

SESSION 04 – REVELATION CHAPTER ONE – PART II

⁴ ...Grace to you and peace from... ⁵...Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (Rev. 1:4-8 ESV)

I. THE REVEALING OF JESUS THE MESSIAH

- A. John next presents the Wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:21). The One through whom, for whom, and by whom are all things that exist (1 Cor. 8:6). John says “Grace and peace from Jesus the Messiah the Faithful Witness, the Firstborn from the Dead, and the Ruler of the Kings of the Earth.” In the introduction of the Revelation of and by Jesus is Jesus Himself standing as the Ascended Victor and Ruling King over His Father’s Kingdom. John begins with this truth concerning Him:

The Faithful Witness. The key word here is *Witness*. Faithful is an adjective that describes what kind of Witness He was, and is, and will forever be.

³⁷ **Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”** (John 8:37 ESV)

We can see from Jesus’ own words that being a faithful witness is to **bear witness to the truth**. This applies not only to the message He is giving to John He received from the Father, but also everything He has ever said and done, or will say and do. The Greek word for *witness* is *martys* (marl-tees). We draw our English word *martyr* from this word. And while it does apply because martyrs are killed for their *testimony and faithfulness to the truth*, it also and primarily means to *testify and bear witness*. In Jesus’ case, He is the Eye Witness who can and only can testify of the Truth. He is the Truth embodied.

⁶ **Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.** (John 14:6 ESV)

¹³ **So the Pharisees said to him, “You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.”**

¹⁴ **Jesus answered, “Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going... ¹⁸ I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.”** (John 8:13-18 ESV)

Jesus alone is the Way and the Truth and the Zoe of God revealed. He *testifies* of the way to Father because He is the way. He *testifies* of the truth of the Father, because He is the Truth of the Father

revealed. He *testifies* of the life of the Father, because He is and has and in Him is the Life of the Father (John 15:1-11).

This was *testified* by Peter on the Day of Pentecost (Shavuot)

²² **“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. (Acts 2:22-24 ESV)**

The point here: *the word martyr* is more than just being willing to die for the faith. That would in fact be the end result of being a person who *testifies to the truth*, both in word and deed. The actual *martys* is the act of testifying to the truth. Or, as Jesus taught, preached, and demonstrated: **the Gospel of the Kingdom**. Of which He was and is indeed faithful both to His Father and the reality of that Good News. His death, descent into Sheol, Resurrection, and Resurrection is proof of His faithfulness. The writer of Hebrews points to the truth of Jesus enduring as a Faithful Witness and that meditation and consideration (*analogizomai*)¹ is an empowering of our resolve to also stand in the face of the opposition of the domain of darkness and endure as *faithful witnesses*.

³ **Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary in your souls or lose heart. ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. (Heb. 12:3-4 NRSVue)**

- B. **The Firstborn from the Dead, and the Ruler of the Kings of the Earth**. Paul uses the same title in Colossians 1:18. “And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.” Paul also describes Him as the *First-fruits of the Resurrection* (1 Cor. 15:20-26). Paul is pointing to Jesus as the First, the Highest, and *Preeminent One*. That word means “to be in the first position, with the implication of high rank and prominence—‘to be the first, to have superior status.’”²

It was Jesus’ faithfulness to the Truth both in word and deed that led to His martyrdom and ultimately the First to be raised from the dead. The background to this *revelation* can be found in Psalm 89:27, 37.

²⁷ **I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth...³⁷ It shall be established forever like the moon, an enduring witness in the skies.” Selah (Ps. 89:27,37 NRSVue)**

These verses also bring in the *faithful witness* that is established forever like the moon, an enduring witness in the skies.

¹Pronounced – anna-low-yee-zoh-may; to think or reason with thoroughness and completeness—‘to think out carefully, to reason thoroughly, to consider carefully, to reason, reasoning (Louw-Nida), 350

² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 737.

- C. Psalm 89 is a Psalm that laments over the apparent defeat and humiliation of the Davidic king. Allen Ross in his three-volume commentary on Psalms notes,

Occasions suggested for this lament include the destruction in the days of Rehoboam, the invasion of Assyria at the end of the northern kingdom, the death of Josiah, the exile of Jehoiachin, and even the early postexilic period with the hope of restoration. The exile of Jehoiachin fits some of the descriptions in the lament section very well; but the difficulty is that the psalm never mentions the destruction of Jerusalem or the exile.

