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# GOD IN JOHN'S APOCALYPSE

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**ABSTRACT:** The book of Revelation is resoundingly theocentric and intensively monotheistic from first to last. The presence and person of God the Father permeates and punctuates the vision at every turn as the central character orchestrating all things according to his purposes. This theocentric character of the Apocalypse, however, is often overshadowed by its extremely pronounced Christology. One possible reason is because John does not consign Christology to a separate category of theology. But from the very outset God is unambiguously identified as the ultimate sovereign ruler of the universe. Revelation attributes a functional distinction between Father and Son, but they equally receive worship and are ascribed as worthy of worship.

**KEY WORDS:** epithets, epithets, Christology, deity, sovereign ruler.

## Introduction

The book of Revelation is resoundingly theocentric and intensively monotheistic from first to last. The presence and person of God the Father permeates and punctuates the vision at every turn as the central character orchestrating all things according to his purposes. [Resseguie, The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary, 39] John significantly restrains his descriptions and references to God. While God the Father is the ultimate source and subject of the Revelation (Rev. 1:1),[ Boring, *Revelation* 1989: 65] he only speaks twice (1:8; 21:5-8) and only once is he directly depicted within the vision (Revelation 4:3-11); even then John carefully avoids describing his appearance. John prefers to use epithets (e.g., "the Alpha and Omega," "the one who is who was and who is to come"), circumlocutions ("the one who sits on the throne," "the throne), ascriptions (e.g., Father of the Lord Jesus, "you are worthy," "true and

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just are your ways"), and references to divine activity (e.g., "it was given") to describe who God is, what he has done or will do, and why he alone is worthy of worship.

This theocentric character of the Apocalypse, however, is often overshadowed by its extremely pronounced Christology. One possible reason is because John does not consign Christology to a separate category of theology. The divine epithets are seamlessly and equally appropriated by God the Father (Rev. 1:8; 21:6) and God the Son (Rev. 1:17; 22:13). Revelation attributes a functional distinction between Father and Son, but they equally receive worship and are ascribed as worthy of worship (Revelation 4–5). Even the language and imagery used to describe Christ incorporates OT allusions to the God of Israel (Rev. 1:14). The relationship between the Father and Son is not competitive or ontologically antithetical, rather Jesus perfectly reveals the Father and fully accomplishes his will as the slain-yet-living Lamb. We may only have a momentary blinding glimpse of the one who sits upon the throne in Revelation 4, but we repeatedly see the one like a son of man who is also the Lamb seated on God's throne (Rev. 3:21; 5:6; 7:9-10; 7:17; 12:5; 22:1; 22:3). In this sense, John conjoins knowledge of God with knowledge of Christ.[Caird, *Revelation to Saint John*, 1966: 290. He remarks: "Like other New Testament writers, he believes that the glory of God has been seen in the face of Jesus Christ (cf. 2. Cor. iv. 6), that whoever has seen him has seen the Father (cf. John xiv. 9). He therefore portrays Christ at his first appearance in all the attributes of deity (i. 12 ff.); . . . . Now we may hold that John is using all these devices to say something about Christ, invested with all the insignia of Godhead; and so no doubt, he is. But the more important fact is that he is saying something about God, once hidden from human sight, but now revealed in the know person of his Son." (290)]. While one cannot not know God apart from Christ nor Christ apart from God, John also clearly distinguishes one from the other. The relatively minimalistic way John refers to God purposely, conscientiously, and reverentially preserves God's ineffable transcendence as exalted and beyond description. Therefore, the sparse references to God the Father occur with such gravitas that it makes him the theological epicenter of the entire book.

The emerging theological portrait of God in Revelation depicts him as the divine sovereign creator of the universe who sits securely enthroned and, through judgment and salvation, will bring history to its appointed conclusion—New Creation. John has characteristically developed the early Israelite faith in God who is faithful to his people in the past and projects it into an "eschatological faith in God's final coming to bring all things to fulfilment in his eternal future."[Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation* 1993: 30].

At the risk of oversimplification, one might say that God's sovereign rule over the past, present, and future coupled with all that it entails is the core of Revelation's

theology. The emphasis on God's sovereignty, a common characteristic of prophetic and apocalyptic writings, functions to remind the readers that God is in control of all their circumstances and that they may confidently trust him. As such, the theology of Revelation is highly contextual so that the question of who God is directly relates to the world in which John's readers lived. A world where idolatry abounded, and human emperors were elevated to divine status. Imperial court proceedings, ascriptions, inscriptions, coinage, and artwork all assert that the emperor is the universal sovereign over the world and cosmos. John, then, assails and blatantly contradicts the prevailing idolatry of imperial pretensions to divine sovereignty with this exalted vision of God seated upon his throne in heaven.

God's sovereignty over creation, angelic beings, nations, situations, history, and even over evil itself is depicted throughout the book of Revelation. We see this in the four distinct ways John refers to God the Father: (1) divine predications and epithets used as names or titles; (2) circumlocutions indirectly representing God, which often involves the use of symbols; (3) ascriptions voiced by others affirming God's character, power, righteousness, justice and worth; and (4) descriptions of divine activity. This article only examines the first of these to develop an understanding of John's theology of God in the Apocalypse as the sovereign creator who brings all creation to its proper conclusion.

## References to God in the Book of Revelation

References to God the Father occur over a hundred times throughout the vision and often occur within a compounded string of divine predications. The following list of references to God the Father is arranged according to their distributional frequency. John prefers some divine designations more than others. While the simple term God (θεός) is used in virtually every chapter, other, more descriptive titles carry more weight. He gives most preference to God as "the one who is seated on the throne." Keep in mind that the exact wording may vary in each context in terms of word order, forms, and syntax. The most significant variations are grouped underneath the head designations.

1. God/ ὁ θεός = 96 occurrences (Rev. 1:1-2, 6, 8-9; 2:7, 18; 3:1-2, 12, 14; 4:5, 8, 11; 5:6, 9-10; 6:9; 7:2-3, 10-12, 15, 17; 8:2, 4; 9:4, 13;10:7; 11:1, 11, 13, 16-17, 19; 12:5-6, 10, 17; 13:6;14:4, 7, 10, 12, 19;15:1-3, 7-8; 16:1, 7, 9, 11, 14, 19, 21; 17:17; 18:5, 8, 20; 19:1, 4-6, 9-10, 13, 15, 17; 20:4, 6; 21:2-3, 7, 10-11, 22-23; 22:1, 3, 5-6, 9, 18-19)

2. He who sits on the throne/ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου = 14 occurrences (Rev. 4:2, 3, 9, 10; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 11:16; 19:4; 20:11; 21:5)

2a. God's throne/θρόνος = 25 occurrences (Rev. 1:4; 4:2, 3, 5, 6, 10; 5:1, 6, 11; 7:9, 10, 11, 15, 17; 8:3; 12:5; 14:3; 16:17; 19:4, 5; 20:11, 12; 21:3; 22:1, 3)

3. Lord God Almighty/ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ = 6 occurrences (Rev. 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22)
   3a. The Lord [and] God/ ὁ κύριος ὁ θεὸς = 7 occurrences (Rev. 1:8; 4:11; 18:8; 22:5,6)
   3b. Almighty/ ὁ παντοκράτωρ or God Almighty/ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος = 3 occurrences (Rev. 1:8; 16:14; 19:15)
   3c. Lord/ κύριος = 3 occurrences (Rev. 11: 4, 15; 15:4)
4. Father/πατήρ = 5 occurrences (Rev.1:6; 2:27; 3:5, 21; 14:1)

5. The one who is, who was, and who is to come/ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος = 3 occurrences (Rev. 1:4, 8; 4:8)
   5a. The one who is and who was/ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν = 2 occurrences (Rev. 11:17; 16:15)

6. The Alpha and the Omega/τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ = 2 occurrences (Rev. 1:8; 21:6)

7. The one who lives for ever and ever/τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων = 3-4 occurrences (Rev. 4:9, 10:6; cf. 15:7)

Living God/θεοῦ ζῶντος = 1-2 occurrences (Rev. 7:2; cf. 15:7)

