

Psalm 89 is a really important Psalm.

Psalm 89 comes right at the end of Book 3 of the Psalms –
the section of the Psalter that focuses on the Exile
and the destruction of Jerusalem –
and the end of the house of David.

Psalm 89 starts by reminding the LORD of his promises to the House of David:
“I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant:
I will establish your offspring forever,
and build your throne for all generations.” (v3-4)

And then Psalm 89 recounts the faithfulness of God.

God is faithful.

God is mighty.

God is just (v5-18)

And in verses 19-37 the Psalmist details the promise to David –

“I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth” –
a line that is adapted in Revelation 1 to speak of Jesus.

And in verses 30-33 we hear the *warning* that God will discipline the house of David
if they sin.

But then in verse 38, there is a dramatic turn:

“But now you have cast off and rejected; you are full of wrath against your anointed.
You have renounced the covenant with your servant...”

And Psalm 89 concludes asking *how long, O LORD?*

*Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire?...
LORD, where is your steadfast love of old,
which by your faithfulness you swore to David?...*

Psalm 89 sets up the *resurrection*.

Psalm 89 provides us with a clear backdrop of why Easter Sunday is so necessary –
and so important!

Sing Psalm 89 – stanzas 1-5, read stanza 6-9, sing 10-13

Psalm 89 asks the question: will God be faithful to his promises?

Revelation 1 answers: YES!!!

Read Revelation 1

Introduction: “Blessed Is the One Who Reads...and Those Who Hear, and Who Keep What Is Written in It” (v1-3)

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants^[a] the things that

must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,² who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.³ Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

What is Revelation about?

In a nutshell:

God rules history and will bring it to consummation in Jesus Christ

In the book of Daniel,

Daniel was told what would happen “in the latter days.”

But John says that these are things that must *soon take place*.

What was the latter days for Daniel is “soon” for John.

This is because Jesus is risen from the dead and seated at the right hand of God!

From the moment that Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father,
all of the events in the book of Revelation became “soon.”

Likewise

Daniel is told to seal up the book (Dan 12:4);
but John is told NOT to seal his (22:10) –
his revelation is immediately to be read, heard, and practiced.

And there are two blessings here at the beginning:

First, there is a blessing on the *one* who reads this aloud.

Second, is the blessing on those who hear – *and who keep* what is written in it.

These two blessing cannot be separated.

The point is that there is a blessing upon the public reading of the book of Revelation –
which is referring to the practice of reading this book in public worship.

The one who reads it to the congregation is blessed.

And those who hear it – and do it – are blessed

If you hear, but you ignore it – then you are *not blessed*.

Some of you may be fearful when you hear this –
you may think – but Revelation is so difficult to understand –
how can I be sure that I am keeping it properly?!

There are times when Revelation can seem like a puzzling book!

But Revelation is not a *puzzle book*.

It is not a puzzle to be solved!

Revelation is not a puzzle book, rather, it is a *picture book*.

Look at the pictures!

Vern Poythress points out that Revelation is perhaps most akin to a comic book –
vivid pictures – striking characters – all in exaggerated form –
and so it may well be that the people who understand Revelation best
are those who are into comic books!!

And if you want to know how to understand the pictures –
read your Bible!

The pictures in the book of Revelation are all rooted in the Old Testament –
and woven together with the themes used throughout the NT as well.

So let's start right here in the first 8 verses!

1. Understanding the Picture: The Holy Trinity (v4-5a)

⁴*John to the seven churches that are in Asia:*

It is worth pointing out that Revelation is actually *the epistle of John*
to the seven churches that are in Asia.

While most of the book will contain the vision that John saw –
the book begins as a letter.

And while he writes “to the seven churches” that are in Asia –
the choice of the number 7 is not accidental.

The number 7 expresses fullness or completeness –
and so by writing to 7 churches, John is writing to *all* the churches in the world!

