

2.4 - Theme

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While it seems tempting to identify a primary theme of the book of Revelation, it appears that there are actually a number of themes which receive great emphasis within the book: *the sovereignty of God, worship of God, and the arrival of God's Kingdom.*

2.4.1 - The Sovereignty of God

One of the most prevalent doctrines throughout Scripture is the sovereignty of God (Job 9:17; 33:13; Ecc. 3:14; Isa. 46:10-11; Mat. 10:29; Eph. 1:11) and the book of Revelation is no exception. Within the book of Revelation, God's sovereignty is *demonstrated* by His powerful intervention in the events of history. From the opening of the first seal by the Lamb (Rev. 6:1+) to the pouring forth of the seventh bowl, whereupon God pronounces "It is done!" (Rev. 16:17+), it is manifestly clear that the physical and spiritual events which transpire are the direct result of God's initiative.

This sovereign might is seen in the incredible use of [δóθην](#) [edothē] (. . . "was given"), a divine passive that points to God's control of the events. This verb is used frequently in the book (Rev. 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 passages on the four horsemen (Rev. 6:1-8+) and the activities of the beast (Rev. 13:5-15+). In other words, even the actions of the forces of evil are controlled by God. Everything they do comes only by the permission of God.¹

The very descriptions of God throughout the book emphasize the immutability of His purposes, which presents a threat to those who oppose Him but provides ultimate security for those who trust in Him.

Revelation presents a sovereign God whose purposes must be victorious. He is almighty (Rev. 1:8+), everlasting (Rev. 4:8+), seated upon the throne of the universe (Rev. 4:2+), the Creator of all things (Rev. 4:11+). His authority is greater than that of evil (Rev. 12:10+), and His name is the security of those who trust in Him (Rev. 14:1+).²

The sovereignty of God is manifest in the visions of heaven and His throne, an image which occurs some forty-six times in the book.³ God's sovereign control is illustrated by His role as Creator (Rev. 3:14+; 4:11+; 10:6+) and the necessity of His sustenance for its continuance (Rev. 20:11+; 21:1+).⁴

2.4.2 - Worship of God

The first question of the *Westminster Confession* asks: "What is the chief and highest end of man?" To which the following answer is given: "Man's chief and highest end is to **glorify God**, and fully to enjoy him forever." [emphasis added] Like God's sovereignty, the theme of God's glory stretches from Genesis to Revelation. His manifest presence among His people is represented by His abiding glory (shekinah, Ex. 14:10; 16:10; 24:15-16; 40:34; Lev. 9:23; Num. 14:10; 16:19, 42; 20:6; 2Chr. 7:1; Isa. 4:5; 35:2; 40:5; Eze. 1:28; 3:23; 9:3; 10:18; Acts 9:3). Here in the last book of the Bible, God's glory is seen through the visions and choruses of worship and praise offered up to God. From the first chapter, the glory of God and John's response are clearly revealed (Rev. 1:17+).

Worship is one of [the book's] strongest emphases. The first vision of the book brought the writer prostrate before the figure of the living Christ who appeared to him on Patmos. Through the long series of visions that followed there are repeated references to worship. . . . The implication of the book is that worship is a token of the genuineness of spiritual life now. The contrast between the saved and the lost in Revelation could be called a contrast in worship, since the latter worship the beast (Rev. 13:4+, 8+, 12+, 15+). Man is made to worship someone, and if he will not have the true God, he will inevitably turn to a false idol.⁵

Tenney notes the importance of worship in an ongoing celestial commentary of the events transpiring on earth below.⁶

Poetic Expressions of Praise			
Title	Passage	Participants	Occasion
<i>Tersanctus</i> : "Holy, holy, holy"	Rev. 4:8+	Living Creatures	Constant worship

"Worthy art Thou" in Creation	Rev. 4:11 [±]	Twenty-four Elders	Worship by Elders
"Worthy art Thou" in Redemption	Rev. 5:8-10 [±]	Living Creatures and Elders	Lamb's assumption of rights
"Worthy is the Lamb"	Rev. 5:11-12 [±]	Angels, Living Creatures, Elders	Lamb's assumption of rights
"Unto him that sitteth"	Rev. 5:13 [±]	Every created thing	Lamb's assumption of rights
"Salvation unto our God"	Rev. 7:9-10 [±]	Great multitude	Sealing of 144,000
"Amen. Blessing. . ."	Rev. 7:11-12 [±]	Angels	Sealing of 144,000
"The kingdom of the world"	Rev. 11:15 [±]	Great voices	Seventh angel
"We give thee thanks"	Rev. 11:16-18 [±]	Elders	Seventh trumpet
"Great and marvellous"	Rev. 15:2-4 [±]	Victors over Beast	Seven last plagues
"Four Hallelujahs"	Rev. 19:1-8 [±]	Great multitude, Elders, Living Creatures, Great voices	Fall of Babylon, Marriage of Lamb