8. God of Heaven/ τῷ θεῷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ = 2 occurrences (Rev 11:13; 16:11)

9. Master/ὁ δεσπότης – 1 occurrence (Rev. 6:10)

10. The Holy and True One/ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός = 1 occurrence (Rev. 6:10)

11. King of the nations/ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν = 1 occurrence (Rev 15:3)

12. The Holy One or Righteous One/ὁ ὅσιος = 1 occurrence (Rev 16:5)

13. The Beginning and the End/ ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος = 1 occurrence (Rev 21:6)

14. The One Who Judges/ ὁ κρίνας – 1 occurrence (Rev 18:8)

The multiple references to God create a sense of infinite grandeur in the seemingly unlimited combinations of titles.[ See also James Resseguie, *The Revelation of*

*John: A Narrative Commentary* 2009: 39. He writes, "John prefers lengthy, expansive titles and epithets to describe God . . . . titles are heaped one upon another . . . or they are expanded to correspond to the expansive unlimited character of God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty' (1:8)."]. John speaks of God in manner that fully displays his theological brilliance. The cumulative effect of John's depiction and description of God presents him as the full revelation of Yahweh—the creator and covenantal God of the Old Testament—who rules over the cosmos and will bring about the New Creation through judgment and salvation. I want to make some initial guiding observations that will bear on the analysis of many references in their literary contexts.

First, John tends to cluster bipartite and tripartite predicates for God usually following an "I am" self-declaration. Both instances where God speaks in Revelation (Rev. 1:8 & 21:6) contains an "I am" (Εγώ εἰμι) statement coupled with several divine predications:

> **Revelation 1:8** "I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, the One Who is and Who Was and the One who is coming, the Almighty" (Εγώ εἰμι τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, λέγει κύριος ὁ θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ).

> **Revelation 21:6** He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. . . (καὶ εἶπέν μοι· γέγοναν. ἐγώ [εἰμι] τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος . . .).

In Rev. 1:8, we find four distinct divine designations. They are all predications are nouns, adjectives, and substantive particles asserting or explaining something qualitatively about God. (Aune 2006: 262).

The "I am" statement in Rev. 21:6 is embedded within the climatic statements of God in Rev. 21:5-8 and emphasizes him as "the Alpha and Omega" and "the Beginning and the End" who makes all things new. Except for "Almighty" (ὁ παντοκράτωρ) all of these predications are comprised of two parts ("Alpha and Omega," "Beginning and End") or three ("The One who is and who was and who is to come"). The bipartite and tripartite predicates are expressed in terms of two extremes of a continuum embracing all that lies between. (Aune, "God and Time in the Apocalypse") What is more, these titles are in some sense synonymous as well as mutually interpretive.[ Aune, "God and Time in the Apocalypse"] The cumulative effect of the compounded designations emphasizes his omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence over the creation and over time itself.

Second, the references to God express aspects of his character, sovereignty, or judgments that are important for understanding the overall message of the vision.

The descriptive titles assert or affirm a quality or characteristic about who God is and what he is like. For example, the "Alpha and Omega" and "the one who is, who was, and who is to come" emphasize the eternality of God. God, as eternal, is before, above, and beyond time. In Revelation, God's eternity is not merely a matter of self-existence apart from the world, but his eternity is set in relation to the world. [Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*: 30.] His eternality and direction of history toward its proper conclusion, then, has direct implication for the audience. God created all things, and everything exists only by his will (Rev. 4:11). As creator of the world, he is not detached from it. He will once again directly intervene and invade the space-time continuum to judge humanity and to make all things new (Rev. 21:5). Believers in Asia Minor are called to preserve in their faithfulness to Christ, to abstain from idolatry, and brace themselves for the backlash of persecution. God is not only in control of history and circumstances, but he will also vindicate his people with the reward of life in the New Jerusalem. We also see that God is the Holy and True Almighty Lord of the heavenly hosts who renders justice while seated securely upon his throne. Therefore, John's vision leaves no doubt about who is the supreme ruler of the cosmos and who is the only one worthy of worship.

Finally, many of the references to God are exegetical to some extent because they are rooted in OT sub-texts. This exegetical nature is evident with the divine predications in Rev. 1:8. Both the "I am" (Εγώ εἰμι) and the phrase "the one who is, who was, and who is to come" (ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος) allude to "I Am who I Am" (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν) in Exodus 3:14. The "Alpha and Omega" is comparable to "the First and the Last" (Rev. 1:17), referring to Jesus, and alludes to Isa 44:6 where God declares "I am first and last [after these things]" (ἐγὼ πρῶτος καὶ ἐγὼ μετὰ ταῦτα). The "Lord God" (κύριος ὁ θεὸς) translates the name *Yahweh Elohim* (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים) and occurs with extreme frequency throughout the OT. Lastly, the title "the Almighty" (ὁ παντοκράτωρ) is also connected with the divine name and is associated with the divine warrior as the Lord of the Hosts (e.g., 2 Sam. 5:10; Jer. 5:14; Hos. 12:5; Amos 3:13; 4:13).(Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*: 30.) While there is much more to say about each of these titles, John's theology is rooted so deeply in Israel's scriptures that the God of the Apocalypse is *Yahweh* of the OT.

## Divine Predications and Epithets

Divine epithets are titles or other descriptive designations that comprise the primary references to God. They do more than merely name God because they theologically assert qualities and characteristics about God. They offer a more robust conception of God for the reader. Epithets posit titles or names for God that define him more fully. The transcendent and exalted manner by which God is presented in the text is accomplished through these epithets. The preceding section will examine each of

these epithets in their literary context. Particular attention will be given to the meaning, background, variation, and function of each epithet throughout the entire book. I will examine them according to their frequency, but preference is given to epithets occurring within clusters.

*God/ὁ θεὸς*

It may seem a bit pedantic to cull through and discuss the ninety-six occurrences of the word God (ὁ θεὸς), but it surprisingly yields a few interesting results. The word *theos* is simply the generic term for God. Though it is a nondescript word it asserts certain theological propositions when set within particular contexts in Revelation. John uses *theos* to refer to the God of Israel and Heavenly Father of Jesus. The following analysis of the occurrences of *theos* examines how John frames it within the literary context to maximize meaning. I will first consider how it functions syntactically. As a noun he uses it subjectively or objectively in relation to verb within clause. It may function descriptively in relation to another noun, pronoun, or preposition.

When used subjectively, *theos* occurs in the nominative case as the subject of the clause. A nominative noun usually functions as the subject doing the action of the verb or it predicates something about the subject of clause. I have grouped the twenty-one instances of the nominative case into three categories describing how *theos* functions in a particular clause: (1) God, as the subject, performs the action of a verb (1:1, 8; 18:5; 21:7; 22:6, 18, 19); (2) God is the subject of an address by another being (4:8, 11; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 21:3[2x]; (3) God, as the subject of a dependent clause, is the cause or reason for the main clause (7:17; 17:17; 18:8, 20;19:6; 21:22; 22:5). Of these, the first and third are the most significant since ascriptions about God will be addressed in a separate section. Nor will we examine every single occurrence of *theos* in the nominative case, but other when it contributes something of theological importance. Interestingly, the prologue (Rev. 1:1-9) and epilogue (22:6-21) contain the thickest clusters of occurrences of *theos* as a subject in order to emphasize the divine source for the vision.