And John starts by speaking of the Triune God:

*Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come,
and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,
⁵and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead,
and the ruler of kings on earth.*

We will see this picture unfolded more clearly in chapters 4-5 –
but here we see God – Father, Spirit, and Son.

We call this a Trinitarian greeting

because John greets us with grace and peace *from* the Father, the Spirit, and the Son,
and yet there is but *one* Lord God Almighty (verse 8).

Who is the Alpha and the Omega?

In verse 8 it is plainly the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come.

But in Rev. 22:13, after telling us that he is coming soon, Jesus says

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last,
the beginning and the end.”

Jesus is one with the Father.

But this is equally clear in the opening greeting here in verses 4-8,
because God never shares his glory with some lesser being!

So let's take a look at how John constructs his trinitarian greeting:

a. The One Who Is and Who Was and Who Is to Come – Exodus 3:14 (v4)
Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come,

This language is drawn from Exodus 3:14,
where God revealed himself to Moses as “I Am” –
which could be translated either “I am who I am”
or “I will be who I will be.”

Our God is the God who is – and who was – and who is to come.

In other words, he is utterly and entirely faithful.
Even when everything else and everyone else fails you –
God will be true to his word.
That doesn't mean that he will do what *you want!*
It means that he will do what *he* has promised!

Consider the Exodus!

When God appeared to Moses at the burning bush,
Israel had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years.
400 years.

When Moses showed up and told Israel that God was going to set them free –
how do you suppose they responded?!?
“Yay – let's go!!” ??

Your grandmother had just died last month.
She had always trusted God.
But she died – never having seen God's promised redemption!

She trusted God – where did it get her?

Isn't that how we tend to think?
We see our own situation – we see the people immediately around us.
We don't see the big picture!

The book of Revelation was given to us so that we might see the big picture!!

We heard some of that as we sang Psalm 89.
Will God be faithful?
Will he do what he has promised?
The God of the Exodus – as we sang in Psalm 89 – is also the God of David –
and he is faithful to his promises and he brings to pass all that he has said.

Verse 4 then speaks of the greeting that comes from the “seven spirits who are before God’s throne”

b. The Sevenfold Spirit – Isaiah 11:1-2 (v4)
and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,

In Zechariah 4, the prophet sees a lampstand with seven lamps –
which Revelation 4:5 interprets as the Spirit of God
(Rev 4:5 – “before the throne were burning seven torches of fire,
which are the seven spirits of God” –
or perhaps better, the “sevenfold spirit of God.”)

Why would Revelation (or Zechariah) speak of the “sevenfold spirit”?

Because of Isaiah 11:1-2 –

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.”

In Isaiah 11 the Spirit that is said to be upon the Messiah
is a sevenfold Spirit.

He is plainly *one Spirit* – but he is a Spirit that has seven characteristics –
because 7 is the number of completeness.

The *whole* Spirit of God is given to the Messiah.

And Isaiah 11 says that when this sevenfold Spirit is poured out on the Messiah,
then the Messiah will bring justice and righteousness to all the earth –

“he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.” (Is 11:4).

And that is where our greeting turns in verse 5:

c. Jesus Christ: Witness (Is 19:20, 55:4), Firstborn (Ex 4:22-23), and Ruler (Ps 89:27) (v5a)

⁵ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

Usually in the NT, the order moves from the Father to the Son to the Spirit.

Here the Spirit is named second because John wants to focus on Christ and his work –
so he puts the Son last.

Jesus Christ is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

All three of these terms are drawn from Psalm 89 –
showing how important Psalm 89 is in understanding who Jesus is!

When John calls Jesus the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead,
and the ruler of kings on earth,
he is saying that Jesus is the answer to the question of Psalm 89!

Is God going to remember his covenant with David?
John says that Jesus is the Son of David – the Messiah – the Christ!
And Jesus is the faithful witness.
In Psalm 89, the throne of the Son of David
is, like the moon, a faithful witness in the skies.