Whenever the reader is tempted to focus on the enormity of the events transpiring on the earth below, the scene shifts to the heavens above, the ultimate source of what is transpiring, and the destination of the glory derived from all that transpires in His creation. "No matter how many parentheses and digressions may be introduced, the Revelation maintains the celestial setting for terrestrial events. Behind the changing panorama of human history described under the symbolic pictures abides the unchanging reality of an eternal world in which God's purpose is unfailing and His Christ victorious."⁷ The importance of glory and its expression through worship is also evident in the degree to which Satan parodies God in a short-lived attempt to subvert God's glory for himself.

Indeed, everything Satan does is a parody or "great imitation" of what God has already done. The mark of the beast (Rev. 13:16-17[±]) in the right hand or forehead is a mere copy of God sealing the saints in the forehead (Rev. 7:3[±]). The false trinity (the dragon, beast, and false prophet, Rev. 16:13[±]) is an obvious copy of the triune Godhead. The mortal wound that is healed (Rev. 13:3[±], 12[±]) imitates the death and resurrection of the Lord. The dragon giving the beast his power; throne, and "great" authority (Rev. 13:2[±]) copies the relationship between God and Christ. The demand for the nations to worship the beast and dragon (Rev. 13:8[±], 14-15[±]) follows the constant commands in Scripture to worship God.⁸

Here in the book of Revelation the attempt of the *creature* to occupy the role of the *Creator* comes to its vain conclusion (Isa. 14:13-14; Mat. 4:9; Luke 4:7; Rev. 13:4[±], 8[±], 12[±], 15[±]; 14:11[±]; 16:2[±]; 19:20[±]). Near the close of the book, the angel informs John and those who would read or hear this prophecy that it is *God* Who alone is to be worshiped (Rev. 22:9[±]).⁹

2.4.3 - The Arrival of God's Kingdom

When the New Testament opens, we find John the Baptist preaching, "Repent, for the **kingdom** of heaven is at hand" (Mat. 3:2) [emphasis added]. Later, when John was imprisoned, Jesus too preached, "the gospel of the **kingdom** of God" (Mark 1:14). During this time of Jesus' early ministry while his disciples *had no understanding of His destiny on the cross*, they too announced, "The **kingdom** of heaven is at hand" (Mat. 10:7) [emphasis added]. At the time of these early pronouncements, there is no additional explanation given to the hearers concerning the nature of this kingdom. It is evident that these pronouncements were in keeping with the expectations set forth by the very promises of God in the Old Testament. Promises which would have been familiar to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Isa. 49:5; Mat. 10:5-6; 15:24; Mark 7:27; John 1:11; Acts 10:36).

Thus, read in the light of its evident Old Testament context, the phrase 'kingdom of heaven' does not refer to a kingdom located in heaven as opposed to the earth, but rather to the coming to earth of a kingdom which is heavenly as to its origin and character.¹⁰

After the religious leaders of the Jews committed the ultimate sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit by attributing the works of Jesus to demon-possession (Mat. 12:24-31; Mark 3:22, 28-30; Luke 11:15; John 7:20), Jesus began using [parables](#) to teach *new truths* concerning this kingdom (Mat. 13, especially Mat. 13:52). An important new truth which Jesus began to reveal was the *delay* before the kingdom of God would come fully on earth: "Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near

Jerusalem and **because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately** (Luke 19:11) [emphasis added].¹¹ When the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, His example included a petition to the Father to bring about His kingdom *on earth* (Mat. 6:10).¹² Later, Jesus told His disciples that in the “regeneration” they would sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mat. 19:28). Immediately prior to his ascension, the disciples asked about the coming of the kingdom: “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Jesus never corrected this expectation of the kingdom of God on earth, but indicated that the *timing* of its arrival was yet future and that in the meantime a special period of time characterized by the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit to move the gospel across the world was the more immediate task (Acts 1:7-8).

