the moment, God will be faithful to His promise to David. As the writer communicates the promises, he comments about David’s offspring,

*“I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him. I will establish his offspring forever and his throne as the days of the heavens...His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me. Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies.” (Psalm 89:27-29, 36-37)*

In other words, God will be faithful to His promise. He will establish David’s throne forever despite the many horrible kings that descended from David, sat on the throne of Israel, and stirred up God’s wrath. But who ultimately fulfills this Davidic Covenant? Jesus! He is the descendent of David in whom God is well pleased. He is the eternal Son that sits on the throne forever. So the fulfillment comes, though not in the way any one expected. John must have this song on His mind, because he adopts the language the psalmist uses to describe the Davidic covenant and applies it to Jesus, the one anticipated in that covenant, the Messiah.<sup>19</sup>

Interestingly, you could argue in John’s arrangement in Revelation 1:5 captures the three offices of the Messiah: prophet, priest, and king. The prophetic office is seen in the fact that Jesus is “*the faithful witness*,” the one who bore witness to the Gospel of the Kingdom. Being the faithful witness speaks to His infallible character. His credibility is impeccable. His reliability proven. All He has said or will ever say true. So when, for example, He said, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6), then we know this is true because it was the testimony of “*the faithful witness*.”<sup>20</sup> As James says, the one who never stumbles in what he says is a perfect man (James 3:2). The only one who lived up to that was Jesus. For this, Christ is worthy of our worship.

His priestly office is called to mind with the second description, “*the firstborn of the dead*.” The term “*firstborn*” has nothing to do with physical birth, as though the Son of God was created. He was not. He has always existed as part of the Trinity. Rather, “*firstborn*,” just like in Psalm 89 has to do with preeminence. Yet when it is combined as it is here with “*of the dead*” it carries the additional nuance of resurrection. Jesus was the first one in history to be resurrected from the dead (not merely resuscitated only to die later). He rose with a gloried body and Revelation 20:4 indicates that His followers will also be raised from the dead like He was. He has pioneered and guaranteed our resurrection.<sup>21</sup> He is the only answer to the question, “How do I beat death?” And He has inaugurated the new creation by His resurrection. That’s the point of Revelation 3:14, which describe Him again as “*The faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation*.”<sup>22</sup> The resurrection though presupposes the sacrifice Jesus offered up on the cross, the sacrifice of Himself. He shed His blood to atone for our sins. And His priestly work continues even after the resurrection as He serves as our “Great High Priest” in heaven (Heb. 4:14ff). For this, Christ is worthy of our worship.

His royal office is described when John calls Jesus “*the ruler of the kings on earth*.” Psalm 89 talks about the Davidic king possessing that level of authority, but not one ever did. Not until Christ. After the

resurrection, Jesus announces to His disciples, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*” (Matt. 28:18; cf. Ps. 89:27). He has all authority. He’s the “*King of kings and Lord of lords*” (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16). For this, Christ is worthy of our worship.

Now if we stopped with those three statements about who Christ is, that would be enough to establish that Christ is worthy of our worship. Who Christ is...is enough. There has been nothing directly said about you. Nothing about what you get out of worship. It’s all Christ-centered, God-centered. “Well, you don’t understand, pastor. When I worship I want it to make me feel good. I want to be uplifted. You know, I want to feel like I’m walking away with something practical and exciting. That’s the kind of worship I like. The kind that helps lift my self-esteem.” Ha! Did you think you were coming to the Dr. Phil show today?

You don’t need worship that helps your self-esteem. Your problem is not a lack of esteem for self. Your problem is a lack of esteem for Christ! That should be the pulse of your worship. He is worthy to be the center of your worship, not you.<sup>23</sup> And it’s from His worth that we ultimately will derive our worth as Christians. When we esteem Christ above all else in this world, then we will begin to find that our identity is found in Him. It’s found in the fact that we belong to Him. That we are loved by Him. That we are set free by Him. That we are given a purpose by Him. In other words, true worship is only related to you to the extent that you are related to Him by grace. That piece of worship that has to do with you has only to do with what God has done *for you* in Christ. So it’s really about Christ too. And that’s when we discover that Jesus inspires worship not only because of who He is, but also because of what He has done.

And this leads to the second answer to our question.

### **Q: What Else About Christ Inspires a Response of Worship?** **A2: *What Christ Has Done Inspires Worship***

And what is that Christ has done for us. Verses 5 and 6 lists three examples—“*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*” Just let that warm your soul for a moment and fuel your worship.

