

book...The vision of heavenly worship in Revelation...seems intended to overshadow the remainder of the book, in which there are repeated calls and references to worship of God (e.g., Rev 7:11-12, 15; 11:16-17) and repeated warnings against worshipping any other (e.g., Rev 9:20-21; 13:4; 14:9-11). In Revelation 19:10 and Revelation 22:9 the angel interpreter sent from God twice forbids John to worship him, insisting that worship may be directed to God alone. The author clearly pictures the exalted Christ receiving worship with God (Rev 5:8-14; 7:10), which must indicate for this author the highest imaginable status for Christ. If later Christian thinkers speak of Christ and God sharing a common substance, John seems to offer something like a functional approximation in portraying idealized heavenly worship as directed jointly to God and Christ."²

Those who hold to a high Christology of Yeshua being God, ascribe great significance to many of the statements and claims made in the Book of Revelation. Much of the veneration of Yeshua the Messiah seen in the Book of Revelation, is not only **the same veneration** expected of those who serve the One God of Israel, but is seen in association **with Tanach intertextuality**. Yet as with the debate about whether Yeshua is a supernatural yet ultimately created being *or* whether He is uncreated and genuinely God, those who hold to a low Christology do have their approaches to statements appearing in the Book of Revelation, which need to be addressed.

Revelation 1:1-8

"The Lord God as Alpha and Omega"

"The Revelation of Yeshua the Messiah, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Yeshua the Messiah, *even* to all that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near. John to the seven [assemblies] 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, and from Yeshua the Messiah, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS [Daniel 7:13], and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'"

The revelation or *apokalupsis* (ἀποκάλυψις), "unveiling apocalypse" (Montgomery New Testament), given by Yeshua the Messiah to the Apostle John, concerned events yet to take place (Revelation 1:1-3). While much of the attention of readers of the Book of Revelation can involve various methods of interpretation (preterism, historicism, futurism, idealism)³—and their associated debates—all readers are agreed that there are significant statements, activities, and claims made of the Messiah, which are to be catalogued and evaluated as they concern His nature and Divinity.

Contextually, the opening greeting of Revelation 1:4a, "Grace to you and *shalom* from Him who is and who was and who is to come" (TLV), includes a reference to God the Father. "[T]he One who is, who was, and who is coming" (HCSB) emphasizes the timelessness and changelessness of God, particularly causing one to think about the theophany of the burning

² L.W. Hurtado, "Christology," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, pp 176-177.

³ For a further discussion, consult C. Marvin Pate, ed., *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

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bush, and of God as “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). The assertions made in Deuteronomy 32:29 might also come to mind: “See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me; it is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, and there is no one who can deliver from My hand.”

The glad tidings continues, issuing grace and peace also “from the seven spirits who are before his throne” (Revelation 1:4b, RSV). Who or what are the *hepta pneumatōn* (ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων)? Many have viewed “the seven spirits” as akin to being seven angels, per various references witnessed in Second Temple Jewish literature (1 Enoch 20:1-8; Tobit 12:15; 4 Esdras 4:1, 4; cf. Daniel 10:13), and perhaps even further references in Revelation itself (i.e., 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). Surely weighing into this is Zechariah 3:9, “For behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua; on one stone are seven eyes,” and Zechariah 4:10, “For who has despised the day of small things? But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel—these are the eyes of the LORD which range to and fro throughout the earth.”

Yet, whether these “seven eyes” (*shivah einayim*, שִׁבְעָה עֵינַיִם) are angels/messengers of God, or qualities of God, is something that is not agreed upon. Others, per the statement of Zechariah 4:6, conclude that the Holy Spirit is actually in view here: “Then he said to me, ‘This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit [*ki im-b’Ruachi*, כִּי אִם-בְּרוּחִי],’ says the LORD of hosts.” Grant R. Osborne forthrightly concludes that “the seven Spirits” of Revelation 1:4b are to be associated with the Holy Spirit:

“[T]he Spirit...is the means by which God will destroy the might and power of the dragon and the beast. Three other texts mention ‘the seven spirits’: in Rev. 3:1 Christ ‘holds the seven spirits of God,’ showing that he is the Spirit of Christ; in 4:5 seven lamps are burning before the throne of God, and in 5:6 the ‘sevenfold Spirit’ is characterized even more closely with Zechariah, as the Lamb is described as having ‘seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth,’ building on the ‘seven lamps...sent out’ in Zech. 4:2.”⁴

In total, it is witnessed in Revelation 1:4-5a that God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Yeshua the Son are present: “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; and from Yeshua the Messiah” (PME). It is hardly surprising that Christian examiners have frequently seen a reference to a developing doctrine of the Trinity here. G.R. Beasley Murray notes how the author “added the name of Jesus, so producing a kind of trinitarian formulation.”⁵ Craig S. Keener concurs, “If we read the seven spirits as God’s Spirit here, 1:4-5 invokes a blessing from the Trinity: Father, Spirit, and the Son.”⁶ From the text, no one can claim that a revealed trinity of God is somehow “pagan.” However, likewise from the text, given the reference to God’s Spirit as *seven spirits*, it can be claimed that a tri-unity of a plural *Elohim* Godhead, can be limiting.

