

THE BOOK OF REVELATION AND THE GLORY OF GOD

A dispensational model of biblical theology posits the Glory of God as the goal in biblical history. As such, it is the theological sine qua non of the system¹ of interpretation. A goal is the purpose toward which an endeavor is directed. So the question is: To what purpose is the creation of the earth directed? The answer is the Glory of God. It is not that God purposed to display his glory for his own benefit, but it was purposed for the good of his creatures. God allowed evil to invade the good creation that was to sustain itself under the rulership of man. Yet man though created in God's image was weak in the midst of the heavens and earth (Psalm 8) and vulnerable before evil (Psalm 51). Thus the creation was susceptible to suffer self-destruction, if God's glorious involvement was not purposed.

This is highlighted in the *Revelation* in the final release of Satan from the abyss (20:7, 8). That assault on Jerusalem could have snuffed out the righteous saints of Israel (20:9a), had not "fire come down from heaven and consumed them" (20:9b). Had this remnant of Israel on earth not been delivered, God's purpose for Israel could have been thwarted.

Angels, in spite of their power, alone do not overcome and defeat evil. In fact, it is apparent that one angel is at the core of the initial rebellion against God. Man alone will not consistently confront evil, even if he were able. Only God, willing to share his glory with his creation, could have enabled the good intended in creation to be fully realized. God's glory appeared both in the objective display² and in the subjective expressions of deserved recognition of glory, by occupants of heaven and earth.

The book of *Revelation* opens heaven for believers to gain access to what is seen from God's perspective from history, a brief summary of God's glory in history will be considered.

First in creation, God spoke, not to remove remnants of judgment of evil on earth,³ but to permit them to remain framing the good creation (darkness, watery deep, etc. Gen. 1:2). Then God permitted evil to invade the human race (Gen. 3:1-6), which then lived with the sentence to death (Gen. 2:18).

Second, God in his fiery presence irrupted into Moses' life (Ex. 3) and into Egypt and Israel's world (Ex. 5-12 and 19-24). His presence although shrouded in clouds was intended to elicit a fear of God to challenge the temptation to sin (Ex. 20:20, 21). When God in glory did settle in the tent of meeting, the people were separated from his glory by a veil, only to approach him through sacrifices and representative priests. When the tent was replaced by a more grand temple, there was no more willingness among the people to have God present among them. Solomon's temple was eventually destroyed, as God's glory reluctantly departed because of Israel's sin (Ezek. 10:1 – 11:25).

¹ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965) 46.

² Those displays included both his word spoken and actions in history.

³ Scofield Reference Bible, Gen. 1:2 and 1:5-31.

Third, a remnant of Israel returned from captivity to partner with God yet when the second temple was rebuilt, God did not show up in glory (Ezra 6:16-22).

Finally, God's glory showed up in the advent of Jesus. In cleansing the Herodian temple, no one recognized the glory in him. No one understood when he called his body a temple (John 2:19-22). Only John the Apostle completed the explanation in the Gospel account as he introduced the Word who became flesh and tabernacled among us with the glory of the only begotten Son (John 1:14).

This perception of glory, residing in the presence of God in history had a dramatic effect on the koine Greek vocabulary of the New Testament. The TDNT summarized: "When the translator of the Old Testament first thought of using *doxa* for *kabod*, he initiated a linguistic change of far reaching significance, giving to the Greek term a distinctive sense which could hardly be surpassed. Taking a word for 'opinion,' which implies all the subjectivity and therefore, all the vacillation of human views and conjectures, be made it express something absolutely objective, i.e. the reality of God."⁴

This objective sense of glory seen in God showing up in his grandeur reaches a climax in the *Revelation*. As the heavens opened for John on earth to peer into heaven, God's glory is present and repeatedly overwhelmed John. The glory of God appears as John describes Jesus Christ, God's throne and the characters participating in those climatic events and God's necessary acts of judgment. Then in an unfettered fashion, His glory shines forth in the new heaven and new earth.