John reminds us that Jesus “*loves us.*” It’s not just that He loved us in the past when He came and died for our sins. And it’s not that He loves some future version of you, when you get rid of all your baggage and sort out the mess that is your life. No. He loves you now. He has always loved you. The tense of the verb in the original language depicts His love as in process. Right now. Jesus is loving you. Do you feel it? Doesn’t matter. Your worship isn’t based on feelings. We worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24). And the truth is, right now, at this very moment, Jesus loves you. Do you know who Jesus first said the “*spirit and truth*” line to? An immoral Samaritan woman from an obscure village who thought she understood true worship but didn’t. An insignificant woman with significant baggage. Yet, as Bob Kauflin explains,

“Jesus told the Samaritan woman not only that the Father was *seeking* true worshipers, but that he came to *make* her one. Her story is the story of every true worshiper. We begin by acknowledging our inability to worship God unless he draws us by his grace and reveals himself to us through his Word.”<sup>24</sup>

In other words, “it takes God to worship God.”<sup>25</sup> And what, you might wonder, does it take for us to be made worshipers? Besides God’s love and grace, it took the cross of Christ, which John said, in verse 5, “*has freed us from our sins.*” Our sins create enmity and distance between us and God. They have to be removed if we are to ever be able to offer acceptable worship to God. Christ alone can remove them. When a person’s faith rests on Christ, their sins are forgiven. Why? Because God has placed them on Christ and He died the death we deserved. He absorbed wrath that had our name on it. He scribbled out our name and wrote “Jesus,” substituting Himself for you. His death canceled our obligation to pay a damning penalty for

our sin. And by His blood alone we are forgiven. We are set free from sin. But when God saves it's not just *from* something, it's *for* something. We are saved to be His agents and worshipers in the world.<sup>26</sup> We were redeemed not so we could get our lives back and do with them whatever we want. We were redeemed so our lives would be turned toward the Redeemer in worship and service. Thus, verse 6 tells us that Christ has made His redeemed people "*a kingdom, priests to his God and Father.*"

Are you detecting all the Exodus language in our text today? Many of you have been reading Exodus lately through our church Bible reading plan (see bulletin tear-off). What happens in the Exodus story? The people are slaves in Egypt. God sees their bondage and raises up a deliverer, Moses, who He reveals His name to at the burning bush. Moses leads the people out of their captivity, after a Passover lamb was slaughtered and the blood applied to the houses of those who trusted God. They cross through a parted sea and meet with God, their true deliverer, at Mount Sinai. The Lord reveals His intentions for His people and tells them that He has delivered them to be "*a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*" (Exod. 19:6). And then, in time, He moves them toward a Promised Land of rest.

That whole event in history was meant to foreshadow the work of Christ. We too were in bondage, not to an Egyptian pharaoh but a far more punishing master called sin. The Lord saw us in bondage and sent someone to deliver us, a new Moses, Jesus Christ. A Lamb was slaughtered and His blood applied to us so that we would be spared the judgment of God. The Lamb was Jesus, slaughtered upon a splintering cross as our substitute. When we trust God, that blood is applied to us and our ransom was paid. He delivered us from our bondage. We participate in a New Exodus. He "*freed us from our sins.*" And that redemption brought us into a new people, "*a kingdom,*" led by a King who brought us into the Lord's service as "*priests*" (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5-6, 9; Heb. 13:15). In other words, He redeemed us and allows us to share in some measure in His own offices. We too are called to faithfully bear witness to the saving good news that is the Gospel (as we will see in "Antipas" in Rev. 2:13), serve as priests offering acceptable worship and service to the Lord, and reign kings and coheirs with King Jesus (Rev. 5:10; 20:6). But just like in the first Exodus, His deliverance precedes our service. And this Savior King has led us into the ultimate rest, which He inaugurated at His first coming and will consummate at His second when He brings us into a new Promised Land. That's what Christ has done for us. For that, He is worthy of our worship!

And that's the resounding note that John strikes. Christ saved us not just to bring us into a people (a kingdom) and not just to bring us into His service (as priests), but He also saved us to bring Him glory. So John says, in verse 6, "*to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*" So be it! Christ is not just worthy of our worship. He is worthy of our worship forever and ever, throughout eternity. Sound familiar? Our purpose statement as a church echoes this sentiment—"We exist to glorify God through gospel-transformed lives."

By now you should be convinced, but let me draw your attention, as we close, to one final answer that John addresses in this text...

**Q: What Else About Christ Inspires a Response of Worship?**  
**A3: *The Hope We Have In Christ Inspires Worship***

Our worship of Christ is an expression of the future hope that we have in Christ. Look at verse 7. "*Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.*" Drawing on imagery from Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10, John is describing the second coming of Christ. There is a lot that could be said about the second coming of Christ and there is a lot that the book of Revelation will say about that event. For now, simply consider what these words are communicating about the event.<sup>27</sup>

John says he will be coming with the clouds, which suggests that it is a supernatural event (cf. Acts 1:11).

Clouds tend to be an image of God's presence in the Bible, so perhaps these clouds carry the same connotations. It's likely that John wants us to think of this as a "theophany," a manifestation of Christ's divinity, because in the Old Testament God appears in the clouds (e.g., Exod. 13:21). No one will deny Christ's true divine nature in that moment. This is a public event. John says, "*every eye will see him, even those who pierced him.*" And finally, this is a decisive act, where eternal destinies will be sealed. When the texts mentions wailing it is ambiguous as to what kind of wailing is taking place. Is this joy or regret? It could be either.<sup>28</sup> Some will cry tears of joy on that day because they know the Lord has come back to bring to fruition their glorious hope. Others will cry tears of grief because the Lord's return will bring eternal judgment and despair. It will be a decisive moment for each group. If He came back today, which group would you be in?

Friends, God's Word announces, "*if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved...For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*" (Rom. 10:9, 13). Do you have such faith? Maybe today God has stirred in you that belief and trust. Confess it before men today. Jesus has said, "*everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven*" (Matt. 10:32). In a moment, during a song of invitation, why not come forward to acknowledge that you are trusting Christ today as your Savior and Lord? Why not publically acknowledge by your coming forward, that you believe Jesus alone can take away your sins? He will not turn you away. He will acknowledge you before His Father. And if He comes back today, the tears you cry will be tears of joy, not sorrow. Tears of worship, not grief.

So you see, Christ is worthy of our worship because He is God. Christ is worth of our worship because of who He has revealed Himself to be—the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings on earth. Christ is worthy of our worship because of what He has done—He has loved us and continues to love us, He's set us free from sin, He's given us a purpose that we live out for His glory. And Christ is worthy of our worship because He's coming back to make all our Christian hopes a reality.

Church, Jesus is coming back. What glorious news! Because when He comes back all our hope in Christ will be fully realized. He will consummate our salvation. He will judge and destroy evil fully and finally. He will resurrect His people. And He will transform all creation so that He can live among His people forever.<sup>29</sup> That is our future hope in Christ. And for that, He is worthy of our worship. Amen, somebody!

Let me close with these words, from a sermon by Voddie Baucham.

"Who [Christ] is...and what Christ has done is worthy of our worship *and* makes our worship worthy of Him. God help us, for squabbling over styles. God help us, for our desire to have our own needs met. God help us, for our preferences. God help us, for all of those things that cause us to come into the presence of a holy God and act as though He better do something to impress...God help us, for thinking that we're here too long. God help us, for thinking that too much is asked or demanded of us. God help us. Do you have any idea who He is? Do you have any idea what He has done? God help us, for coming through those doors with any attitude other than the one that says, first and foremost, 'I cannot believe I have this privilege. I know who I was before He redeemed me. I know who I was when I got up this morning, even after He redeemed me. And yet...' God help us, for any attitude other than that. Because it is only that attitude that brings us into this place and puts us into a position that says, 'He is worthy of all that I can offer Him today and so...much...more.'"<sup>30</sup>

Let's pray...

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<sup>1</sup> Voddie Baucham makes the same point in “Christ is Worthy,” a sermon preached that can be found on

<sup>2</sup> This greeting of grace and peace will be familiar to readers of the New Testament because of how frequently it occurs in Paul’s letters (e.g., Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Phil. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1), though John here does expand here the source of these blessings in a Trinitarian way with some uniqueness. Together, grace and peace, “represent the bicultural background of the NT—Greek (“grace”...) and Hebrew (“peace”...)” Alan F. Johnson, “Revelation,” *Hebrews – Revelation* (EBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 598.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Revelation 4:11 5:9, 12-13; 7:10, 12; et al.

<sup>4</sup> That’s not the order we would expect (i.e., Father, Son, Holy Spirit), but he mentions the Son third so the Christ-centered doxology flows more smoothly out of his reference to the Trinity.

<sup>5</sup> According to Richard Bauckham argues that the title “Alpha and Omega” may be connected to the divine name “Yahweh.” He argues: “The biblical name of God YHWH was sometimes vocalized Yāhōh and so transliterated into Greek (which has no consonant ‘h’) as ΙΑΩ (Iota, Alpha, Omega). In the context of Jewish theological speculation about the divine name, the occurrence of the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet in this Greek form of the name could have suggested that the name itself contains the implications that God is the first and the last.” Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (NTT; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 27-28.

<sup>6</sup> Craig Keener notes that “some Jewish writers used the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet (Aleph and Tav) to make the same point.” Craig S. Keener, *Revelation* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 73.

<sup>7</sup> The language is echoing the phrase diving title, “the first and the last,” which is found several times in Isaiah (41:4; 44:6; 48:12). Interestingly, only Christ is referred to as “the First and Last” in Revelation (1:17; 22:13). The “Beginning and the End” is used of both the Father (21:6) and the Son (22:13).

