

# The Divine Character of Jesus Christ

## *Evidence from Revelation 1*

Gregory A. Smith / February 2010

### Introduction

Scenario #1: Assume you've just met someone who immigrated to the United States from a country where he/she had no knowledge of Christianity. How would you describe Jesus Christ to him/her?

Scenario #2: Assume that a couple of Jehovah's Witnesses have just come to your door. They do not believe that Jesus Christ is co-equal with God the Father. What evidence could you give of Jesus' divinity?

Many Scripture references lead us to conclude that Jesus was the Son of God—God the Son, co-equal in the Godhead with his Father and the Holy Spirit. However, most of these texts are quite reserved in the way that they attribute deity to Christ. Most don't say straightforwardly, "Jesus is God."

Today we'll look at some evidence of Christ's deity that is found in the first chapter of Revelation. As you may know, this book was written by the apostle John. Of all the New Testament authors, John was probably the one who spoke most plainly about the divine character of Jesus Christ—in his gospel, in his epistles, and in Revelation.

You may not realize it, but the book of Revelation is filled with allusions to the Old Testament. Using different criteria, scholars have recognized anywhere from 195 to about 1,000 uses of the Old Testament in Revelation (Beale and McDonough 1082). The passage we're going to study (Rev. 1:10-18) has a strong connection with certain Old Testament texts, so we'll be looking at the latter.

### Body

Read the passage in its entirety. Based on the clues in the text, whom did John see in his vision? (Answer: Jesus Christ)

#### Old Testament Connection #1: Jesus' Self-Description as "the First and the Last" (Rev. 1:17)

- Let's focus on v. 17—particularly, Jesus' self-description as "the first and the last." This description has an Old Testament precedent in the book of Isaiah (41:4; 44:6; and 48:12).
- Read the context of each of these texts in Isaiah.
  - Whom does Isaiah describe as the first and the last?  
(Answer: Jehovah God)
  - How else do these passages describe Jehovah?  
(Answer: Lord of creation [40:12; 48:14], sovereign [40:13], all-knowing [40:14], Lord of the nations [40:15ff], majestic [40:21], etc.)
  - According to these passages, is there anyone above or equal to Jehovah?  
(Answer: No! [40:13-14, 18, 25; 44:6, 8; 48:11])
  - What, then, is the significance of Jesus calling himself "the first and the last" in Revelation 1?  
(Answer: It is a clear claim to deity. In referring to himself as "the first and the last," Jesus is appropriating a title that Jehovah attributed to Himself in the Old Testament. Notably, the LORD used this self-description in passages where He was calling attention to his uniqueness. By attributing the same self-description to Jesus, John is

making a strong case for his equality with Jehovah. “The title . . . shows that in John’s Christology Christ is identified with the Deity” [Johnson, notes on 1:17-18].)

### Old Testament Connection #2: John’s Vision of “One Like a Son of Man” (Rev. 1:13-16)

- Now let’s focus on vv. 13-16. The Old Testament background for this vision actually comes from three texts: Dan. 7:9ff; 10:5-6; and Ezek. 43:2. In order to save time, we’ll only look at the first of these today.
- Read the selections from Daniel 7 provided on the handout.
  - What two personages does Daniel see in his vision?  
(Answer: “the Ancient of Days” and “one like the Son of man”)
  - What similarities are there between the verses we read in Daniel 7 and those we read in Revelation 1?  
(Answer: Daniel 7:13 refers to “one like the Son of man,” and Revelation 1:13 uses this descriptor in reference to Jesus. Daniel 7:9 speaks of “the Ancient of Days” as having white hair, while Revelation 1:14 applies this to Jesus.)
  - What, then, does this passage have to say about the identity of Jesus Christ?  
(Answer: There is an indication that Jesus Christ is divine. “What is significant about the description John gave of the figure is that in Daniel two beings are present—the Ancient of Days and the Son of man—but John blends them together into one figure. The Son of man and the Ancient of Days are one Being. . . . [T]he son is the outward expression of the hidden God” (Elwell 1204).)

### **Conclusion**

What is the significance of attributing deity to Jesus? What difference will it make in our lives?

- His words are absolutely true and faithful. They are the words of God himself.
- Our salvation is sure because the very Son of God has given his life for us.
- The Word who became flesh for us is Lord of all, incomparable to anyone or anything. God himself has walked among us and offers us the chance to know him personally.
- If we believe in Jesus as the Son of God, we will seek to glorify him rather than ourselves. And we will face earthly trials with confidence that God is on our side.

### **Works Cited**

Beale, G. K., and Sean M. McDonough. “Revelation.” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Ed. Beale and D. A. Carson. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic; Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2007. 1081-1161.

Elwell, Walter A. “Revelation.” *Baker Commentary on the Bible*. Ed. Elwell. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000. 1197-1229.

Johnson, Alan F. “Revelation.” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. Ed. Frank E. Gaebelin. Vol. 12. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981.

## Revelation 1

<sup>10</sup>I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,

<sup>11</sup>Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

<sup>12</sup>And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;

<sup>13</sup>And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

<sup>14</sup>His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;

<sup>15</sup>And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

<sup>16</sup>And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

<sup>17</sup>And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:

<sup>18</sup>I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

---

## Daniel 7

<sup>1</sup>In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters.

<sup>2</sup>Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea.

<sup>3</sup>And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another.

...

<sup>9</sup>I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.

<sup>10</sup>A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.

...

<sup>13</sup>I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

<sup>14</sup>And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

---

## Isaiah 40

<sup>12</sup>Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?

<sup>13</sup>Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him?

<sup>14</sup>With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?

<sup>15</sup>Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.

<sup>16</sup>And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering.

<sup>17</sup>All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.

<sup>18</sup>To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?

<sup>19</sup>The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains.

<sup>20</sup>He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved.

<sup>21</sup>Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth?

<sup>22</sup>It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:

<sup>23</sup>That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity.

<sup>24</sup>Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble.

<sup>25</sup>To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.

<sup>26</sup>Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.

#### Isaiah 41

<sup>2</sup>Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings? he gave them as the dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow.

<sup>3</sup>He pursued them, and passed safely; even by the way that he had not gone with his feet.

<sup>4</sup>Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? **I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.**

---

#### Isaiah 44

<sup>6</sup>Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; **I am the first, and I am the last;** and beside me there is no God.

<sup>7</sup>And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them.

<sup>8</sup>Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.

<sup>9</sup>They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed.

---

#### Isaiah 48

<sup>9</sup>For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off.

<sup>10</sup>Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.

<sup>11</sup>For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another.

<sup>12</sup>Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; **I am the first, I also am the last.**

<sup>13</sup>Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together.

<sup>14</sup>All ye, assemble yourselves, and hear; which among them hath declared these things? The LORD hath loved him: he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans.

## Daniel 10

<sup>1</sup>In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a thing was revealed unto Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar; and the thing was true, but the time appointed was long: and he understood the thing, and had understanding of the vision.

. . .

<sup>4</sup>And in the four and twentieth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, which is Hiddekel;

<sup>5</sup>Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz:

<sup>6</sup>His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude.

<sup>7</sup>And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves.

<sup>8</sup>Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength.

<sup>9</sup>Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground.

<sup>10</sup>And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands.

<sup>11</sup>And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling.

<sup>12</sup>Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.

## Ezekiel 43

<sup>1</sup>Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh toward the east:

<sup>2</sup>And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory.