

## 2 John is Commissioned by The Exalted Christ

“A **theologian** takes God seriously as subject and not as object, and makes it a life’s work to think and talk about God in order to develop knowledge and understanding of God in his being and work. A **poet** takes words seriously as images that connect the visible and invisible, and becomes custodian of their skillful and accurate usage. A **pastor** takes actual persons seriously as children of God and faithfully listens to a and speaks with them in the conviction that their life of faith in God is the centrality to which all else is peripheral ... St. John ... throughly integrated the work of theologian, poet, and pastor...”  
(Peterson, 2-3)

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### 1.2 John greets the churches (1:4-7)

**Revelation 1:4** From John, to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace and peace to you from He who is, and who was, and who is coming, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 1:5 and from Jesus Christ—the faithful witness, the firstborn from among the dead, the ruler over the kings of the earth. To the one who loves us and has set us free from our sins at the cost of his own blood 1:6 and has appointed us as a kingdom, as priests serving his God and Father—to him be the glory and the power for ever and ever! Amen.

- Seven
- The Seven churches in Asia

“...the seven historical churches are viewed as representative of all the churches in Asia Minor and probably, by extension, the church universal. (Beale, 186.)

- Grace and Peace from...

“The greeting itself is typical, found in most of the NT letters (often with “mercy” added). “Grace” (*chairein*) was the common Hellenistic greeting, and “peace” (*šālôm*) the common Hebrew greeting. In the NT, however, these terms were “baptized” with a great deal more significance, with each one being also an eschatological promise of spiritual blessings sent from God. In other words, Christian writers were saying, “Now in Christ you can experience what was only a hope before, namely true ‘grace’ and ‘peace.’” (Osborne, 60)

“Domitian, according to Suetonius, would regularly preface his cruel sentences and punishments on the unfortunate with the phrase, ‘It has pleased the Lord our God in his grace...’, a signal that something horrible was about to come to pass. **John is suggesting that his audience lives by a very different sort and source of mercy and grace.**” (Witherington, 75)

- from He who is, and was, and is to come ...

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**IN THE BACKGROUND 01:** *He who is...*

**Exodus 3:13-15** Moses said to God, “If I go to the Israelites and tell them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what should I say to them?” 14 God said to Moses, “I AM that I AM.” And he said, “You must say this to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” 15 God also said to Moses, “You must say this to the Israelites, ‘The LORD the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you. **This is my name forever, and this is my memorial from generation to generation.**’

“The name in Exod. 3:14 was also expanded in twofold and threefold manners in later Jewish tradition: “**I am he who is and who will be**” (Targ. Ps.-J. Exod. 3:14); “**I am now what I always was and always will be**” (Midr. Rab. Exod. 3:6; Alphabet of Rabbi Akiba; likewise Midr. Ps. 72.1); “**I am he who is and who was, and I am he who will be**” (Targ. Ps.-J. Deut. 32:39; see likewise the gloss to Targ. Neof. Exod. 3:14)

[John] is more likely familiar with the general tradition represented by the texts, listed above, that expand Exod. 3:14. *All these expansions are used in their respective contexts to describe God, not merely as present at the beginning, middle, and end of history, but as the incomparable, sovereign Lord over history, who is thus able to bring prophecy to fulfillment and to deliver his people despite overwhelming odds, whether from Egypt, Babylon, or the nations.* (emphasis mine, Beale, 187-188)

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- from the **Seven Spirits**:  
There has been endless debate over the meaning of these “Seven Spirits.” It is widely held that this may be a reference to the “Sevenfold” Spirit of God as in Isaiah 11:2 (although only six traits are mentioned in that text)

Other references in Revelation

3:1 – **associated with the seven stars**, which are angels

“Write to the angel of the church in Sardis: “The One who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars says: I know your works; you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead.

4:5 – **equated with seven burning torches**

“Flashes of lightning and rumblings of thunder came from the throne. Seven fiery torches were burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God.”