The critical issue is the lament at the end of the psalm (vv. 39–52); the hymn and the oracle lay the foundation for it. The psalm has to refer to a time that the Davidic monarchy was disrupted so severely that the psalmist lamented his being rejected by God and the apparent annulment of the covenant. If it was written before the exile period, it certainly became relevant at that time. In fact, the lament is more relevant than meets the eye. The promises to David remain unfulfilled, and so we today still look for the restoration of the Davidic monarchy in the coming of the king, the anointed one, who will end the humiliation of human failure, the taunts of the nations, and the disrepute of the word of God. The prayer of the psalmist is the prayer of the saint today for the kingdom to come.³

- D. Recall 2 Samuel 7:12-14 where Yahweh declares over the offspring (seed; *zera*) would build the Temple for Yahweh's dwelling and He would establish *that King* and *His* kingdom forever, and would be to *Him* a Father, and *He* would be a *Son*. The Psalmist says in Psalm 89:27 that Yahweh would make *Him* the firstborn. This of course is a reference to position not chronology or order of birth. (see Cain (first in birth; Seth (who took the place of Abel; see Gen. 4:25) became the *firstborn* in position; see also Ishamel, firstborn, Isaac, firstborn in position, child of promise; Esau, firstborn, Jacob, firstborn in position, etc., et. al.).

John takes the language of *firstborn* and applies it directly to not only the Davidic Covenant (1:18) but also to the Resurrection from the Dead and thus the ruler of the Kings of the Earth. (see Psalm. 2:7).

Beale observes,

“Firstborn” from the Psalm is defined clearly as firstborn from the dead. Christ has gained a sovereign position over the cosmos. This is not to be understood in the sense that He is recognized as the first created being of all creation nor even as the origin of creation, but rather that He is the inaugurator of the new creation by means of His resurrection, as 3:14 explains. John thinks of Jesus as the seed of David, whose resurrection has resulted in the establishment of His eternal kingdom.⁴

³ Allen P. Ross, A Commentary on the Psalms 1–89: Commentary, vol. 2, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2011–2013), 824–825.

⁴ G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, Revelation: A Shorter Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 40.

This again leads directly to the language of Amos 9:11, “On that day *I will raise up* the booth (sukkot) of David that is fallen.” The LXX translates *qwm* (Heb. rise; get up, stand up) as *anistemi*, the key word used in the New Testament describing the *resurrection*.

²And many of those sleeping in the breadth of the earth will arise (anistemi), some unto everlasting life, but some unto reproach, and some to dispersion and everlasting disgrace. (Dan. 12:2 LXX)

¹⁶ But those who fear the Lord will arise into eternal life, and their life will never cease in the light of the Lord (Ps Sol 3:16 LXX)

³¹ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. (Mark 8:31 NASB)

¹⁴For this reason it says, “Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” (Eph. 5:14 NASB)

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (1 Thess. 4:16 ESV)

The raising up of the Tabernacle or Sukkot of David (John 1:14 – where *skene* can be translated tabernacled) is in reality the *anistemi* of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we are made alive in Him. He is the firstborn from the dead, and we will follow Him in His resurrection. His death freed us from the decree against us (Colossians 2:14, 15) and upon His resurrection, we were raised with Him to join Him in the reality of the new creation joining of the *husband (Christ) and the wife (the Church)* (Rom. 7:2-4; Eph. 5:31-32).

- E. Ruler of the Kings of the Earth is a direct fulfillment both *already and not yet* come to fulness. Psalm 2 stands as absolute. The key that ties John’s truth concerning the resurrection of Jesus and the inevitable rule over the earth as King is the verse, “Yahweh said to me [Jesus], “You are my son; today I have begotten you.” (Ps. 2:7) This is direct language of the firstborn, the only begotten of the Father, and the One raised and set His King on Zion, His Holy Hill. This will become the reference the peoples, kings, and rulers will have with the King as He releases His judgments upon them.

¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶ calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (Rev. 6:15-17 ESV)

- F. ⁶and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. (Rev. 1:6 ESV)

We again see the narrative theme that Jesus in His triumph over all of His enemies, brings us into His victory in Him. John draws our attention back to the original call Yahweh placed on the Children of Israel

at Mount Sinai declaring they were to be a *kingdom and priests, a holy nation*. (Ex. 19:6). Peter applies this reality to believers in Jesus, Jew and Gentile.