God's Glory in the Revelation

The consideration of God's glory in the *Revelation* will be limited to texts where the word is used directly. The word is used in the praise of the author John and in the praise expressed by the heavenly characters.

1:5b, 6 The Glory in Jesus Christ

At the conclusion of John's prologue (1:1-8), John ascribes glory and power to Jesus Christ. This expressive word of praise is proclaimed by John completing his greeting to the seven churches in Asia (1:4-6). That greeting—grace and peace—is assured by the three Persons of the Godhead; Yahweh, the Spirit (Isa. 11:2) and Jesus Christ. The focus will continue to rest on Jesus Christ who is now mentioned a third time (1:1, 1:2, and 1:5), even though this name does not occur again in the text of *Revelation*. In a point of emphasis, Jesus alone is the One to whom *glory* is ascribed.

⁴ Gerhard Kittle, *doxa*, TDNT Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 245.

That distinctive expression rests on truths found in the Gospel; his earthly life, his resurrection to eternal life and his coming to rule on earth (Psalm 89:27). Those truths generate “spontaneous doxology of praise.” “The doxology celebrates the greater redemption of which the first exodus is an anticipation. . . where (Israel) received the covenant which made them ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (Exodus 19:6).”⁵ Now in these works of Jesus Christ, the church will share the same role on earth as Israel had (1:6a). To Jesus Christ belong *glory* and *power* because of what had been accomplished in the first advent (1:6b). But the idea will be repeated later (5:10, 12) and result in man’s ruling on earth. These parallel thoughts led some to translate the praise concerning “glory and dominion.”

This thought of glorious power naturally introduces the theme of the whole prophecy (1:7): “Look, He is coming” to earth, announced in terms already prophesied (Dan. 7:13 and Zech. 12:10). Zechariah in particular highlights Jerusalem who would mourn for the One whom they had pierced, yet the announcement is enlarged: “every eye will see him and all the peoples of the earth will mourn over him.” John then adds, “so it is to be. Amen;” which affirms the certainty of the divine promise and calls for the readers to trust in the promise. The same affirmation and call appears at the end of the prophecy (22:20), sandwiching everything that occurs within Revelation within this divine commitment. Dare anyone neglect God’s promise of Messiah’s coming?

The Glory in Heaven (4:9, 11 and 5:12, 13)

The scene now changes from the church, struggling on earth with evil to “see what transpires in heaven that he may understand what takes place on earth.”⁶

Righteous judgment “must take place, after this” (4:1). While the church as seven golden lampstands had enjoyed the spiritual presence of One like the Son of Man in their midst (1:12-20), yet the conditions on earth remained infiltrated with evil. A divine necessity demanded that God show up on earth in heavenly glory in order that God’s purpose in creation be fulfilled. The church would not bring about in their lampstand witness, God’s mediated rule on earth. This is in contrast to Babylon the Harlot (17, 18), and her attempts to rule.

The two chapters that follow (4 and 5) “may be viewed as a fulcrum of the Revelation. . . that serve the double purpose (first) of initiating the series of judgments that lead to the final advent. . . (second) of supplying the form for the series of Messianic judgments”. . .⁷

Chapter Four introduces the throne of heaven and the One who was seated on it (4:2). The existence of the heavenly Throne demanded righteous judgment to confront the evil

⁵ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 57.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁷ *Ibid.*

permitted to persistently encroach further into a good creation. Only then would man's mediation of God's heavenly reign be established on earth (Gen. 1:26, 28). The throne as described is without equal on earth as the heavenly participants give expression to its' *glory*.

Four living beings express the glory of *holiness* residing in the One seated on the throne (4:6b-9). The identity of these "living ones" highlight the appropriateness in their appreciation of holiness. Thomas points out that their name "is not derived from the verb meaning 'I create,' so the name should not be rendered 'creatures,' nor 'beasts,' rather 'living beings.'"⁸ What, then, do these living beings represent?

Since they "were in the middle and around the throne" (4:6b), where only deity resides, Ironside appropriately concludes, "They represent attributes of the living God."⁹ These attributes of God are reflected in different dimension of what God created.¹⁰ God's own attributes uniquely give expression to the holiness that sets him apart in glory from any created being in the creation.