*God, as the subject, performs action of a verb*

The very first mention of God as the subject of a verb, in Revelation 1:1, unambiguously asserts God as the one who bestows the revelation of Jesus Christ to John through a mediating angel to show his servants what will soon take place. While "the revelation" could either be about Jesus or given by him, [Either an objective or a subjective genitive.] God is listed first in the chain of revelatory command. God is the subject of the verbs "gave" (ἔδωκεν) and "made known" (ἐσήμανεν) making him the source of the revelation. This is further underscored in the epilogue (Rev. 22:6) where the guiding angel affirms the words of the prophecy are true and that God sent

(ἀπέστειλεν) it via his angel. The words of the angel in Rev. 22:6 parallel the opening statement of Rev. 1:1 in terms of God as the one giving the revelation and sending through his angel to show God's servants what must soon take place:

> **Rev. 1:1** The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God [ὁ θεὸς] gave [ἔδωκεν]him to show [δεῖξαι] his servants [τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ] what must soon take place [ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει]. He made it known [ἐσήμανεν] by sending [ἀποστείλας] his angel [τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ] to his servant John, (NIV)

> **Rev. 22:6** The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God [ὁ θεὸς] who inspires the prophets, sent [ἀπέστειλεν] his angel [τὸν ἄγγελον αὐτοῦ] to show [δεῖξαι] his servants [τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ] the things that must soon take place [ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει]." (NIV)

By emphasizing God as the source of the vision in this way, John identifies and attributes the entirety of Revelation as coming directly from God.

In addition to commissioning (i.e. *giving* and *sending*) the revelation, God performs a range of actions highlighting divine activity in John's Apocalypse. God speaks (Rev. 1:8). God has created all things (Rev. 4:11). God will wipe away the tears from the eyes of his people (Rev. 7:17). God has begun to reign by his great power (Rev. 11:17). God directs the hearts and purposes of wicked rulers to give their authority to the beast (Rev. 17:17). God remembered the crimes of Babylon (Rev. 18:5). God renders swift judgment against Babylon (Rev. 18:8) and he judges Babylon with retributive justice based on the judgments she rendered against his people (Rev. 18:20). God reigns (Rev. 19:6). God will forever be the God of his people (Rev. 21:3). God and the Lamb themselves are the temple in the new creation (Rev. 21:22). God will add the plagues of Revelation to anyone who would add to the message as delivered (Rev. 22:18). God will take away the share of life in the eternal kingdom of anyone who takes away from the message as delivered (Rev. 22:19). To be sure, this is not a comprehensive list of all the activity of God in Revelation, but only that which is attributed to *theos* instead of one of the other ways John refers to God. There are two observations regarding this activity. First, God is the mastermind orchestrating and acting to ensure everything is accomplished in the Apocalypse as he determined it. The scope of God's activity extends well beyond that of passively sitting on his throne calling the shots. He actively speaks, directs, judges, and reigns. Second, John clearly intends for his readers to recognize *theos* as the Creator and Covenantal God of Israel—Yawhweh.

The connection to Yahweh is made even stronger in Revelation by pairing it "Lord" (ὁ κύριος). This bipartite epithet, "the Lord God" (κύριος ὁ θεός), occurs seven times in the apocalypse (Rev. 1:8; 4:11; 18:8; 22:5,6) and is likely a truncated form of the tripartite formula "The Lord God Almighty" (κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ; Rev. 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22, see 1.1.3). The exact phrase "the Lord God" (κύριος ὁ θεός) frequently appears in the LXX as a translation of the Hebrew "Yahweh Elohim" (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים).[Just the occurrences in the Pentateuch and Prophets demonstrates that κύριος ὁ θεὸς was the stock translation of the יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים (or some combination of these names for God). Cf. Gen. 2:8, 15-16, 18, 22; 3:1, 9, 13-14, 21, 23; 4:6, 15; 5:29; 6:3, 5, 12, 22; Gen. 7:1, 5, 16; 8:15, 21; 9:12, 26; 11:9; 24:7, 27; 27:20; 28:13, 20; Exod. 3:15-16; 4:5; 5:1; 6:7; 7:16; 9:1, 13; 10:3; 13:5, 8-9, 11; 16:12; 20:2, 5, 12; 29:46; 32:27; 34:6, 14; Lev. 8:35; 11:44;18:2, 4-5, 30; 19:2-4, 10, 12, 14, 16, 23, 25, 28, 31-32, 34, 36-37; 20:7, 24, 26; 22:3, 9; 23:22, 43; 24:22; 25:17, 38, 55; 26:1, 13, 44; Num. 10:10; 15:41; 23:21; 27:16; Deut. 1:6, 10-11, 19-21, 25, 30-31, 41; 2:7, 29-30, 33, 36-37; 3:3, 18, 20-22; 4:1, 3, 7, 19, 21, 23-24, 31, 34-35, 39-40; 5:2, 6, 9, 12, 15-16, 24, 27, 32-33; 6:1, 3-4, 10, 15, 20; 7:1-2, 6, 9, 12, 16, 18-23; 8:1-2, 5, 7; 9:3, 6; 10:12, 17, 22; 11:12, 25, 29, 31; 12:1, 5, 7, 9-11, 14, 18, 20-21, 26, 29; 13:4, 6, 13; 14:2, 23-25, 29; 15:4, 6-7, 10, 14-15, 18, 20; 16:2, 5-7, 10-11, 15, 18, 20, 22; 17:2, 8, 10, 14-15; 18:5, 9, 14-15; 19:1-3, 8, 10, 14; 20:1, 4, 13-14, 16-17; 21:1, 5, 10, 23; 23:6, 15, 21-22; 24:4, 9, 18-19; 25:15, 19; 26:1-2, 11, 16; 27:2-3; 28:1, 7-9, 11, 13, 52-53, 64; 29:3, 5, 11; 30:4-5, 7, 9, 16, 18; 31:3, 6, 17; Hos. 2:25; 12:6, 10; 13:4; Amos 3:7-8, 11, 13; 4:3, 5, 13; 5:8, 14-16, 27; 8:9; 9:5-6, 12, 15; Mic. 4:10; 7:10; Joel 2:12, 27; 4:17; Obad. 1:1; Jon. 4:6; Nah. 3:5; Hab. 3:19; Zeph. 2:7; 3:17; Hag. 1:12; Zech. 10:3, 6; 13:9; 14:5; Mal. 2:16; 3:6; Isa. 8:10; 17:6; 27:4; 30:18; 37:4, 21; 38:5; 41:17, 21; 42:5-6, 8, 13, 21; 43:1, 3, 10, 12, 14-15; 44:2; 45:1, 3, 5-7, 11; 51:22; 52:12; 57:21; Jer. 2:17, 19; 3:22; 5:18-19; 7:3; 9:14; 11:3; 16:1, 9; 19:3; 23:30, 37-38; 24:5; 26:18, 23; 32:15; 34:4; 36:4; 37:2; 38:18; 39:27-28, 36; 40:4; 41:13; 46:16; 47:2; 49:3; 51:2, 25; Ezek. 4:13; 20:5, 7, 19-20; 28:26; 34:30-31; 35:15; 39:22, 28; 43:18-19; 44:2, 6, 9, 12, 15, 27; Dan. 3:45, 95; 9:14.]. The ubiquity of this phrase in the OT clearly demonstrates that it is the standard way to refer to Yahweh. What makes this especially notable for is the virtual absence of this phrase in the NT. Aside from its frequent appearance in Revelation, it is only found once in Mark (12:29), twice in Luke (1:32; 68), and twice in Acts (2:39; 3:22). John's usage of this phrase in Revelation reinforces the fact that John thoroughly rooted in the OT text and prophetic tradition of ancient Israel. He does more than any other NT writer to make the identification of God the Father with Yahweh.

*God, as the subject of a dependent clause, is the cause or reason for the main clause*
There are seven instances where God is expressly attributed as the cause or reason why something is so (Rev. 7:17; 17:17; 18:8, 20; 19:6; 21:22; 22:5). In Greek, the cause or reason may be expressed in a dependent clause introduced by using the conjunctions *hoti* (ὅτι) or *gar* (γάρ).[ BDF §§456, 452; Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* 1996: 460, 674]. While both conjunctions have an explanatory force, *hoti* communicates the idea of what caused the action and *gar* explains the reason why it happened. As a dependent clause it is subordinate to the idea or action expressed in the main clause so it must be viewed within the context of the full sentence as further explanation. Five times *hoti* is used to express God as the cause:

**Rev. 7:17** For [**ὅτι** ] the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to springs of living water.' 'And God will wipe [**ἐξαλείψει ὁ θεὸς**] away every tear from their eyes.'"

**Rev. 18:8** Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for [ὅτι] mighty is the Lord God who judges her [**ὁ θεὸς ὁ κρίνας**].