Yeshua the Messiah is titularly labeled “the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1:5b). Many modern Bible readers can get completely caught off guard by seeing the title “firstborn of the dead” (*ho prōtotokos tōn nekron*, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν). In Colossians 1:18 previously, Yeshua is venerated as “head of the body, the [assembly]; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead [*prōtotokos ek tōn nekron*, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν], so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.” The title “firstborn” or *bekor* (בְּכוֹר) actually has a strong Tanach background, which for the purposes of Revelation 1:5b, is taken

⁴ Grant R. Osborne, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 61.

⁵ G.R. Beasley-Murray, *New Century Bible Commentary: Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 56.

⁶ Craig S. Keener, *NIV Application Commentary: Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 70.

from God's promise to David in Psalm 89:27: "I also shall make him *My* firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." All too frequently, the Tanach or Old Testament background of "firstborn" is overlooked, with uninformed persons often concluding that "firstborn" somehow means "first created." G.K. Beale properly directs how this is not intended:

"Firstborn' refers to the high, privileged position that Christ has as a result of the resurrection from the dead (i.e., a position with respect to the OT idea of primogeniture, especially in the context of royal succession [Ps. 89:27-37 develops this idea from 2 Sam. 7:13-16 and Ps. 2:7-8]). Christ has gained such a sovereign position over the cosmos, not in the sense that he is recognized as the first-created being of all creation or as the origin of creation, but in the sense that he is the inaugurator of the *new* creation by means of his resurrection, as 3:14 explains."⁷

Yeshua is lauded by the author of Revelation as "Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood" (Revelation 1:5c), an obvious reference to His sacrificial work on the tree at Golgotha (Calvary). It is further exclaimed how "He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father" (Revelation 1:6a), a statement about the sanctified status of born again Believers. A status originally granted to Ancient Israel (Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 61:6; cf. 1 Peter 2:5, 9) is given to the Messiah's followers (also Revelation 20:6; 22:5). With this in view, various commentators are witnessed as concluding that Revelation 1:6a connotes various themes of replacement theology, with "the Church" being a "new Israel."⁸ They draw this conclusion because Yeshua making people a kingdom of priests, obviously affects more people than just ethnic Israelites or Jews, but also those of the nations. Keener has an appreciable approach to this, which Messianics should recognize draws on the Romans 11:16-18 theme of non-Jewish Believers being grafted-in to Israel's olive tree: "Like other early Christian writers (1 Peter 2:9), John applies this title and mission to all believers (Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), who have been grafted into the heritage of Israel."⁹

What does it mean for us to see that Yeshua has "made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father" (Revelation 1:6a, NRSV)? Here, it is stated how God is not only the Father of Yeshua, but is also "His God." Might this somehow imply, as advocates of a low Christology may claim, that Yeshua is not God? We need not exhaust all of our understanding of the relationship of the Father and Son from Revelation 1:6a. Given how the text speaks of *tō Theō kai patri autou* (τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ), with the possessive pronoun "his," should be a significant clue to how Yeshua the Son has a relationship with the Heavenly Father, that the Messiah's followers do not have. Beasley-Murray stresses,

"God is here described as **his God and Father**. It is possible that the language has especially, though not exclusively, in view the relation between God and Jesus in his redeeming activity. God is he whom Jesus worshipped and revealed, the Father whom he trusted and obeyed. On the other hand in the Revelation God is spoken of as the Father of Jesus alone, never as the Father of believers (see 2:27, 3:4, 21, 14:1). The title indicates the unique relation of Jesus to God, and so is one of honour, setting him apart from all men."¹⁰

That Yeshua the Messiah is not identical with any mortal, for sure, is seen in the ambiguity detected in the exclaim of Revelation 1:6b, "to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and

⁷ G.K. Beale, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 191.

⁸ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 27; Robert H. Mounce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp 71-72; Beale, 194; Osborne, Revelation, 65.

⁹ Keener, *Revelation*, 71.

¹⁰ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 58.