5:6 – **maybe the seven spirits sent into the Earth?**

based on this verse, these may be seven specific angelic servants of the Lamb Christ that are sent out into the earth to be his “eyes” watching over things: 5:6 “Then I saw One like a slaughtered lamb standing between the throne and the four

living creatures and among the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent into all the earth.”

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**IN THE BACKGROUND 02:** *Names of Angels in Rabbinic Judaism*

In early Jewish non-biblical texts, there is a reference to seven archangels (named: Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Saraqael, Gabriel, and Remiel) before the throne of God (Tobit 12:15; 1 Enoch 20:1-8).

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- from Jesus Christ: the faithful witness,

The word “witness” that is used of Christ here is the word that has come into English as *martyr*. It simply means witness, but as the unfolding of Revelation will reveal, to be a witness for Christ in a time of (imperial) persecution means to be someone who is faithful even to death.

- Jesus Christ: the firstborn from among the dead,

In the NT, Jesus is the first human being to experience resurrection. He is the “firstfruits” (see 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23)

- Jesus Christ: the ruler over the kings of the earth

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**IN THE BACKGROUND 03:** *Psalm 89*

**Psalm 89:20-40**

20 I have found David, my servant;  
    with my holy oil I have anointed him,  
21 so that my hand shall be established with him;  
    my arm also shall strengthen him.  
22 The enemy shall not outwit him;  
    the wicked shall not humble him.  
23 I will crush his foes before him  
    and strike down those who hate him.  
24 My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him,  
    and in my name shall his horn be exalted.  
25 I will set his hand on the sea  
    and his right hand on the rivers.  
26 He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God,  
    and the Rock of my salvation.'  
27 **And I will make him the firstborn,  
    the highest of the kings of the earth.**  
28 My steadfast love I will keep for him forever,  
    and my covenant will stand firm for him.  
29 I will establish his offspring forever  
    and his throne as the days of the heavens ...

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“Beasley-Murray (1978: 56) notes an interesting possibility centering on the three stages of Jesus' ministry: in his life he was a ... faithful witness; in his resurrection he became ... firstborn from the dead; and with his parousia he will become ... ruler of the kings of the earth. (Osborne, 62)

- The One who **loves** us ...
  
- The One who **set us free** at the cost of His blood ...

This is the only place in the NT where the exact phrase “freed us from our sins” occurs. This is spoken in conjunction with Christ appointing us as a kingdom of priests. As the beloved of Christ, we are set free – all of us who belong to Him – so that we may all function as “kingly priests” in the here and now AND ALSO in His Kingdom when it comes in full power and glory.

“While the sins of the enemies of God continue to pile up in readiness for divine judgment, the sins of those who have turned to God have already been “loosed” by the “blood” of Christ. (Osborne, 64)

- The One who **appointed** us as a Kingdom, Priests ...

Anticipates Revelation 22:3–5 “And there will no longer be any curse, and the throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city. His servants will worship him, 22:4 and they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 22:5 Night will be no more, and they will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will shine on them, and **they will reign forever and ever.**

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#### IN THE BACKGROUND 04: *A Kingdom of Priests*

**Exodus 19:5-6** Now therefore, if you (Israel) will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me **a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.** These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.

**1 Peter 2:4-5** As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

“In A.D. 90, shortly before this work was written, the Roman Empire received a new name—*Imperium Aeternum*, the eternal empire—and the Emperor was meant to be the eternal king, as the court poet Statius suggested to Domitian. But John’s theology is that Jesus alone is King of Kings, and his followers are not slaves but rather kings and priests.” (Witherington, 76-77)

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- The Doxology:  
to Him be glory and power forever and ever!

“[*forever and ever*] the Greek takes its greatest term for time, the eon, pluralizes this, then multiplies it by its own plural...”  
(Lenski, *Revelation*, 48)

**Revelation 1:7** Look! He is coming with the clouds,  
and every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him,  
and all the tribes on the earth will mourn because of him.  
This will certainly come to pass! Amen.

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**IN THE BACKGROUND 05:** *The Son of Man*

**Daniel 7:13-14** 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. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

**Zechariah 12:9-12** And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. 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.

