

THE NATURE OF YESHUA IN THE REVELATION GIVEN TO JOHN

is the eternal one, guaranteeing vindication for his suffering followers. The title is drawn from Isa. 44:6 and 48:12.”³¹

- Gordon D. Fee: “He is **the First and the Last**, which as noted regarding this phrase in 1:17, is language borrowed from Yahweh’s self-identification in Isaiah 44:6. Thus Christ is presented first of all as the Eternal One, to which is added the most significant event of his incarnation—**who died and came to life again.**”³²

REVELATION 3:1-6

“To the angel of the [assembly] in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: ‘I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. So remember what you have received and heard; and keep *it*, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the [assembly].”

The assembly at Sardis is told by Yeshua the Messiah, “I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead” (Revelation 3:1, RSV). Sardis was a very wealthy and prosperous city of antiquity, which had surely benefitted from Rome. Robert H. Mounce offers the following, important summary in his commentary on Revelation:

“Sardis was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia, the most obstinate of the foreign powers encountered by the Greeks during their early colonization of Asia Minor. In 546 BC it fell to Cyrus and became the seat of the Persian governor. Later it became part of the Seleucid kingdom, then passed to Pergamum and subsequently to Rome (133 BC). In AD 17 Sardis suffered a catastrophic earthquake, but it was rebuilt with considerable help from the emperor Tiberius (10,000,000 *sesterces*—about a million dollars—and five years of tax remission; Tacitus, *Ann.* ii.47). Nine years later (in AD 26) it competed with ten other Asian cities for the privilege of building an imperial temple but lost out to Smyrna, which stressed its practical services to Rome (Tacitus, *Ann.* iv.55-56). Situated at the western end of a famous highway from Susa to Asia Minor, Sardis was a city of wealth and fame. Under Croesus gold was taken from the Pactolus. Jewelry found in the local cemeteries indicates great prosperity. It was at Sardis that gold and silver coins were first struck. It claimed to be the first to discover the art of dyeing wool.”³³

When seeing the admonition to be revived (Revelation 2:2a), it is not difficult to postulate how the problems present in Sardis involved the influences of paganism, corruption, and spiritual deadness. Mounce draws the conclusion, “The [assembly] at Sardis comes under the most severe denunciation of the seven. Apparently untroubled by heresy and free from outside opposition, it had so completely come to terms with its pagan environment that although it retained the outward appearance of life, it was spiritually dead.”³⁴ Perhaps for the assembly at Sardis, the professing Believers became so comfortable and at ease with the wider pagan society, that they all backslid into broad conformity with paganism, losing the sure edge that they needed so that they could be accomplishing the tasks of God’s Kingdom. Keener notes a

³¹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 128.

³² Fee, *Revelation*, 30.

³³ Mounce, *Revelation*, 109.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

number of possible, ancient factors, which may have played a role in the rebuke issued by Yeshua to Sardis:

“Jesus’ reproof of a church with a name that is alive yet it is dead (3:1) may have evoked a variety of local associations. For instance, some of the most prominent local pagan religion focused on seasonal renewal of life. Perhaps less likely, some have also suggested an allusion to the opposing hills of Sardis, the Acropolis and Necropolis, so that the Christians there appear lively like the Acropolis but are actually dead like the city’s almost equally visible necropolis.”³⁵

There were a few sincere Believers in Sardis, who are lauded by the Messiah (Revelation 2:4).

What is to be deduced about the nature of God from Yeshua’s words to the assembly at Sardis? Yeshua does assert that He is One “who has the seven Spirits of God” (Revelation 3:1), *ta hepta pneumata tou Theou* (τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ). Recognizing the presence of “the sevenfold Spirit of God” (CJB/CJSB) is important, as it can definitely imply that a rigid Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is rather confining for the Eternal One. At the same time, calling a revealed tri-unity of Spirit (Revelation 3:1, 6), Son (Revelation 3:1, 2, 3, 4, 5), and Father (Revelation 3:2, 5) “pagan” is hardly appropriate—given how Spirit, Son, and Father are present in Revelation 3:1-6—although customary Christian conclusions might be incomplete.