**Rev. 18:20** "Rejoice over her, you heavens! Rejoice, you people of God! Rejoice, apostles and prophets! For God has judged [**ὅτι ἔκρινεν ὁ θεὸς** ] her with the judgment she imposed on you."

**Rev. 19:6** Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For [ὅτι] our Lord God Almighty reigns [**ἐβασίλευσεν κύριος ὁ θεὸς** [ἡμῶν] ὁ παντοκράτωρ].

**Rev. 22:5** There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for [**ὅτι**] the Lord God will give them light [**κύριος ὁ θεὸς φωτίσει**]. And they will reign for ever and ever. = In the New Creation there will be no more night nor need for the sun **because** God will provide light by his own presence.

Twice *gar* introduces a clause explaining why something is:

**Rev. 17:17** For God has put [**ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἔδωκεν**] it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to hand over to the beast their royal authority, until God's words are fulfilled.

> **Rev. 21:22** I did not see a temple in the city, because [**ὁ γὰρ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ**] the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are [**ἐστιν**] its temple.

All of these clauses function to maximize the theological relevance for the audience. These statements are provided to encourage the implied audience by reinforcing the work of God in judgment and salvation. God will bring about the salvation of his people who may find themselves in the midst of trial through various forms of oppressive challenges. In Rev. 7:16-17, the people of God are assured of their future salvation with pastoral imagery. They will never hunger, thirst, or feel the harsh heat of the sun *because* the Lamb will shepherd them and God will wipe away their every tear. Believers are marginalized, oppressed, and even executed because they reside within the adulterous, seductive, and wicked city of Babylon/Rome (Rev. 17:9). God, however, will judge Babylon fully and speedily. God's judgment of Babylon is swift *because* God, the one judging her, is powerful (Rev. 18:8). God's judgment of Babylon accomplishes the salvation and vindication of God's people. As such, joyful celebration is the proper response to Babylon's demise *because* God vindicated his people through retributive justice (Rev. 18:20). God's judgment of Babylon is both an act of justice and, at the same time, an act of salvation. Even the actions of wicked rulers play out the way they do *because* God has so directed them to act accordingly (Rev. 17:17). The ultimate basis for believers to worship and celebrate is *because* the Lord God Almighty reigns (Rev. 19:6). His total reign over all creation, the final consummation of salvation, means that the earth itself will be his temple (Rev. 21:22) and darkness is no more *because* he will illuminate it by his very own presence (Rev.

*God as the direct or indirect object of a verb or within a prepositional phrase*

When used objectively the word God/*theos*, occurs in the accusative case, as the one who receives the intended action of a verb or as the object of a prepositional phrase. Three of the five occurrences of God in the accusative case (*theon*) make God the object of the verb to blaspheme.

> **Rev. 13:6** It opened its mouth to blaspheme God (εἰς βλασφημίας πρὸς τὸν θεὸν), and to slander his name (βλασφημῆσαι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ) and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven.

> **Rev. 16:11** [People] . . . cursed the God of heaven (ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸν θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

> **Rev. 16:21b** And they cursed God (ἐβλασφήμησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν θεὸν) on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

If the major imperative of the book of Revelation is to worship God (Rev. 19:10, 22:9), then the polar opposite would be to blaspheme, slander, or curse God. In fact, three imperative verbs are used in Rev. 14:17 directly commanding the inhabitants of the earth to fear God (**φοβήθητε** τὸν θεὸν), give him glory (**δότε** αὐτῷ δόξαν), and worship him as the creator of all things (**προσκυνήσατε** τῷ ποιήσαντι τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ θάλασσαν καὶ πηγὰς ὑδάτων). It is not surprising to see the objects of God's wrath in the book of Revelation as those who undauntedly hate and revile him. The beast seeks to establish himself as God, demands to be worshiped as such, and wages war against the true people of God (Rev. 13:1-8). When the wrath of God is poured out on the inhabitants of the earth who worshiped the beast and received his mark (Rev. 16:2), they compound their blasphemy against God by their resolute refusal to repent of their sins. Interestingly, God is used in the objective case when blasphemed (Rev. 13:6, 16:11, 21), but when he worshiped God is in the subjective case (Rev. 4:8, 11; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7). God is the subject of worship from his angels and people, but he is the object of slander and derision from the beast and his worshippers.

God/*theos* is also used objectively with the dative case to express God as the one *to whom* or *for whom* something was done [Wallace, *Greek Grammar*: 139.] The dative case has a range of nuances, but, when used of persons, it is best understood as the case of personal interest emphasizing the person who caused or was affected it by the action [Ibid., see also BDF: 100.] It may function as the direct object of certain verbs so that it is sometimes used in place of an accusative [Zerwick, *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples* 1994: 19 (§51).] The dative is used as the direct object with verbs of worship, in part, to emphasize the personal nature of God as the true object of worship (cf. Matt. 14:33; 28:9; John 4:21; 1 Cor. 14:25; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 4:10; 19:10) [Wallace, *Greek Grammar*: 172.] The majority of the occurrences of God/*theos* in the dative case designate God as the object of worship (Rev. 7:11; 19:4, 10; 22:9), praise (Rev. 19:5), and glory (Rev. 11:16) from angelic beings or his redeemed. Within the context of worship, the worshipers ascribe qualities, virtues, and attributes to God:

> **Rev. 7:10** And they cried out in a loud voice saying: Salvation to our God (ἡ σωτηρία τῷ θεῷ), to the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb.

> **Rev. 7:12** saying: Amen! Blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, and strength to our God (τῷ θεῷ) for ever and ever. Amen!

In all of these examples, God is the object of worship, but the other dative occurrences of God/*theos* fall more broadly under the category of the indirect object to express the one "to" or "for" whom the action was accomplished [Ibid., 140-41.] Although it is possible to identify them as datives of interest to express advantage ("for") more specifically. Zerwick remarks how τῷ θεῷ is often a dative of interest and, when modifying a noun, it is a Hebraism to give it a superlative sense [Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*: 20 (§56).] In these examples, the focus is on the believers who belong to God as those, from all nations, purchased by the blood of Christ (Rev. 5:9; 14:4) and who are prepared to be a kingdom of priests to serve God for eternity (Rev. 1:6; 5:10).

*God used as an adjective in relationship to another noun*

God/*theos* is often used descriptively in relation to another noun to show possession, relationship, quality, origin, and location. Most occurrences of *theos* in Revelation are found in the genitive case (57x). The genitive case restricts the meaning and modifies a substantive noun or "head word" that directly precedes it [Decker, *Reading Koine Greek: An Introduction and Integrated Workbook* 2014: 47.] While there is no single meaning for genitives, most of them in Revelation function adjectivally as adnominal genitives [Aune, *Revelation 1–5,* 1997: clxxi.] Because of the strong influence of Semitic syntax in Revelation, the genitive is used where one would ordinarily find an attributive adjective so that the genitive has a descriptive force—the genitive of quality [BDF, 91 (§165); Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, 14 (§29); Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* 1999: 92.] The elastic nature of the genitive, however, enables it to express a wide range of possible syntactical relations with the substantive it is modifying [Wallace, *Greek Grammar*: 74.] In Revelation, the use of *theou* ("of God"), therefore, functions to describe, assert, or attribute something about the noun as an adjective attributing a divine quality to the noun (i.e., descriptive genitive or genitive of quality) [Some examples may include: "the throne of God" (Rev. 7:15; 22:1, 3); "the glory of God" (Rev. 15:8; 21:11, 23); "the name of God" (Rev. 3:12; 16:9); "the seal of God" (Rev. 7:2; 9:4); "the mystery of God" (Rev. 10:7); "the great day of God Almighty" (Rev. 16:14); "the power of God" (Rev. 19:1); and "the supper of God" (Rev. 19:17).] as belonging to God (i.e., possessive genitive), [It is possible to classify any number of these examples as descriptive genitives or some other nuance, but they generally emphasize something as belonging to God: "the servants of God" (Rev. 7:3; 15:3); "the priests of God" (Rev. 20:6); "the city" or "temple of God" (Rev. 3:12; 11:1, 19); "the tabernacle of God" (Rev. 21:3); "the kingdom of God" (Rev. 12:10); "the creation of God" (Rev. 3:14); "the Paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7); and "the harps of God" (Rev. 14:2). Concerning the "harps of God", David Aune remarks, "In 15:2, the noun phrase κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ is ambiguous. τοῦ θεοῦ could be a genitive of pos-