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- One of the key arguments for the authorship of John the Apostle is found in the this allusion to Zechariah; Mounce comments:

“The prophecy of Zech 12:10 regarding Jerusalem looking on the one they have pierced is quoted in both Rev 1:7 and John 19:37 using the same Greek verb (*ekkenteō* [to pierce] ), which in turn is not used by the LXX and is found nowhere else in the NT. At the close of a substantive discussion of the vocabulary, grammar, and style of the Apocalypse, Swete concludes that the evidence “creates a strong presumption of affinity between the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse.” (Mounce, 14)

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### 1.3 The Lord declares His identity (1:8)

**Revelation 1:8** “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God—the one who is, and who was, and who is coming—the All-Powerful!

- The Alpha and Omega
- The Lord God
- The One who is, was and is coming

- The All-Powerful

“The God who transcends time guides the entire course of history because he stands as sovereign over its beginning and its end. (Beale, 199)

“Of the three uses of this title in Revelation, two refer to God (1:8; 21:6) and one to Christ (22:13, though see 1:17, where Jesus is “the first and the last”). From the start the unity of the Father and the Son is stressed. Here God is “the Alpha and the Omega” and Jesus is “the first and the last” (1:17). In 21:6 God is “Alpha and Omega,” and in 22:13 Jesus is “Alpha and Omega” (Osborne, 71)

#### 1.4 John is commissioned to write what he sees (1:9-11).

**Revelation 1:9** I, John, your brother and the one who shares with you in the persecution [tribulation/suffering], kingdom, and endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony about Jesus. 1:10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day when I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, 1:11 saying: “Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches—to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.”

- John’s “commissioning” shares features similar to Isaiah’s (Chpt 6), Jeremiah (Chpt 1), and Ezekiel (Chpts 1-3)
- John, your brother, the one who shares ...
- the **persecution** (*tribulation*) that is “in Jesus”,

the word that is translated “persecution” here is the same term often translated as “tribulation” or “suffering.” Jesus teaches that this “tribulation” is part of being His follower (see Matthew 24:9). Paul reminds the church that it must pass through many “tribulations” before we enter the Kingdom (see Acts 14:22). This is an important concept in the NT and should be studied:

Matt 13:21; 24:9, 21, 29; Mark 4:17; 13:19, 24; John 16:21, 33; Acts 7:10–11; 11:19; 14:22; 20:23; Rom 2:9; 5:3; 8:35; 12:12; 1 Cor 7:28; 2 Cor 1:4, 8; 2:4; 4:17; 6:4; 7:4; 8:2, 13; Eph 3:13; Phil 1:17; 4:14; Col 1:24; 1 Th 1:6; 3:3, 7; 2 Th 1:4, 6; Heb 10:33; James 1:27; Rev 1:9; 2:9–10, 22; 7:14

- **the kingdom** that is “in Jesus”,
- and the **endurance** that is “in Jesus”,
- WAS on the island called **Patmos** (c. AD 95)

“Rome especially used two groups of islands in the Aegean Sea near Asia Minor to detain political prisoners, namely, the Cyclades and the Sporades; Patmos was in the Sporades, and the older Pliny can be understood as naming this a place of exile.<sup>9</sup> The island was not deserted; it included a Greek gymnasium and a temple and cult of Artemis (though it would not have been as pervasive as the veneration of Artemis in nearby Ephesus).<sup>10</sup> Since John would be permitted visitors, the churches of Asia would undoubtedly send him messengers; Patmos was only forty to fifty miles southwest of Ephesus. (Keener, 83)

“Thus John would have lived a fairly normal life as an exile on that island. He was likely there only a short time and was allowed to go to

Ephesus in a general amnesty for exiles by the emperor Nerva in A.D. 96 after Domitian died. (Osborne, 81)

- Because of the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus
- In the Spirit  
(used also in 4:2, 17:3 and 21:10) seems to indicate that John experiences an “ecstatic” vision. See Peter at Joppa in Acts 10:10; 11:5 and Paul in Acts 22:17 and 2 Corinthians 12:2-4)

This is probably parallel to the Spirit falling on prophets like in Ezekiel 3:12ff. and not like the NT discussions of being “filled” with the Spirit. Both Isaiah and Ezekiel are given a vision of God in their ministries.