<sup>8</sup> “Also, if one considers Revelation 2:8 to be a continuation of 1:17, then these phrases are used a total of seven times in Revelation as yet another way of emphasizing the completeness of God’s sovereign control.” J. Daniel Hays, J. Scott Duvall, and C. Marvin Pate, “Alpha and Omega,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 21.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> As J. Scott Duvall states, “For John...theological concerns take priority over rules of grammar...” J Scott Duvall, *Revelation* (TTCS; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 25.

<sup>11</sup> This sometimes referred to as a “solecism,” a term used for grammatical irregularities. Rob Plummer gives a helpful explanation in this video: <http://dailydoseofgreek.com/extended-exegetical-discussions/rev-1-4-solecism/>.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Laing Harris, in a note from the ESV Study Bible, makes this same point. “While each of these points is true of God, the main focus in this passage is on the Lord’s promise to be with Moses and his people. The word translated ‘I am’...can also be understood as ‘I will be’ (cf. ESV footnote). Given the context of 3:12 (‘I will be with you’), the name Yahweh (‘the LORD’) is also a clear reminder of God’s promises to his people and of his help for them to fulfill their calling.” *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), n. 3:14, 149.

<sup>13</sup> According to James L. Resseguie, “The third title, ‘the Almighty,’ is an expression of God’s absolute control over this world and the world to come, and occurs none times in Revelation out of ten times in the New Testament (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22).” James L Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 69.

<sup>14</sup> “Whereas Caesar (*autokratōr*, or emperor) rules over a limited area and could have threatened them with persecution, the Lord God ‘Almighty’ (*pantokratōr*) rules over the entire universe and promises to come to their rescue.” Duvall, 27.

<sup>15</sup> Some have argued instead that this is a reference to the seven angels who stand before God in Revelation 8:2 (e.g., Mounce, 2; cf. Tob. 12:15; *I En.* 20). “However,” as Alan F. Johnson explains, “to identify the seven spirits with angels is highly unlikely because (1) such reference to angels would break the symmetry of the Trinitarian address in 1:4-5 by the intrusion of an angelic greeting, and (2) ‘spirit(s)’ in the book of Revelation refers only to the Spirit of God or to demons, with the exception of 11:11 and 13:5, neither of which refers to angels.” Johnson, 599. Cf. F. F. Bruce, “The Spirit in the Apocalypse,” in *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament*, ed. B. Lindars and S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 333-337. I would also draw attention to the fact that Revelation 3:1 shows Jesus holding the “seven spirits” and the “seven stars” in His hands, which suggests a distinction between the two. The latter is identified as the seven angels of the churches in 1:20. Keener, who does *not* adopt the view that John is referencing angels, does acknowledge that “Early Judaism thought in terms of seven archangels before God’s throne, and especially given the angels of the seven churches (1:20), many of John’s readers



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may at first have assumed that this was what he meant. Angels are sometimes listed elsewhere with the Father and Son (14:10; see also Mark 8:38; 1 Timothy 5:21).” Keener, 69.

<sup>16</sup> The Hebrew text is the basis for that translation and the “Spirit of the LORD” is necessarily included to reach the number seven. However, in the Greek translation, the virtue of “godliness” is added, which can also account for the sevenfold reference.

<sup>17</sup> This is not the only place where the Spirit is associated with the number seven. “In 4:5 the Spirit is represented by the seven [torches] burning before God’s throne, and in 5:6 the Spirit is described as the seven eyes of the Lamb. In 1:4 the seven spirits are the fullness of the Spirit before God’s throne. The dynamic imagery emphasizes the active presence and power of the Spirit of God in the world.” Resseguie, 66. Richard Bauckham’s discussion is fascinating as usual; see Bauckham, 109-125.

<sup>18</sup> Gregory K. Beale, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 39-40; Beale and McDonough, “Revelation” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1089; Johnson, 599.

<sup>19</sup> See Beale and McDonough, 1089.

<sup>20</sup> Baucham, “Christ Is Worthy.”

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Rom. 8:29; Col 1:18; 1 Cor. 15:20; Heb. 1:6.

<sup>22</sup> Beale, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, 40, 44.

<sup>23</sup> Baucham, “Christ Is Worthy.”

<sup>24</sup> Bob Kauflin, *True Worshipers: Seeking What Matters to God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 27.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Keener, 71.

<sup>27</sup> For more on how and where Jesus will return, see Eckhard Schnabel, *40 Questions about the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 251-255.

<sup>28</sup> Beale perceptively comments, “in John 19:37, the Zech. 12:10 quotation refers to the Gentile soldier near the cross who ‘pierced’ Jesus and then apparently repented (cf. John 19:34-37 and Mark 15:39).” Thus, the wailing of repentance may be what John has in mind here in Revelation. Beale, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, 43.

<sup>29</sup> Duvall, 28.

<sup>30</sup> Baucham, “Christ is Worthy.”