Twenty-four elders (4:4, 9-11) also give expression to the glory of *redemption*. Surrounding the central throne are 24 thrones. These are not merely seats, but rather represent what was accomplished in redemption. The elders share in God's heavenly rule. The elders are dressed in white clothes, with victor's crowns.¹¹ The number, 24, alludes to the priestly order of ministry in the Old Testament temple (1 Chronicles 24). The particular identity of the elders remains under discussion. If the crown (victor or overcomer) depends upon experiencing the finished work of the resurrection of Jesus over death (overcomer; 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:26, 3:5, 3:12, and 3:21), then the twenty-four represent the church. However, if those seated on thrones represent redemption, then the twenty-four represent both Israel and the church.¹² The elders bow down in worship, casting their crowns at the feet of the One on the throne. The Throne Sitter alone is the focus of their victory. This deference toward God in the expression of glory represents them as creatures and him as Creator and Providential Ruler.

In Chapter 5, the focus changes from the throne to a search for one worthy, in heaven, on earth, or under the earth to partner with the Throne Sitter to bring about the climax of history. The issue is portrayed in "a scroll written on both sides and sealed with seven seals" (5:1 and 2). If the scroll is the title deed to the earth, the partner is the rightful heir to Jerusalem, the Promised Land and the earth. To receive the scroll is to claim this promised inheritance.

⁸ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: an Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 355.

⁹ Harry Ironside, *Lectures on Revelation*, 85.

¹⁰ Lion, representing divine majesty; ox, divine strength in service; man, divine personal intentions; eagle, divine swiftness in detecting evil and executing judgment.

¹¹ Stephanos, victor's or overcomer's crown rather than diadems, ruling crown.

¹² Ironside, 82; Beasley-Murray, 113, 144.

Once the Heir is recognized (5:5-7), he is envisioned from two perspectives. In one perspective, he is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, rooted in David to whom the promise to rule on earth was given. So he is worthy because of God's promise (5:5a). In addition, that promise added that he is worthy because he is the overcomer (the victor) (5:5b). This alludes to the pronounced judgment of a historic conflict between the seed of the woman and the serpent (Gen. 3:15).

In another perspective, he is the slaughtered Lamb (5:6), who satisfied God's demands that others might share in the inheritance (5:9, 10). This alludes to the promise that the seed of Abraham would mediate blessing to all nations (Gen. 12:3 and 22:15-18). While the Lamb is a creature, he "stands in the middle of the Throne" (5:6b) along with the "living beings." And they are among the elders. Thus the One who is like a sacrificed Lamb is God himself.

When the Lamb took the scroll, the four living beings and the 24 elders fell down before the Lamb, with harps and the prayers of the saints, and sang a new song. The Lamb's worth rests on his work of redemption and on his appointment to priestly service (5:9, 10). Then thousands of thousands of creatures give expression to the glory that the Lamb who showed up in his first advent ministry (5:11, 12). That worth deserves future glory that will show off that which is necessary to the completion of God's will. Further every creature, in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea and everything in them, will appreciate the glory of the One seated on the Throne and the Lamb (5:13). This acknowledges that the redeemed ones and those not redeemed, all will acknowledge God's glory and dominion forever.

At this stage in the progress of the revelation, several questions emerge:

What does it mean that the Throne will rule forever and ever?
Has the Throne ever lost its' rule?
Is this the Davidic Throne?

The comment by Beasley-Murray is troubling: "The triumph by the Lamb reaches its fitting climax in the acknowledgment of his worth by every creature in the universe. . .In the vision, the end of history has been reached". . .¹³ This is followed by the new heavens and the new earth (21:22ff., and 22:15).