⁹ *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* (1 Peter 2:9 NRSVue)

Beal correctly makes the observation that the seed truth behind John's allusion is Exodus 19:6. However he says that this call was "never fulfilled by Israel" but that is not correct. Israel actually had the priesthood in Levi. They became, then, the types and shadows of the reality that would actually be fulfilled *in Israel* as New Creation Believers in Yeshua. They did in fact become a Kingdom of Priests in the New Covenant and into that Kingdom Gentiles were grafted in.

Kingdom here refers not just to a place but, in parallel with priests, to an action. "Kingdom" can also mean "kingship" or "royal power." Believers do not merely live within a kingdom; they exercise its kingly power (albeit under Christ). Believers have already entered into this role as priests and as kings, even though the manner of their performance is still incomplete.⁵ In other words, believers are already kings and priests in the Kingdom of God, though not yet in fulness in this age. John will say later, "*If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God. (Rev. 3:12)*"

Mounce provides additional insight, "Corporately they are a "kingdom" (stressing their royal standing in connection with the exaltation of Christ as ruler of all earthly kings), and individually they are "priests" (emphasizing their role in serving God as a result of Christ's sacrificial death)."⁶ Splendid. That which was most prominently seen in the King-Priest Melchizedek, shadowed in the Levitical Priesthood, typified again in King David, and ultimately filled in Jesus, has been opened to His Church, Jew and Gentile in the One New Man; a Kingdom of Priests, a Royal Priesthood, to do the works of the Kingdom of God.

G. ⁷ *Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. (Rev. 1:7 ESV)*

John again brings into focus two key Old Testament allusions. The first concerning the Son of Man and His association with the Rider on the Clouds. John had last seen Him ascend on the Clouds in Acts 1:9, which was present at His presentation before the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:13-14. The other is the description of Yahweh returning as the pierced One in Zechariah 12:10.

The main point of the Cloud Rider is the identification in the ANE mythology with Baal. Heiser writes in his seminal work, *The Unseen Realm*,

In the Ugaritic texts, the god Baal is called "the one who rides the clouds."⁵ The description became an official title of Baal, whom the entire ancient Near Eastern world considered a deity of rank. To ancient people all over the Mediterranean, Israelite or not, the "one who rides the clouds" was a deity—his status

⁵ G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 41.

⁶ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 50.

as a god was unquestioned. Consequently, any figure to whom the title was attributed was a god. Old Testament writers were quite familiar with Baal. Baal was the main source of consternation about Israel's propensity toward idolatry. In an effort to make the point that Yahweh, the God of Israel, deserved worship instead of Baal, the biblical writers occasionally pilfered this stock description of Baal as "cloud rider" and assigned it to Yahweh.⁷

In the mythological texts of Ras Shamra the god Baal repeatedly gets the epithet *rkb* 'rpt. It is rendered with slight nuances as 'Rider of the Clouds', 'Rider on the Clouds', 'Who mounts the Clouds'. Epithets based on the root RKB, 'to ride', occur quite frequently in connection with gods.⁸

Understanding Yahweh is the Most High, the Biblical authors take this ANE idea of the *Rider on the Clouds* and make an intentional attribution not to Baal, rather they assign it to Yahweh, for he and He alone is El-Elyon, the Most High.

²⁶**There is none like God**, O Jeshurun, who **rides through the heavens** to your help, **majestic through the clouds**. (Deut. 33:26 NRSVue)

³²O kingdoms of the earth, **sing to God; sing praise to the Lord**, Selah ³³to **the one who rides in the highest heavens** of old. See, he gives forth his voice, a mighty voice. (Psalm 68:32-33 LEB)

¹Bless **Yahweh**, O my soul. O **Yahweh my God, you are very great**. You clothe yourself with splendor and majesty, ²you who cover yourself with light as with a garment, who stretch out the heavens like a tent curtain, ³the one who sets beams in the waters for his upper chambers, **who makes clouds his chariot, who rides on the wings of the wind**, ⁴who makes his messengers the winds, his attendants a flame of fire. (Psalm 104:1-4 LEB)

The powerful truth is not only is Yahweh described as the *Cloud Rider*, displacing Baal, but we see the Son of Man, our Lord Jesus Christ ascending on a cloud, being presented to the Ancient of Days on a cloud, and returning with the clouds. The point is not to simply make imagery for a classical painting of the return of Jesus *with clouds*, but to undeniably and eternally reveal Him as Yahweh incarnate. He *is* the Rider on the Clouds. And He has supplanted Baal and all forms of idolatry and worship of the wicked spirits as the One True God and King.