session or objective gentive '*chtharas* for the praise of God' or it could be a hebraic periphrasis for the superlative (Col 2:19; 2 Cor. 1:12; 1 Thess 4:16; James 5:11, cf. Ps. 36:7." (Aune, *Revelation 1–5*: clxxv).] as something produced by God (i.e., subjective genitive), [The most commonly occurring genitive phrases is the "word" or "words" of God (Rev. 1:2, 9; 6:9, 7:17; 19:9, 13; 20:4) and the "commands of God" (Rev. 12:17; 14:12) are both modify nouns deriving from a verb cognate so they are likely subjective genitives indicating God as the one who spoke the words or gave the commands (Aune, *Revelation 1–5*: clxxi). Other subjective genitives may include: "the wrath" and "anger of God" (Rev. 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1; 19:15).] as indicating relationship (genitive of relationship), [Two possible examples are "the son of God" (Rev. 2:18) and "the seven spirits of God" (Rev. 3:1; 4:5; 5:6).] as coming from God (i.e., genitive of source or origin), [Source or origin genitives occur with the prepositions ἀπό (*from)* or ἐκ (*out of*) to signify "heavenly origin and divine mission" (R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John,* 1920, 1:cxxix). For example, the New Jerusalem descends from heaven to earth because it was from (ἀπὸ) God who prepared it (Rev. 3:12; 21:2, 10; Cf. Rev 12:6). The only instance of ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, meaning, "out of" or "from God," is a reference to the "living Spirit" who proceeds from God to raise the two witnesses back to life (Rev. 11:11).] or to indicate something being in God's presence or sight (i.e., genitive of location) [The genitive is used with the preposition ἐνώπιον (*before*) to show that people, beings, or objects who are in God's presence or physically before God on his throne (Rev. 7:15; 8:2, 4; 9:13; 11:16; ). In a couple of instances, it refers to something known to God (Rev. 3:2; 16:19).]

## The One who sits on the throne/ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου

The theocentric character of John's vision is defined by God seated upon his throne as the divine sovereign creator king. It is the central core of John's theology. God's throne is the primary symbol for his sovereignty and "it is the one fixed and unchanging center of the kaleidoscopic visions of the Apocalypse." [Tenney, "The Theism of the Apocalypse," in *The Living and Active Word of God: Studies in Honor of Samuel J. Schultz*. 1983: 187.] The throne as a symbol of universal sovereignty is highlighted by the fact that John places it in the center of his heavenly cosmology in a series of concentric circles (Rev. 4:2-5) [Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text,* 1999: 320.] The throne is the keynote in Revelation's symphony of symbolic images making it the "central theological symbol." [Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 1991: 31, 58, 120.] As one of "the central symbols" of the whole book it makes "faith in God's sovereignty over all" the decisive theological perspective of Revelation [Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*: 31.] The throne of God constitutes a theological motif essential to what Revelation commu-

nicates about God for believers in Asia Minor [Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation: Profiles form the History of Interpretation*, 2014: 330-35.] Bauckham rightly contends that the image of "the One who sits on the throne" has implications for the intended audience because it "makes it possible for John to enlarge his readers' perspective on their own situation by setting it within the broader context of God's universal purpose of overcoming all opposition to his rule and establishing his kingdom in the world." [Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*: 31.] What is more, the heavenly throne combines political and cultic imagery to contrast imperial cult pretensions by presenting God as the true King who is the only one worthy of worship [Ibid., 33-35. The political aspect has best been argued by David E. Aune, "The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John," *BR* 38 (1983): 5-22. For the cultic aspect see James Valentine, "Theological Aspects of the Temple Motif in the Old Testament and Revelation" 1985: 210-211; R. Dean Davis, *The Heavenly Court Judgment of Revelation 4–5* 1992: 118-43; Jon Paulien, "The Role of the Hebrew Cultus, Sanctuary and Temple in the Plot and Structure of the Book of Revelation," *AUSS* 33 (1995): 245-65. For an excellent discussion and appraisal of the scholarship on the cultic and political background see Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, 100-2.] The reference to God as "the One sitting on the throne" successfully merges the concepts of God and king together to emphasize him as the "embodiment of absolute power." [Gallusz, *The Throne Motif*: 123. Gallusz takes the phrase "the embodiment of absolute power" from Stephen D. Moore, "The Beatific Vision as a Posing Exhibition: Revelation's Hypermasculine Deity," *JSNT* 60 (1995): 32.] Not only is God currently reigning over the cosmos while seated securely upon his heavenly throne, but Revelation culminates with God's rule on earth, as it is in heaven, when he makes all things new (Rev. 21:1-6). As such, the emphasis on the throne as a symbol of God's sovereignty contributes to the theology of Revelation by answering the questions of God ('Who, if anyone, rules in this world?') and the question of history ('What, if any, is the meaning of the tragic events which comprise our history?')." [M. Eugene Boring, "The Theology of Revelation: Our God Reigns," *Interp* 40 (1986): 257.]

The "throne" and "the One who sits on the throne" is the predominate circumlocution for God in the book of Revelation [See also Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*: 40. He argues that God is known by what he does and the image of God on this throne is essential to the plot of Revelation. He writes, "God's character is known not only by what he says and does or by what others say about him but also by the type of setting. The primary prop of Revelation is the throne, which occurs forty-seven times in the book and almost always refers to God's throne . . . The setting captures the major plot conflict of the story: "Who sits on the throne" "Who rules" "Who is

to be worshiped?"] The phrase, "the One who sits on the throne" (ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου) or a slight variation of it, [Aune, *Revelation 1*–5, 284. He remarks, "The use of καθήμεν with ἐπί 'seated upon' occurs 27 times. The formula occurs 12 times in five different grammatical forms (284): (1) ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος, (Rev 4:2; 20:11); (2) τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ (Rev 4:9; 5:13; 7:10; 19:4); (3) τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου (Rev 4:10; 5:1, 7; 6:16); (4) ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ· (Rev 21:5); and (5) ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεου (Rev 7:15). The lack of syntactical consistency for the what case is used with the preposition ἐπί has puzzled many interpreters. Charles, *Revelation*, 1:113, views it as the result of multiple sources and redaction.] recurs throughout the vision fourteen times with the most theologically significant uses found in Chapters 4-5 and 21:5 (Rev. 4:2, 3, 9, 10; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 11:16; 19:4; 20:11; 21:5). References simply to the throne (θρόνος) occurs more frequently as a truncated circumlocution for God who sits on the heavenly throne (Rev. 1:4; 4:2, 3, 5, 6, 10; 5:1, 6, 11; 7:9, 10, 11, 15, 17; 8:3; 12:5; 14:3; 16:17; 19:4, 5; 20:11, 12; 21:3; 22:1, 3). While the New Testament contains sixty-two references to the word "throne" (θρόνος), Revelation holds the lion's share with forty-seven of them in every chapter except chapters 2, 9, 10; and 15:5-8 [Ibid., 2. See also R. H. Charles, *Revelation,* 1:111.] The prominence of the throne is something that intentionally gives shape to the theology of John's vision. Gallusz observes, "Structurally, the vision part of the book (4.1–22.5) starts and ends with visions that most strongly emphasize the centrality of the throne, the first in a heavenly context (4.1–5.14) and the last in an earthly context of new creation (22.1-5). This *inclusio* suggests that the work has been organized within the framework of throne visions." [Gallusz, *The Throne Motif*: 2.] Six scenes revolve around the heavenly throne room and each resounds with worship (Rev 4:2–6:17; 7:9–18; 11:15–19; 14:1–5). The throne shifts to the background during the judgments in Revelation 6–16 so that the throne appears to play a passive role in the succeeding series of judgments (e.g., Rev 6:1–8, 16; 8:3–6; 16:17) [Beale, *Book of Revelation*: 320. See Osborne, *Revelation,* 2002: 32, who discusses the use of as δόθη, a passive verb, that frequently occurs (6:2, 4, 8, 11; 7:2; 8:2, 3; 9:1, 3, 5; 11:1, 2; 12:14; 13:5, 7, 14, 15; 16:8) and "is especially clustered in the passage on the four horsemen (6:1–8) and the activities of the beast (13:5–15)." He portrays how "every aspect of God's creation flows out of his enabling presence; and the actions of his people and all celestial powers, good, and bad, occur only under his authorization."] The idea conveyed, however, is not passivity, but rather "theocentricity" depicting how God controls all the affairs of Earth's history [Gallusz, *The Throne Motif*:123.]