- on the Lord’s day

Most likely a reference to Sunday as the first day of the week set aside for worship. During this time, the emperors would set aside specific days as the “emperor’s day” for worship in the imperial cult, etc.

- Write in a book (*biblion*) what you see ...

1.5 John has a vision of the Glorious Christ (1:12-20).

**John 1:14** “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

“Everywhere and always we have to do with the ‘gospel of Jesus Christ.’ Without this controlling center, the Bible is a mere

encyclopedia of religion with no more plot than a telephone directory.” (Peterson, 27)

**Revelation 1:12** I turned to see whose voice was speaking to me, and when I did so, I saw seven golden lampstands, 1:13 and in the midst of the lampstands was **one like a son of man**. He was dressed in a robe extending down to his feet and he wore a wide golden belt around his chest. 1:14 His head and hair were as white as wool, even as white as snow, and his eyes were like a fiery flame. 1:15 His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 1:16 He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp double-edged sword extended out of his mouth. His face shone like the sun shining at full strength.

- Seven Golden Lampstands:  
(*Jesus interprets these symbols at the end of this vision*)

- **Jesus is presented in this vision as Prophet, King and Priest**

In 1:1 He is the recipient and revealer of God’s word,

In 1:5 He is the Ruler of the kings of the Earth,

In 1:13 He is dressed as a Kingly priest.

- In the Midst ...
- One like the Son of Man: Daniel 7:13f

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**IN THE BACKGROUND 06:** *One Like a Son of Man*

**Daniel 7:9** “I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, Its wheels were a burning fire.

**Daniel 10:4–10** On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris) 10:5 I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. 10:6 His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude. 10:7 And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves. 10:8 So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me. My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. 10:9 Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground. 10:10 And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. (ESV)

“Jesus is being identified with this human and yet more-than-human figure, who is seen in Daniel as a representative of God’s people to God, and of God to God’s people. While in Daniel the son of man is distinguished from the Ancient of Days, here the son of man is described as if he were the Ancient of Days.” (Witherington, 81)

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- A robe extending to His feet, A golden belt around His chest...

“In short, the first description depicts Christ as an exalted, dignified figure. The day laborer wore the sash around the waist, in order to tuck in a tunic for work. The aristocrat wore it around the chest, as here, to indicate high rank.” (Osborne, 89)

- His head and hair were white as wool ...
- His eyes were like a fiery flame ...
- His feet were like polished/burnished bronze ...  
*It is interesting to note that the feet of the Cherubim of Ezekiel 1:7 gleam as burnished bronze.*

“Thus the imagery of “gleaming” or “burnished” metal pictures the molten state, with the metal glowing in all its purity (so R. Charles, Swete, Beckwith, Thomas). Since feet in the ancient world portrayed the direction of one’s life, the image here depicts Christ’s life in both its strength or stability and its absolute purity. (Osborne, 91)

- His voice was like the roar of many waters ...
- Holding Seven Stars
- The Sharp Double Edged Sword  
this Sword clearly calls to mind Hebrews characterization of the Word of God: Hebrews 4:12-13 “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

But Isaiah’s description of the Messiah/Servant is also in the background here: Isaiah 11:4 “...and He shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.” Also Isaiah 49:2, part of the 2nd Servant Song: “**He made my mouth like a sharp sword**; in the

shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow;  
in his quiver he hid me away.”

- His Face, Shining like the Sun

**Revelation 1:17**      When I saw him I fell down at his feet as though I were dead, but he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid! I am the first and the last, 1:18 and the one who lives! I was dead, but look, now I am alive—forever and ever—and I hold the keys of death and of Hades!