H. ⁷**...every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him...**(Rev. 1:7b ESV)

Again, Holy Spirit moving upon John uses the Old Testament Prophets to give revelation of Jesus and an identification of Who He Is and the fact that His appearing is in fact **a return**.

⁷ Heiser, Michael S.. The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible (p. 251). Lexham Press. Kindle Edition.

⁸ W. Herrmann, "Rider Upon the Clouds," ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 704.

¹⁰ “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. (Zech. 12:10 ESV)

Zechariah begins verse 10 with Yahweh speaking. “I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem...” We know Yahweh is speaking because 12:1 says, “Thus declares Yahweh, who stretched out the heavens....” Verse 2, “I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of staggering...” Verse 3, “On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone...” Verse 4, “On that day, declares Yahweh, I will strike every horse with panic, and its rider with madness...” Verse 6, “On that day I will make the clans of Judah a blazing pot in the midst of wood...” Verse 7, “And Yahweh will give salvation to the tents of Judah first...” Verse 9, “And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.”

The same *Person* speaking from verse 1, identified as Yahweh in verse 1, “Thus declares Yahweh”, is the same “I” who has been speaking the entire time. “I will pour out...I am about to make Jerusalem...I will make Jerusalem...I will strike...I will make the clans...I will see to destroy...” That same “I” is still speaking in verse 10.

“I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy.” There is only One Person who can pour out His Spirit. Yahweh. Then the Speaker says, “**when they look on me...**” again who are they going to look on? The Speaker who is Yahweh. Then the speaker uses the *Second Person* pronoun “**him**.” But He is saying, “When they look on me, on *him whom they have pierced*” the identification of Yahweh with another Person cannot be any clearer. This beholding Yahweh whom they have pierced will result in mourning.

“Having received this spirit which ensures the favor of Yahweh and prompts pleading for that favor which results in new found faith in Yahweh, the tone soon shifts. Looking upon Yahweh reveals the one whom they stabbed (*dāqar*), a verb used elsewhere in the OT to refer to the violent action of stabbing someone with a spear (Num. 25:8) or sword (Judg. 9:54; 1 Sam. 31:4//1 Chr. 10:4; cf. Niphal in Isa. 13:15), which causes death.¹¹¹ This prompts mourning (*sāpaq*), a term which is used only negatively for mourning over great loss,¹¹² especially over the loss of a life.¹¹³ That the latter is in view is clear from the phrase which follows, which likens their mourning to the death of a child. Their response to looking on the fatally stabbed Yahweh is secondly described as grieving bitterly (*mārar* Hiphil), the bitter response of those who have been afflicted by great loss (Job 27:2), which may involve the death of one close to the person (Ruth 1:20).¹¹⁴ This deep mourning and bitter grieving is likened to that of a family which has lost its only son (*yāhîd*) and/or its firstborn son (*beḵôr*), a common comparison in the OT (cf. Jer. 6:26; Amos 8:10).”⁹

Clearly from John’s viewpoint, this is Jesus. Beale writes,

Zech. 12:10, which refers to the end-time victory of Israel over the nations and the repentance of Israel before the Lord, whom the people of Israel have pierced. Zechariah also speaks of mourning for a

⁹ Boda, Mark J. The Book of Zechariah. Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016. Chapter 12:10

firstborn son, which echoes the quotation from Psalm 89 in v. 5. But the Zechariah text has been universalized, for in the original it speaks only of the house of David mourning over Him as a result of the Spirit of grace poured out upon them, whereas John speaks of **all the peoples of the earth** doing so, and also adds the phrase **every eye will see Him**. What is applied in Zechariah 12 to Israel is now transferred in Revelation to all the peoples of the earth, specifically those peoples who, having received the Holy Spirit and His grace (see v. 4), that is, all true believers in Jesus, **mourn over** what they have done to Him. This continues the same trend of application seen with the use of Exod. 19:6 in v. 6.¹⁰

Zechariah 12 flows into chapters 13 and 14, with 14 showing the day of Yahweh. Verse 1, “Behold, a day is coming for Yahweh...” Verse 2, “I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle...”

³ Then **the LORD will go out** and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. ⁴ On that day **his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives...** (Zech. 14:3-4 ESV)

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, **to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them**. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. (Matt. 28:16 ESV)

¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? **This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven** ¹² **Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away.** ¹³” (Acts 1:10-12 ESV)

Yahweh, the Rider on the Clouds, the Pierced One, is clearly identified as our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁰ G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, [*Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 42.

¹¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ac 1:12.