What is troubling is that he fails to account for what the *Revelation* includes in the unfolding of God's delegated reign on earth. The throne in heaven introduced in Revelation 4 portrayed God's *universal* reign that has never been surrendered or lost. As the Lamb joined the One who sat on the throne, it indicated that the first advent ministry had been fulfilled yet the *mediated* reign on earth of the Lion of the tribe of Judah had not yet been established. That would occur in Revelation 20:4-6 when the White-horsed Rider would reign with a rod of iron (Rev. 19:15, 16). The mediated reign of the Lion on earth would extend God's universal reign

¹³ Beasley-Murray, 128.

over evil on earth. Together they will reign to the climax of history and be combined forever and ever in the new history (5:13).

7:12, 11:13, 14:7, 15:8 and 16:9 and the Glory of God in Judgments

7:12

A great multitude saved from the judgments on earth, and stood before the Throne in heaven and worshipped. All the angels, along with the elders and the four living beings fell down and worshipped God, ascribing glory as God showed off his grace and power to save the multitude in the tribulation, in spite of righteous judgment on earth.

11:13

Jerusalem was the focus of God's judgment after they rejected the two witnesses and watched them taken to heaven. Then a violent earthquake struck Jerusalem and the survivors acknowledged that God showed up in *glory* in the judgment of an earthquake.

14:7

In the context of the terror of the two beasts, an angel flew high overhead with an eternal gospel. He called with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come" (14:7). Beasley-Murray proposes that to give *glory* is to repent.¹⁴ However, in light of a consistent use of the term, the focus is not on man but on God. And the sense of the call is to give expression that God is present to judge their sin. That may also imply repentance for individuals.

15:3, 4

Pending the last seven bowl plagues to complete the time of God's wrath, those who won victory over the beast sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb. It would be unimaginable that the earthdwellers would not concede the God alone has shown up to display the depth of his wrath (15:4). All nations will acknowledge God's righteous acts. Then the heavenly Temple, the Tabernacle of testimony appeared as it had at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 40:34-38). Clearly, God had showed up in glory as he had at first. Israel would experience a climactic exodus from judgment on the nations.

16:9

Assuming that Israel will become the focus of the prophecy from the second reading of the little scroll (10:8-11), then the people, Israel, will uniquely experience this great tribulation of God's wrath (Matt. 24:21:22) yet will refuse to acknowledge God's presence in glory nor repent. This is in contrast to Jerusalem and the earlier earthquake of Rev. 11:13. Israel's heart is being hardened even as Pharaoh's had been (Ex. 5:1-4).

¹⁴ Ibid.,

21:11, 23, 26 and the New Jerusalem

The goodness of the first creation reached fulfillment in the reign of Messiah and the fiery appearance of God's glory. After the Great White Throne Judgment, that creation passed away.

In its absence, a new heaven and earth appeared to house the New Jerusalem prepared as a bride for the Lord (21:2). The keynote is that God will dwell with his people (21:3). So the holy city, coming out of heaven, is arrayed with God's glory (21:11). Contrary to the first creation, where God's glory remained covered in man's presence, now the redeemed humanity dwell directly in God's glorious presence. What an unimaginable hope!

Conclusion

The glory of God appears in history in God's objective achievements associated with his promises and presence and appears in praise from those who share his victories, in their subjective expression of honor toward God. In *Revelation*, there is a balance between references to achievements and celebrations of His glory.

Only in a good creation in which an assault from evil is permitted, will the *wisdom* of God be evident because history is directed in purpose toward the glory of God.

Only in the fallen world, would the glory of God's *righteous* judgments become evident to restore the reign of *justice*. Those judgments are demanded in a scroll, providing a title deed of ownership for the heir. That demand would reach its' climax in the urgent call of trumpets, announcing war against evil.

At the core of evil attack, there is war against Israel yet with the people in the end deserved the judgment of seven bowls of wrath, also named the time of Jacob's trouble. Still a righteous remnant of saints will be preserved so that God's promised blessing of the saints will be fulfilled in God's *mercy*.

Only in a world where death reigns would a White-horsed Rider ride forth to conquer and to bring victory to the living saints who would reign with him in fulfillment of what was purposed in the good creation. And the *holiness* of God's glory would appear in the bringing of death to the evil enemies of God.