Revelation is permeated by references to thrones besides the ones designating God's throne exclusively. In some pivotal moments pertaining to the fully realized salvation of God's people, his throne or the right to his throne is shared conjointly

with the Lamb (Rev. 3:21; 7:17; 22:1, 3; cf. 7:9-10; 12:5). This conjoined rule does not mean that there are two kings, but "that God, the ruler of the universe, has functionally defined his rule with his act in Jesus so that God has definitively manifested his rule in Jesus (11:15) [Boring, "The Theology of Revelation,": 266.] Other thrones mentioned in Revelation refer either to his allies or his enemies. His allies include the twenty-four elders who sit upon their own thrones surrounding God's throne (Rev. 4:4, 11:16) and the resurrected saints who reign with Christ for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4). Thrones belonging to his enemies include Satan (Rev. 2:13), the beast (Rev. 13:2; 16:10) and Babylon the harlot (18:7) [(Rossing 1999: 66), argues that Babylon has set herself as queen in opposition to God's rule and reign and therefore the ensuing judgment represents a dethronement of the harlot queen. Babylon is identified as the one "seated" or "enthroned" (Rev 17:1, 3, 9, 15), culminating in her audacious boast, "I sit as a queen" (Rev 18:7).] The thrones of the enemies represent an important theological contrast to God's throne because "Revelation pictures a world in which the destructive forces of evil seek to dominate the world," but God, the Creator, has a sovereign claim over the world and he will "liberate the earth from their ruinous activity so that life will prevail." (Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB 38A, 2014: 367.) What is more, the contest between God and his enemies each on their respective thrones contrasts true and acceptable worship with the inappropriate wickedness of idolatry (Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*: 32-34.) Speaking of how worship around the throne of God functions in Revelation, Bauckham writes: ". . . true knowledge of who God is inseparable from worship of God." This vision radically displaces humanity from the center, where they typically place themselves, to orient all creation in worship toward the Creator. He perceptively discusses the theological role of this contrasted worship: "The coming of God's kingdom on earth must therefore be the replacement of Rome's pretended divine sovereignty by the true divine sovereignty of the One who sits on the heavenly throne. Significantly, this conflict of sovereignties is often portrayed in the rest of Revelation by references to worship. Rome's usurpation of divine rule is indicated by the universal worship of the beast (e.g., 13:4, 8, 12), whereas the coming of God's kingdom is indicated by universal worship of God (15:4; cf. 19:5-6)."] Therefore, the questions of who is the rightful king and only proper recipient of our worship and allegiance is tied to who sits on heaven's throne.

*The One who sits upon the throne and the Throne Room Vision (Revelation 4–5)*

John's entrance through the threshold of heaven in Rev. 4:1-6 signals a major transition into the throne room vision that extends through Rev. 16:21 and includes the series of seven seals (6:1-17), trumpets (8:1–9:21), and bowls (16:1-21) as well as several narrative interludes focused on the saints as sealed (Rev. 7:1-17), prophetic

witnesses (10:1–11:13), engaged in a spiritual holy war (Rev. 12:1–15:8). The heart of the throne room vision is Revelation 4–5, which is generally considered to be "the pivotal section of the book of Revelation." (Gallusz, *The Throne Motif*: 97.) Beale remarks how Revelation 4–5 "introduce and overshadow all the visions in 6:1–22:5," because all that flows out of this scene in the remaining vision constitutes "the historical consequences of divine sovereignty in its exercise of redemption and judgment." (Beale 1999: 172.) "The fact that the word *throne* (θρόνος) occurs seventeen times in chapters 4–5, the highest concentration in the book, underscores the centrality of God's sovereignty (Ibid.) However, God's sovereignty is not abstractly or ethereally attributed to him, but rather his right to rule and judge derives directly from the fact that he is the Creator of all things and everything exists solely by his will (Rev. 4:11). In chapter 5, the Lamb, God the son, steps up to the throne, God the father, to receive the right to judge because he is the redeemer who purchased people for God by his own blood (Rev. 5:5-10). The scene that began with the throne of God centrally located in heaven in Rev. 4:2 concludes in 5:13-14 with the entirety of the created order encircled around the throne in worship ascribing eternal praise, honor, and power to "One seated on the throne" and to "the Lamb." Koester refers to the Creator and the Lamb as the "theological center of the Apocalypse" by putting them "at the heart of the present created order" both in the opening throne vision (Revelation 4–5) and at "the central place in the new creation (22:1-5)." (Koester, *Revelation*: 367.)

In apocalyptic literature, the seer transcends through the varying layers of heaven, anywhere from three to ten, to arrive before the divine throne [1 *En.* 14.8–24; *2 En.* 22.1–4; *2 Bar.*. 22 :1 ; *Mart. Isa*. 7.13–15, 18–20, 24, 28–31, 32–33; 8.1–3, 16–20; 9.6; *T. Lev.* 2:6–8; 5:1. So F. Lentzen-Deis, "Das Motiv der 'Himmelsöffnung' in verschiedenen Gattungen der Umweltliteratur des Neuen Testaments," *Bib* 50 (1960): 301–27.]. A closely related phenomenon appears in the *Hekhalot* writings (i.e., "heaven palaces") containing the accounts of the *merkabah* mystics who traveled through the realm of the heavens to arrive at a vision of God's throne-chariot [Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* 1955: 41–79; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 1980; Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision*, TSAJ 16, 1988; Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* 1992. Dating the *Hekhalot* literature has proven to be a rather sticky endeavor. Conservative estimates date it to the eighth century A.D., but it is possible that it originated around the same time as other Jewish apocalyptic writings. See Michael Mach, "From Apocalypticism to Early Jewish Mysticism?," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 1, *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* 2003: 232–36. For a very helpful comparative analysis of throne room visions see Christopher Rowland, "The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature," *JSJ*

10, no. 2 (July 1979): 137–54.] While Revelation 4–5 represents a *merkabah* vision in that John is transported before God's throne, to identify it as a "Christianized" form of *merkabah* mysticism boarders on exaggeration [Munoa, "Jesus, The *Merkavah*, and Martyrdom in Early Christian Tradition," *JBL* 121 (2002): 315. Cf. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*: 62.] John's account represents a unique quality devoid of the excessive speculation in these Jewish writings. Since he simply appears in heaven and before the throne, the lack of multiple levels of heaven reflects a particularly Christian cosmology stressing the immediacy of God's presence [Hurtado, "Revelation 4–5 in the Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies," *JSNT* 25 (1985): 110–11; Jörns, *Das Hymnische Evangelium*, 33. Contra Rowland, "The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature," 137–54. For an excellent discussion of the differences between Jewish Apocalypses and John's Apocalypse see Craig Keener, *Revelation*, NIVAC, 2000:169–71.] Moreover, the throne is portrayed in Revelation 4 as "the *axis mundi*, the immovable centre of all reality, unlike the descriptions of the *merkabah* texts, in which the throne appears as a dynamically moving object." [Gallusz, *The Throne Motif*: 103.] A final feature that distinguishes John's account from other throne room visions is the inclusion of the twenty-four elders because no other extant Jewish or pagan writing contains anything remotely parallel [Hurtado, "Revelation 4–5," 111. Nevertheless, these Jewish writings share at least one common characteristic with the Book of Revelation when it comes to throne room visions. Throne room visions frequently emphasize the theme of justice through God's judgment. The *Testament of Levi* contains a throne room vision filled with pronouncements of judgment on the "injustices of humankind" provoking the Lord's wrath (*T. Lev.* 2:2–3; 4:1–2). In his introduction to *3 Enoch*, Alexander, (Hebrew Apocalypse of Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments,* ed. Charlesworth 1983: 244) demonstrates how the conception of a heavenly lawcourt became central to discussions about God's judgment in rabbinic Judaism: "Building on such biblical texts as 1 Kings 22:19–22, Psalm 82; Job 1:6–12, and especially Daniel 7:9f., the rabbis taught that there is a heavenly law court . . . over which God presides (b.Sanh 38b; ExR 30:18; LevR 24:2). It was regarded as the heavenly counterpart of the earthly Sanhedrin (b. Sanh 99b; b.Ber 16b/17a), and there was earnest discussion as to the relative jurisdictions of the two courts (b.Makk 23b; Pesiqta deRab Hahana 5:13, ed. Buber, 48a; cr. DeutR 5:5; GenR 26:6). The heavenly law court is one of the main themes of 3 Enoch, and its sessions are covered in detail. There are three main blocks of material: (1) 28:7–10; 30:1–33:2 (2) 26:12 and (3) 18:19–21." Divine judgment, in other words, was conceived in Judaism as occurring within the realm of a heavenly law court.]