Jesus had just been speaking for forty days of the kingdom of God (Acts 1:4), and no doubt the content of his discussions prompted this question. Christ’s answer must not be understood to be a denial of the hope reflected in this question, a hope firmly founded upon the provisions of the Davidic Covenant and the predictions of the prophets (Isa. 11:11; 55:3), but a confirmation of it. If the disciples were mistaken in this hope, this would have been a most opportune time to correct them, but Christ did not (John 14:2; 20:29; Rom. 15:8). Yet, misunderstanding this, many expositors have gone far astray in their understanding of the prophetic plan of God revealed in Scripture. Misunderstanding on this point is virtually fatal to understanding Biblical prophecy as a whole.¹³

This last book of the Bible includes key events related to God’s kingdom coming *to earth* and its extension into the eternal state. The King extends His rightful rule over all the nations (Rev. 12:5⁺; 19:15⁺). Here is recorded the final defeat of the kingdoms of man (Ps. 2:1-2; Dan. 2:34-35, 44-45; Rev. 1:5⁺; 19:15-21⁺), the ushering in of the [Millennial Kingdom](#) on earth (Rev. 11:15⁺; Rev. 20:4⁺), the demise of the kingdom of Satan (Rev. 20:2⁺, 10⁺), and the permanent dwelling of the King among His subjects (Rev. 21:3⁺; 22:3⁺). Although relatively little is said concerning the *earthy* nature of the Millennial Kingdom in Revelation 20:4⁺, this is but a small slice of all that God has said concerning this time of peace and great blessing upon the earth: Isa. 2:1-4; 9:7; 11:1-16; 60:1-12; 65:17-25; Jer. 23:3-8; 31:31-40; Eze. 37:15-28; Eze. 44-48; Zec. 8:1-17; 14:8-11; Mic. 4:1-8. That this period cannot refer to the eternal state (Rev. 21⁺, 22⁺) is clear for it includes the continuance of physical birth, (Isa. 65:23), sin (Isa. 60:12; 65:20), and physical death (Isa. 65:20).

The belief in the Messianic Kingdom does not rest on this passage [Rev. 20:4⁺] alone. In fact, it hardly rests on it at all. The *basis* for the belief in the Millennial Kingdom is twofold. *First*: there are the unfulfilled promises of the Jewish covenants, promises that can only be fulfilled in a Messianic Kingdom. *Second*: there are the unfulfilled prophecies of the Jewish prophets. . . . The only real contribution that the book of Revelation makes to the knowledge of the Kingdom is to disclose just how long the Messianic kingdom will last—namely one thousand years—for which the term *Millennium* is used. This is the one key truth concerning the Kingdom that was not revealed in the Old Testament.¹⁴

See [Millennial Kingdom](#). Tenney identifies three [NT](#) principles which receive special emphasis within the Revelation: *judgment*, *redemption*, and the [establishment of the kingdom of God](#).

Judgment, redemption, and kingdom are interrelated parts of the public establishment of God’s salvation. Judgments are the fate of the unrepentant and the unredeemed, as the kingdom is the destiny of the redeemed believers. Redemption exempts one from judgment, and makes him ready for the kingdom.¹⁵

This redemptive work of God goes beyond the establishment of a *mediatorial* kingdom ruled by Jesus in Jerusalem for one thousand years. It includes the redemption of all that was originally given to man and the restoration of conditions prior to the Fall (Gen. 3:6, 14-19). See the discussion concerning [Genesis and Revelation as Bookends](#) for more information on the complete restoration brought about through the events recorded in the book of Revelation. The arrival of God’s kingdom on earth is inseparably linked with the arrival of the King Himself. “The return of Jesus to this earth is the central theme of this book. It will deal with events leading up to, accompanying, and following the Second Coming.”¹⁶ The kingdom has no temporal power prior to the Second Coming.¹⁷ This emphasis on the [imminent](#) coming of Jesus Christ is found in many statements throughout the book (Rev. 1:7⁺; 2:25⁺; 3:3⁺, 11⁺; 16:15⁺; 19:11-16⁺; 22:7⁺, 12⁺, 20⁺). This last book of the Bible amplifies the teaching found throughout the NT that believers are to live in constant expectation of His return.¹⁸