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ever. Amen." A Tanach background for this can be detected from 1 Chronicles 29:11, "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all." But, who is the "Him" of Revelation 1:6b? Is it just God the Father? Many conclude so. Yet, if the doxology of Revelation 1:6b is actually being directed toward Yeshua the Messiah, then we see the beginnings of a high Christology present in the Book of Revelation, where praise and veneration normally reserved for the One God of Israel is also given to Yeshua the Son. Gordon D. Fee is a theologian who indeed concludes that Yeshua the Messiah is issued the doxology of Revelation 1:6b:

"The very thought of this threefold acclamation about Christ—that God's 'faithful witness' is also 'the first born from the dead' and has thus assumed his role as 'the ruler of the kings of the earth'—causes John to burst into doxology. But typical of Johannine theology, the doxology is not offered to God the Father, but to Christ himself!—the first of many such remarkable moments in this book. This in turn sets the stage for the especially 'high Christology' that marks the Johannine corpus as a whole."¹¹

There is little doubting the fact that in Revelation 1:7, the "Him" being referred to is the Messiah: "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen" (NIV). The statement that "He is coming with the clouds" is rightly associated with the Daniel 7:13-14 theophany of the Son of Man presented before the Ancient of Days, who is given an everlasting Kingdom, and to whom all of Creation must venerate and serve (discussed previously). And, clouds are often associated with Divine activity in the Tanach (Numbers 11:25; Isaiah 19:1; Psalm 104:3).

The language of Zechariah 12:10 is also present in Revelation 1:7: "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn." No one denies that at the Second Coming of Yeshua that the Jewish people will look on their Messiah. Yet, given the cosmic importance of the Daniel 7:13-14 Son of Man theophany (cf. Matthew 24:30), it is not appropriate to limit *hai phulai tēs gēs* (αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς) as simply being "all the tribes of the Land" (Revelation 1:7, CJB/CJSB) of Israel, but instead it has to be "all the families of the earth" (HCSB), or even "all the societies of the world" (WBC).¹² While no Messianic person denies the importance of Zechariah 12:10 for Jewish outreach and evangelism, we cannot forget that the King of Israel is indeed returning to reign over all of Planet Earth.

As the opening words of the Book of Revelation close, God the Father is called the *alpha* (Α) and the *omega* (Ω), which are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. The CJB originally had, "I am the 'A' and the 'Z,'" for Revelation 1:8, later being updated in the CJSB with "I am the א (*Alef*) and the ת (*Tav*)," with the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Regardless of which alphabet is employed, as Beasley-Murray states, "'I am the A and the Z' would signify 'I am the beginning of history and the end of history, and the lord of all that lies between'."¹³ In the Book of Isaiah, it is unambiguously declared how the God of Israel is the first and the last (Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12), a theme being employed in Revelation 1:8. The One God of Israel being the Alef and the Tav, Alpha and Omega, or the A and the Z in Revelation 1:8, does bear

¹¹ Gordon D. Fee, *New Covenant Commentary Series: Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 8.

¹² David Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation*, Vol 52a (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), 50.

¹³ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 59.

significance for further statements made, where Yeshua the Messiah is seen to possess this title as well (Revelation 22:13).

Yeshua the Messiah is not declared to be the Alef and the Tav or the Alpha and Omega at the beginning of the Book of Revelation—but He is declared to be so further on. God the Father is first declared to be the Alef and the Tav or the Alpha and Omega, with these honors further applied to Yeshua the Son. Osborne details, “Of the three uses of this title in Revelation, two refer to God (1:8; 21:6) and one to Christ (22:13; though see 1:17 where Jesus is ‘the first and the last’). From the start the unity of the Father and Son is stressed. Here God is ‘the Alpha and the Omega’ and Jesus is ‘the first and the last’ (1:17). In 21:6 God is ‘Alpha and Omega,’ and in 22:13 Jesus is ‘Alpha and Omega.’”¹⁴ For David Aune, this means that “John’s developing Christology is evident when the same divine names that he earlier ascribed to God are applied to Christ.”¹⁵ What is particularly important, is that while Yeshua the Messiah might also be the Alef and the Tav or the Alpha and Omega—Yeshua does not possess these titles independently of God the Father, but instead because He is integrated into the Divine Identity. Ben Witherington III appropriately summarizes,

“The claim is being made that Christ shares in the eternal being of God, but not only so. Notice that in Isa. 44:6 it is Yahweh declaring, ‘I am the first and last, and besides me there is no god,’ making it all the more remarkable that Jesus uses this phrase to identify himself. He shares in the work of both creation and new creation that God brought about precisely because he shares in the divine being. It is not a surprise then that Christ is the proper object of worship in Revelation.”¹⁶

If Yeshua the Messiah independently said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 22:13), then obviously He would be an important figure in the cosmic schema. But the fact that God proper is first stated to be the Alef and the Tav or the Alpha and the Omega, necessarily requires further inquiry into the nature of Yeshua the Messiah.

Revelation 1:9-20

“Yeshua the Messiah as the First and the Last”

“I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Yeshua, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Yeshua. I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, ‘Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.’ Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the

¹⁴ Osborne, *Revelation*, 71.

¹⁵ Aune, 52a:59.

¹⁶ Ben Witherington III, *New Cambridge Bible Commentary: Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003),