- John’s response
  - the first and last,
  - once dead, but now alive forever!
  - holding the keys of death and hades
- » Witherington and others have made the point that in this vision of Jesus (as in other presentations of Him in the New Testament), He stands as the reality that is counterfeited in Greco-Roman and other pagan mythology:

<p>Greek: <b>Hecate</b> the key keeper to the gates of Hades <i>“Beginning and end are you and you alone rule all. For all things are from you, and in you do all things, Eternal One, come to their end.”</i></p>	<p>Greek: <b>Heracles</b> (Hercules) was able on a couple of occasions to bring up people from the place of the dead.</p>	<p>Egyptian: <b>Anubis</b> is said to hold the keys to Hades</p>
<p>(Adapted from Witherington, 83)</p>		

**Revelation 1:19** Therefore write what you saw, what is, and what will be **after these things**.

- Some see this verse as simple outline for the whole book:  
 What you saw - Chpt 1  
 What is - Chpts 2—3  
 What will be - Chpts 4—22

**Revelation 1:20** The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”

- The mystery...

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**IN THE BACKGROUND 07:** *The Vision of Zechariah 4*

Zechariah 4:2-6 seems to be in the background of several of John’s visions. In the Zechariah context, the lamps in the context of the Temple represent a restored, faithful Israel in some sense. In the context of John’s vision and in Jesus’ interpretation, the Lampstands of Revelation refer to churches.

**Zechariah 4:2, 10** He said to me, “What do you see?” And I said, “I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it; ... 10 But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel—these are the eyes of the LORD which range to and fro throughout the earth.”

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- The Identity of the Stars and the Lampstands:

This vision stands in distinction to the Jewish Menorah of one

lamp with seven stems patterned after the instructions given to Moses in Exodus 25:31-37. *Here these are seven individual lampstands that represent seven churches, or assemblies.*

The figure of “light giving” in reference to the churches probably indicates that these assemblies provide “illumination” in a sin-darkened world as they reflect the glory of the Creator in their unity and love.

Daniel 12:3 And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Philippians 2:14–15 Do everything without grumbling and arguing, 2:15 so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, **among whom you shine like stars in the world.**

## (9) The Christology of Revelation

As the revelation of (*from and about*) Jesus Christ, the content of Revelation is focused upon Jesus and His return at the end of this present evil age. Thus, Christology is at the heart of Revelation.

“It is possible that John... conceives of Heaven as the Christian’s assembly hall where the divine decrees would be read out and justice would finally be done by Christ, who is truly ‘our Lord and our God,’ in contradistinction to the Emperor Domitian. If so, his high Christology... is hardly just a religious statement; it is a political one as well. This explains why Christians are warned to expect stern reprisals for their allegiance to a very different Lord than Caesar. Their exclusive faith would be seen as dangerous and unpatriotic, for Christians would not participate in the emperor cult.”  
(Witherington, 24)

(9.1) Jesus is revealed as **the Sovereign God, the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last.** (1:8, 21:6, 22:13)

“... [this title] conveys the idea that the person in question ‘precedes and originates all things, as their Creator, and he will bring all things to their eschatological fulfillment. The titles cannot mean anything else when they are used of Christ... [this is} a way of stating unambiguously that Jesus belongs to the fullness of the eternal being of God, this surpasses anything in the [rest of the] New Testament’ (Witherington, 29)

(9.2) Jesus is revealed as **the God of the Hebrew Scriptures**

**Isaiah 44:6\***

Thus says the LORD,  
the King of Israel and his Redeemer,  
the LORD of armies:

“I am the first and I am the last;  
there is no God other than Me!”

**Isaiah 48:12-13** “Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am he; I am the first, and I am the last. 13 My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand forth together. (ESV)

(9.3) Jesus is revealed as **the all-powerful Lamb!** (5)

(9.4) Jesus is revealed as **the Redemptive Judge.** (1:7, 5:1ff, 19:17ff)

(9.5) Jesus is revealed as **the Savior of His people.** (7:17)

(9.6) Jesus is revealed as truly **worthy of worship.** (5:13, 22:3)

(9.7) Jesus is revealed as **the Promised Messiah, the Ruler of Creation.** (3:7, 5:5, 17:14)