2.4.4 - A Worldwide Revival

It should not be missed that in accordance with God’s desire that all should come to repentance (2Pe. 3:9), the events of the book of Revelation are intended to serve as a final call to those who God knows will yet respond to the message of the gospel. This can be seen in the special ministries of the 144,000 Jewish servants (Rev. 7⁺, 14⁺), the two witnesses (Rev. 11:3⁺), and the angel proclaiming the gospel message worldwide (Rev. 14:16⁺). In response to their testimony, a large number of people will come to faith in Christ, although many will be martyred (Rev. 6:9-11⁺; 7:13-14⁺).¹⁹ Those who refuse to respond to the gospel message are shown to be unbending in their rejection of God and without any hint of repentance (Rev. 9:20-21⁺; 16:9⁺, 11⁺, 21⁺). Thus, the events preceding the Second Coming of Christ serve as a global “threshing” where the wheat (believers) is separated from the chaff

(unbelievers) by the extreme tests which come upon the world (Luke 21:34-36; Rev. 3:10⁺). In our sorrow over the destiny of the chaff, let us not overlook the wheat which is harvested to the glory of God (Rev. 14:14-16⁺).

Notes

¹Grant R. Osborne, [*Revelation*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 32.

²Merrill C. Tenney, BORROW [*Interpreting Revelation*](#) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1957), 198.

³“One of the predominant images is that of God on his throne . . . occurring forty-six times.”—Osborne, [*Revelation*](#), 33.

⁴“The ultimate proof of his control over this world is that he both created and sustains it.”—*Ibid.*, 32-33.

⁵Tenney, [*Interpreting Revelation*](#), 199-200.

⁶*Ibid.*, 36-37.

⁷*Ibid.*, 37.

⁸Osborne, [*Revelation*](#), 34.

⁹One might also wonder whether the judgments which are poured out upon the *earth* are an indication that those dwelling upon the earth have placed undue emphasis upon the earth, while neglecting its Creator. Perhaps this is an indication of the fully-developed fruit of unbridled environmentalism which includes an idolatrous worship of the earth.

¹⁰Alva J. McClain, [*The Greatness Of The Kingdom*](#) (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959), 280.

¹¹The future aspect of the kingdom is found throughout Scripture: Ps. 110:1; Dan. 7:11-14, 21-22, 25-27; Mat. 6:2; 7:21-22; 19:28; 25:31; 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 11:2; 19:11, 15; 21:31; 22:16-18, 29-30; 23:51; Acts 1:6-7; 14:22; 1Cor. 15:24; 2Ti. 4:1; Heb. 2:8; Rev. 3:21⁺; 11:15⁺, 17⁺; 12:10⁺; 19:20⁺.

¹²“Bauckham asserts that Revelation as a whole can be seen as the fulfillment of the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer: May your name be made sacred, your kingdom come, and your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. The earthly scene, where his name is not made sacred and his will not done, is soon to be transformed by the sovereign action of the enthroned God.”—Osborne, [*Revelation*](#), 33.

¹³Jerome Smith, [*The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*](#) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), Acts 1:6.

¹⁴Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, [*The Footsteps of Messiah*](#), rev ed (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 381.

¹⁵Tenney, [*Interpreting Revelation*](#), 30-31.

¹⁶Fruchtenbaum, [*The Footsteps of Messiah*](#), 15.

¹⁷“The papacy has ever grasped at ‘temporal power.’ She wants to rule the world *now*, before Christ comes—thus *proving* herself false; . . . God’s saints, with their Lord, await expectantly the Father’s time.”—William R. Newell, [*Revelation: Chapter by Chapter*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1994,c1935), 60.

¹⁸This is known as the doctrine of *imminency* which states that the return of Jesus for His church (the Rapture) can occur at *any moment* without warning. There are *no preconditions*—events which must transpire—before He comes. The pretribulation rapture position is the only position which preserves the doctrine of imminency in that every other rapture position holds that the Rapture takes place after the beginning of the Tribulation. If Jesus could truly come “tonight,” but the Tribulation (Daniel’s 70th week) cannot start until Antichrist signs a covenant with Israel (Dan. 9:27), then mid- or post-tribulation Rapture is not ‘imminent.’ NT passages which teach the imminency of His return include: 1Cor. 1:7; 4:5; 15:51-52; 16:22; Php. 3:20; 4:5; 1Th. 1:10; 2Th. 3:10-12; Tit. 2:13; Jas. 5:7-9; 1Jn. 2:28; Rev. 3:11⁺; 22:7⁺, 12⁺, 17⁺, 20⁺.

¹⁹“By means of the 144,000 Jews, God will accomplish the second purpose of the Great Tribulation, that of bringing about a worldwide revival.”—Fruchtenbaum, [*The Footsteps of Messiah*](#), 179-180.

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(Content generated on Thu Apr 30 16:37:45 2020)

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