Questions can be raised, given Yeshua’s statement, “for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God” (Revelation 3:2b), *tou Theou mou* (τοῦ θεοῦ μου). Some supporters of a low Christology would claim that Yeshua the Son referencing the Father as “My God” is an indicator that Yeshua cannot be integrated into the Divine Identity. However, as we have particularly examined for John 20:11-18, Yeshua noting the Father as “My God” when speaking to mortals—as opposed to “our God”—indicates that Yeshua has a special relationship with the Father that mortals do not have. Aune recognizes how for Revelation 3:2b, “The phrase ‘my God’ (which occurs here and four additional times, all in 3:12) is a distinctive expression attributed to Jesus found elsewhere in the NT only in John 20:17 (‘I am ascended to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God’) and in the cry from the cross (Mark 15:34 = Matt 27:46...).”³⁶ Indeed, in an environment where those in Sardis had largely forgotten their faith, with many being spiritually dead—likely due to pagan influences—Yeshua’s employment of “My God” should have gotten the attention of many back to the One God Israel, and how Yeshua during His time on Earth, in His human Incarnation, served the Father as “My God.” This is a service that His followers are to emulate.

In his commentary on Revelation, Osborne, who surely does hold to a high Christology, considers the judgment of the Father and Son to be united. At the same time, he does indicate how some might consider the Son to be subordinated to the Father in this passage:

“The idea here is to meet God’s standards (‘in the sight of my God’), and in that the [assembly of Sardis] is not only inadequate but under indictment. In the eyes of their contemporaries, they may have been more than sufficient, but not in the eyes of God. Christ has judged them, and now God is judging them. The great temple of Artemis in Sardis was unfinished, and perhaps John is saying that they resemble that building—unfinished and worthless. Christ calls the Father ‘my God’ in Mark 15:34 and John 20:17 and four times in Rev. 3:12 alone. There can certainly be a subordinationist aspect to the phrase, but in this context it means rather that Christ’s judgment is one with his Father’s.”³⁷

³⁵ Keener, *Revelation*, 143.

³⁶ Aune, 52a:220-221.

³⁷ Osborne, *Revelation*, pp 175-176.

THE NATURE OF YESHUA IN THE REVELATION GIVEN TO JOHN

Those who hold to a high Christology of Yeshua being the eternal, uncreated Son of God who is God, are internally divided as to whether or not Yeshua the Son is eternally subordinated to the Father, or only subordinated to the Father in His human Incarnation. Revelation has much more to communicate about the relationship of the Father and Son.

REVELATION 3:7-13

“And to the angel of the [assembly] in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this: ‘I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Behold, I will cause *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and *make them* know that I have loved you. Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the [assemblies].”

Significant promises are made to those of the assembly at Philadelphia by Yeshua the Messiah (Revelation 3:7-11).³⁸ Resultant of the faithfulness that the Philadelphian Believers have demonstrated, Yeshua promises them significant rewards:

“The one who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the Temple of My God, and he will never leave it. And on him I will write the name of My God and the name of the city of My God—the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God—and My own new Name” (Revelation 3:12, TLV).

Revelation 3:12 employs the possessive pronoun “My” a total of four times, in reference to the relationship that Yeshua the Son has to God the Father:

- *tō naō tou Theou mou* (τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου); “the temple of My God”
- *to onoma tou Theou mou* (τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου); “the name of My God”
- *to onoma tēs poleōs tou Theou mou* (τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου); “the name of the city of My God”
- *tēs kainēs Ierousalēm hē katabainousa ek tou ouranou apo tou Theou mou* (τῆς καινῆς Ἱερουσαλήμ ἡ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου); “the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God”

Why do we see the possessive pronoun “My” used four times? There is not a huge amount of discussion, if any at all, in most commentaries of the Book of Revelation on this. Yet, this issue can and does arise from those who hold to a low Christology of Yeshua being a created entity. Osborne is among the few who has said something about the presence of the possessive pronoun “My” in Revelation 3:12:

“The added τοῦ θεοῦ μου (*tou theou mou*, of my God) is significant. It is found four times in this verse alone. Elsewhere Jesus calls his Father ‘my God’ (cf. 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; Heb. 1:2-9; 1 Pet. 1:3, which mention ‘the God of our Lord Jesus Christ’) in the cry of dereliction (Mark 14:34 par. Matt. 27:46), at his resurrection (John 20:17), and in the letter to Sardis (Rev. 3:2). As in 3:2

³⁸ The issue of the “synagogue of Satan” is addressed, in various parts of the author’s book *Israel in Future Prophecy*; the issue of “the hour of testing” is addressed in the author’s publication *The Dangers of Pre-Tribulationism*.