The dominant object drawing John's immediate attention is God sitting on his throne (ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος) [Cf. Rev 4:3, 9, 10; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 20:11; 21:5. Although John avoids identifying the one seated on the throne, it obviously refers to the God of Israel as attested in the OT (1 Kgs 22:19; Ps 9:4; 45:6; 47:8; 123:1 Isa 6:1; 66:1; Ezek 1:25; 10:1; Dan 7:9) as well as apocalyptic writings (*1 En.* 9:4; 18:8; *2 En.* 1:4; 20:3; *T.Mos.* 4:2). Aune observes that John uses the throne as a circumlocution for the name of God (*Revelation 1–5*, 284). Cf. Keener, *Revelation*, 170–71.] The phrase "the One who is sitting on the throne" does not occur in the OT, but there is a close antecedent in Sirach 1:8-9 [Gallusz, *The Throne Motif*: 115.] While the One seated on the throne should be identified as God, John resists any attempts to describe the divine being in anthropomorphic terms [Smalley, *Revelation to God: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, 2005: 115.] Rather, John gives detailed attention to the description of the surroundings of the heavenly seat as a means to protect the unknowable transcendence of God [Gallusz, *The Throne Motif,* 105] John alludes to numerous antecedent accounts of descriptions drawn from OT theophanies of God on his throne [Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 80. Commenting on the emotive effect felt when the various parts of these visionary amalgamations are studied separately in their OT contexts. He argues that when the OT context of each allusion is studied one finds that, without exception, they are all from descriptions of theophanies that function as introductory sections to announcements of judgment on Israel or the nations. This common denominator of a theophany-judgment theme is enhanced when one also notes the dominant influence of Dan 7:9–13 throughout Revelation 4–5. All the common scenes and themes of these OT contexts intensify the cognitive and emotive aspects of the picture in Rev 4:2–9.] He melds together a smorgasbord of allusions from Exod 19:16; 24:10–12; 1 Kgs 22:19–20 (cf. 2 Chron 18:18); Isa 6:1–4; Dan 7:9–14; Zech 4:2, 6 and apparently modeled it on the structure of Ezek 1:1–28 (cf. Ezek 10:1) [For the most comprehensive treatments of John's use of Ezekiel in this passage see Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel in der Offenbarung des Johannes,* SBB 52, 2004:104–18; Vogelgesang, "The Interpretation of Ezekiel in *Book of Revelation*," 168–82. Cf. Vanhoye, "L'Utilisation Du Livre D'Ézéchiel," 436–72. See also Koester, *Revelation,* 360, "Israel's tradition told of God's throne in heaven (Pss 11:4; 103:19), where God is surrounded by a heavenly council (1 Kgs 22:19). Isaiah says that the throne is high and lofty and that six winged seraphs declare God's holiness (Isaiah 6:1-3). Ezekiel describes a sapphire throne chariot drawn by creatures, each with faces of a lion, ox, eagle, and human being. God appears in fiery splendor, surrounded by a rainbow with a crystalline sea beneath him (Ezek. 1:4-28). The fiery throne in Dan 7:9-10 also has wheels. God has white hair and robes. Around his throne are thrones for a heavenly court, and beyond them are

countless other heavenly beings (cf. 4Q530 II, 17)."] Although the language and imagery is laden with these allusions, John presents the readers with a fresh accounting of his vision. The result is a remarkably familiar yet distinctive depiction of God's throne room.

John briefly remarks how the one on the throne appears as the stones jasper—a translucent stone found in shades of red, green, blue, yellow, brown, and white—and carnelian—a bright red stone [See also Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*: 106–8; Vogelgesang, "The Interpretation of Ezekiel in *Book of Revelation*,": 172–74; Beale, *Book of Revelation*: 320; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*: 285; Osborne, *Revelation*: 226–27; Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*: 72.] The glorious and colorful brightness of the throne and its occupant comes into sharp focus, in Rev. 4:3, with the halo-like emerald rainbow encircling (κυκλόθεν) [Gallusz, *The Throne Motif*: 125. He notes, "The prepositions related to the throne are informative in this regard: κυκόθεν (4.3, 4) and ενώπιον (4.5, 6, 10) focus on the surroundings of the throne, εν μέσω on its centre (4.6), while at the heart of the vision heavenly phenomena are pictured as emanating from the throne itself, as indicated by the use of ἐκ (ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου ἐκπορεύονται, 4.5)."] the throne (cf. Ezek 1:28). These iridescent stones also adorn the New Jerusalem bedecked with all kinds of precious materials, thus indicating that the entire city radiates with God's glory (Rev 21:11–23) [Aune, *Revelation 1–5*: 285.] Twenty-four other thrones surround (κυκλόθεν) God's throne (Rev 4:4). These thrones and their occupants seem to evoke parallel accounts of addition thrones flanking God's (cf. 1 Kgs 22:19; Dan 7:9). Aside from God, these elders are the only beings in the divine court permitted to sit. Because they sit on thrones and don golden crowns, the twenty-four elders most likely make up the members of the divine council. In a similar vein, the four living creatures (Rev 4:6b) stationed in the middle and around the throne basically correspond to the cherubim of Ezek 1:5, 8. Their primary function involves worship, and they most likely represent some aspect of the created order. The phenomena in Rev. 4:5a, lightening, rumblings or voices, and thunder (ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταί), issue forth from the throne most notably evoke the Sinai theophany of Exod. 19:16 (cf. Ezek 1:13). Not only do these phenomena connect the throne with Yahweh as the lawgiver, but they also occur at significant junctures linking the series of septet judgments with his judicial decrees [Cf. 8:5; 11:19; 16:18. See the important insights of Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation,*1993: 8.] The seven burning torches (ἑπτὰ λαμπάδες πυρὸς καιόμεναι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου) ensconced before the throne most likely represent the Holy Spirit (Cf. Zech 4:2; Ezek 1:13). Finally, the sea resembling glass, a rather polyvalent image, evokes the firmament of creation (Genesis 2), the floor of heaven (Exod 24:10b), and even temple imagery (The Brazen Sea). When viewed to-

gether, what emerges is that, in every way, God's throne room emanates and resounds with symbols of his glorious presence rooted in OT theophanies.

