

The Biblical Unitarian Podcast - by Dustin Smith, PhD

Episode 371—"Who is the Alpha & Omega in Revelation?"

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Introduction

This week's episode will look at the title Alpha & Omega, which on the surface appears to be applied to both God and to Jesus. Naturally, some interpreters have taken this evidence as sufficient reason to collapse God and Jesus into a single being. Is this the way that John of Patmos intended for these images to be understood by his original readers?

1. The Alpha & Omega and First and Last Titles

- I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. (Rev 1:8)*
 - The Lord God, the Almighty (Father)
- When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last (Rev 1:17)*
 - Jesus
- Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life*

without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. (Rev 21:6-7)

- i. God, the Father
- d. *Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. (Rev 22:12-13)*
 - i. Jesus
- e. 7x (perfection)
 - i. Never attributed to the Holy Spirit

2. Possible Meanings of Jesus Being Called the Alpha & Omega

- a. Jesus is the Father
 - i. Unlikely, the one seated upon the throne and the Lamb are consistently distinguished
- b. Jesus bears God the Father's titles as God's agent
- c. No other meanings

3. Revelation's Christology of High Empowerment

- a. Rev 1:1
 - i. The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place (Rev 1:1)
- b. Shared Throne
 - i. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. (Rev 3:21)
 - ii. She gave birth to a male child, one who is to shepherd all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne (Rev 12:5)
 - iii. Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it (Rev 22:1-3)
- c. Only one worthy to open the scroll and reveal God's plans and purposes
 - i. one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Shoot of David, has overcome so as to open the

- book and its seven seals." And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain (Rev 5:5-6)
- ii. And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth. (Rev 5:9-10)
- d. Executor of Divine Wrath (Revelation 6:16-17, 19:11-21)
 - i. they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come (Rev 6:16-17)
 - ii. And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war . . . From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will shepherd them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. (Rev 19:11, 15)
 - 1. Draws upon imagery from Psalm 2
 - e. Rev 13:8
 - i. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain from the foundation of the world. (Rev 13:8)
 - f. Son of Man - received authority
 - i. and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man (Rev 1:13)
 - 1. I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom (Dan 7:13-14)

4. The Use of Psalm 2 in Revelation's Christology

- a. I will surely tell of the decree of Yahweh: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have become your Father. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.'" (Psa 2:7-9)
 - i. The Hebrew root רָעַע ("to break") and רָעָה ("to shepherd") share similar consonants
 - ii. Without vowels, תִּרְעָם ("you shall break them") could be visually confused with a form of רָעָה, like תִּרְעָם ("you shall shepherd them")

- b. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will shepherd them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. (Rev 2:26-27)
- c. She gave birth to a male child, one who is to shepherd all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne (Rev 12:5)
- d. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will shepherd them with a rod of iron (Rev 19:15)
- e. And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came (Rev 11:18)
 - i. Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples devising a vain thing?
The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together
Against Yahweh and against His Anointed (Psa 2:1-2)

In conclusion, we have observed that:

1. The titles Alpha and Omega, first and last, and beginning and end appear to be synonymous titles attributed to both God the Father and to the Lamb who was slain.
2. Jesus functions as God's authorized agent in several ways within the christology of the Book of Revelation, including being the agent of revealing God's words, sharing in God's throne and rule, and sharing in God's role as the cosmic judge. Furthermore, Jesus is constantly portrayed as the beneficiary of God's authority, admitting plainly that he has received authority from his Father and being illustrated as Daniel's son of man who was given dominion, glory, and a kingdom by God.
3. Jesus is the only one qualified to act as God's agent of revelation, rule, and judgment because Jesus died as a sacrificial lamb. In other words, the immortal God has authorized a mortal who died and has been raised to new life.
4. The best interpretation that takes into account all of this data is that the Lamb is God's highly empowered agent, bearing God's titles and authority in light of his sacrificial death, a death that occurred before the foundation of the world (alpha) that redeems believers and makes them into kings and priests who will live in God's kingdom forever (omega).

Thanks for listening to this week's episode!

Join us next week as we look at the Epistle of Barnabas in our Church History series in order to see what "Barnabas" believed about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Does the Epistle of Barnabas teach the doctrine of the Trinity?

Please look forward to our next episode.

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Producer and Editor: Dustin Williams | Host: Dustin Smith