*The One who sits upon the throne and the climatic pronouncement of the New Creation (Rev. 21:1-8)*

The speeches pertaining to the New Creation in Rev. 21:1-4 and 5-8 not only "captures in a nutshell the meaning of the entire Book of Revelation" [Michaels, *Revelation*, IVPNTCS 20, 1997: 235.] by it may very well represent the theological climax of the vision [Koester, *Revelation*, 806.] One reason it is climactic is because it records the second, and more extensive, of only two times when God speaks from his throne (Rev. 1:8; 21:5). Both speeches of God are linked together by the self-designation "I am the Alpha and the Omega." [Gallusz, *The Throne Motif*: 122.] Alpha and Omega are expressions used for God (Rev. 1:8; 21:6) and Christ (Rev. 1:17; 22:13) in the opening and concluding chapters of the book to create a frame around the whole [Koester, *Revelation*: 806.] The structure of the divine speech of Rev. 21:5-8, as Aune as pointed out, consists of a pattern of seven specific sayings of God [Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, WBC 52c, 1998:1114. (1) The One sitting on throne *said*, "Behold, I am making everything new" (v 5a). (2) He also *said*, "Write, for this message is trustworthy and true" (v. 5b). (3) He also *said* to me, "It is finished" (v 6a). (4) "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End" (v 6b). (5) "I will freely give some water to the one who is thirsty from the well of living water" (v 7). (6) "Those who conquer will inherit these things, for I will be their God and they will be my children" (v 7). (7) "But as for the cowards and unbelievers and the abominable and murderers and the immoral and sorcerers and idolaters and all who lie, they will experience the lake that burns with fire and Sulphur, which is the second death" (v 8).] Gallusz argues that Rev. 5-8 forms a "sandwich chiasm" whereby two separate chiasms (Rev. 21:5a-6a and 21:c-21:8) are joined together by the central statement of Rev. 21:6b: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End." [Gallusz, *The Throne Motif*: 130-31.] While one could justifiably contend with his suggestion of a sandwich chaism in this passage, he makes the rather astute observation that "both sides of the chiasm are related to the actions or commands of God, but the focal statement centres on God's character as the sovereign Lord of history, the originating cause from whom the eschatological new creation emanates." [Ibid., 131.] Other scholars, however, see the declaration "I am making all things new" as the "centerpiece" of 21:5-8 because it encourages the faithful believers of God's power and trustworthiness while at the same time warns the weak about spiritual failure [Osborne, *Revelation,* 736 who cites Peter Stuhlmacher, "Behold, I Make All Things New" *Lutheran World* 15 (1968): 13-15.] Regardless of which exact statement is central, that the "the One sitting on the throne" is the one speaking means that the entire content comes directly from the

sovereign Creator king who will most assuredly accomplish the full redemption and renewal of his creation (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1052.)

The anticipated reality of the New Creation is only realized in light of the absolute sovereign reign of God whose throne will reside on earth among his people (Rev. 21:1-3). John sees a renewed heaven and earth where there is no longer any sea (Rev. 21:1) and he hears an unidentified voice proclaim that God now dwells among his people (21:3) [For a good argument as to why the "new" creation is better understood as a "renewed" creation see Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of St. John,* BTNC, 2006: 293.] The result is that the threefold cosmology of heaven, earth, and sea collapses into one New Creation where God dwells among his people as the creator, redeemer, and king [Ibid. Boxall remarks: "The three-tiered universe has collapsed into two tiers, and almost immediately will collapse into one (Rev. 21:3), thus overcoming that fundamental separation between God and God's people."] In other words, God's kingdom has come and his will is now being done on earth just as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). Bauckham explains, "As for the image of God's rule in the eschatological kingdom, what is most notable is the fact that all implication of distance between 'the One who sits on the throne' and the world over which he rules has disappeared." [Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*: 142.] Moreover, God's kingdom contrasts with the beast's kingdom because it does not find its fulfillment in the subjection his servants to is rule (Rev. 22:3), but rather they reign with him (Rev. 22:5) [Ibid., 142-43.] Therefore, in this climatic reference to God's throne (22:3b-5), is unlike human rule, which must always have subjects, and "makes it a pure symbol of the theocentricity of its vision of human fulfilment." (Ibid.)

## Conclusion: God is the one will bring history to its appointed climax because he is the sovereign creator of the universe.

From the very outset God is unambiguously identified as the ultimate sovereign ruer of the universe in Rev 1:8. This verse contains three of the four most significant designations for God in the book of Revelation: "the Alpha and Omega," "The one who is, and who was, and who is to come," and "the Almighty." [Ibid., 25] This title is used interchangeably of God the Father (Rev 1:8; 21:6) and of Jesus (Rev 22:13; cf. 1:17) suggesting that they dually share in the sovereign administration over the affairs of human history. The title "Alpha and Omega," stems from the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet and is equivalent to "I am the A to Z" in English. It denotes that he is the origin and goal of all history because he precedes all creation and will bring everything to its eschatological fulfillment (cf. Isa 44:6) (Ibid., 27.) The phrase denoting God as "the one who is, and who was, and who is to come" (Rev 1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5) constitutes an interpreted expansion of the divine name YHWH (cf. Exod 3:14)

and stresses his eternal presence in relationship to the world [Ibid., 28–30.] God is now, he has always been, and he will come in the future when he dramatically intervenes with the consummation of the ages (Rev 11:17; 16:5). The third designation for God as "the Almighty" (Rev 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22) associates him with the "Lord of Hosts" from the OT emphasizing his omnipotent power and unrivaled authority [Boring, "The Theology of Revelation: 'The Lord Our God the Almighty Reigns,' *Interp.* 40 (1986): 259–63.] The fourth designation asserting God's sovereignty is that he is addressed as "the one sitting on the throne" (Rev 4:9; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:15; 21:5) (Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*: 31.)

The image of God seated on his throne, in Revelation 4–5, introduces the second way in which God's sovereignty is depicted throughout John's vision [For the theological significance of the image of the throne, see Beale, "Revelation (Book)," *NDBT*: 356–57.] In Rev 4:1–2, the scene radically transforms from the barren rocky isle of Patmos into the heavenly throne room. John describes nothing less than an infinitely majestic display of God gloriously enthroned and surrounded by his courtiers. The first thing that John sees upon his entrance through the open door is a throne centrally located in heaven (Rev 4:2). God's throne occupies the central location in a series of concentric circles clearly depicting his sovereignty over the cosmos. In order to describe his vision, John draws from other familiar prophetic visions involving theophanies of the throne of God (e.g., Ezekiel 1 and Daniel 7). He only briefly remarks how the one on the throne resembles gemstones like jasper, carnelian, and a halo-like emerald rainbow encircling his throne [These iridescent stones also adorn the New Jerusalem bedecked with all kinds of precious materials, thus indicating that the entire city radiates with God's glory (Rev 21:11–23). See Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 285.] Incidentally, John's vision of the heavenly throne room offers an apocalyptic perspective contrasting imperial pretensions assuming cosmic sovereignty with the true king and judge of the universe [Aune, "The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial," 5–26.] Once John establishes the fact that God Almighty sits securely enthroned in heaven, the throne shifts into the background throughout the rest of the vision (Rev 6:16; 7:9–17; 8:3; 11:16; 14:3; 16:17; 19:4–5) until it descends from heaven when he comes in judgment to establish his dwelling on earth (Rev 20:11–12; 21:3–5).

The sovereignty of God over creation, events, and history is, lastly, displayed through his decrees and acts of judgment. God, as the creator, is the one who decrees the course and timing of all events as he governs from his throne in heaven. His activity is most apparent in the six scenes revolving around the heavenly throne room with accompanying scenes of worship frequently declaring the righteousness of his decrees and judgments (Rev 4:2–6:17; 7:9–18; 11:15–19; 14:1–5). The judg-

ments produced on the earth by the seals, trumpets, and bowls represent a direct outworking of the proceedings in the divine courtroom. God is the one who judges humanity (Rev 11:18; 18:8; 19:11; 20:12, 13) and his judgment is swift, severe, and just (Rev 14:7; 16:7; 18:10; 19:2). God's activity is sometimes passive as indicated by the frequent use of the divine passive verb *edothē* ("it was given") [Osborne, *Revelation*, 32.] He commissions some agents for the purpose of rendering judgments (e.g., the four horsemen and angels) and he allows forces of evil to perform certain deeds (e.g. the beast). The fact that God is in control of everything including the woes of both believers and unbelievers powerfully reinforces the purpose of the Apocalypse to encourage the believer's faith in the midst of suffering [Beale, "Revelation," 357.]

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