Jesus is also the firstborn of the dead.
In Psalm 89 the Son of David is the “firstborn.”
This language was drawn from Ex 4:22-23,
where God says to Pharaoh –
“Israel is my son, my firstborn –
let my son go, that he may serve me.”
Israel was God’s firstborn.
But Israel rebelled.
Israel failed to do and to be
all that God called his firstborn to do and to be.
And so God chose the Son of David to be the one
who would succeed where Israel had failed!
Jesus is the firstborn –
and therefore he is the firstborn from the dead!

Now it’s true that Jesus is the Son of God from all eternity.
But *that* sonship – by itself – is not very useful to us!
It is only when the eternal Son of God joined himself to our humanity –
when the eternal Son became the incarnate Son –
when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us –
only then could he become the *firstborn* among many brothers.

Because only through the *death* of God’s firstborn
could salvation come to his people.
But Jesus is not just the firstborn.
He is the firstborn *of the dead* –
he is the one who brings the new creation
in his resurrection from the dead –
thereby bringing *many sons to glory*.

And therefore Jesus is also the ruler of the kings of the earth.
“The kings of the earth” is a phrase that refers to *hostile kings*.
Jesus is not only Lord and King of the Church.
He is the ruler of the kings of the earth!
There is not a single square inch in all of creation

over which our Lord Jesus does not say,
“This is MINE”!

When you are tempted to think that the powers of this age are too strong,
when you are tempted to think that “our culture” is doomed...
remember the resurrection!
Remember Easter!

Where all seemed cold and lifeless –
there blooms the tree of life!
And that is ever the way of the resurrection!

If you had been there on Good Friday – you would have said,
“we had hoped that he was the one who would restore Israel!”
At best! You would have said that!!
If we are honest with ourselves we might well have been among the crowd
calling “crucify him, crucify him!”

But God didn’t send an angel from heaven to rescue Jesus at the last minute!
The rescue came *after* it was too late!

This is the point that J. R. R. Tolkien makes in the *Return of the King*.
Frodo failed.
At the end – standing at the Crack of Doom – Frodo failed.
He claimed the ring as his own.
Frodo did not have the strength to conquer evil.
Only a divine power working in ways beyond human comprehension
could so order all things that life would arise out of death!

But isn’t that *your story* as well?
You failed.
You were cold – hard – dead.

You may think – “So what?” “Why keep trying?” “There’s no life here!”
True.
But precisely in the midst of cold, hard, death –
God speaks.
God acts.
God raises the dead!!

Your hope is not that you will never die.
Your hope is in the God who raises the dead!

And having called us to behold the Triune God – Father, Spirit, Son –
John then turns his focus to the Son in particular in his doxology in verses 5-6

2. Seeing Jesus (v5b-7)

a. To Him Who Loves Us and Has Freed Us from Our Sins by His Blood – Is 53 (v5b)

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

We have been *freed* from our sins by the blood of Christ –
this reminds us of how God set Israel free from Egypt –
when he made *them* a kingdom of priests (Ex 19:5-6).

God delivered his firstborn son from Egypt through the death of the Passover Lamb.
And now Jesus Christ, the firstborn Son of God, has freed *us* from our sins by his own blood.

b. Made Us a Kingdom and Priests – Exodus 19:5-6 (v6a)

⁶and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father,

We sometimes think that the idea of the priesthood of all believers is a NT idea –
but before it was a NT idea, it was first an OT idea!

In Exodus 19, God said that he brought Israel to himself on eagles' wings –
and he told them:
“you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (19:6)

What does it mean to be a “kingdom of priests”?

Priests have access to the presence of God –
and then mediate the blessings of God to others.

So for Israel being a kingdom of priests meant that they had access to the presence of God
and were called to mediate the blessings of God to the nations.

But as the prophets repeatedly point out –
Israel failed in that calling!

They turned away from the LORD – turned to other gods –
and were sent into exile – away from the presence of the LORD!

And that's why Jesus had to be a kingly priest – in order to succeed where Israel failed!

He was a priest as he laid down his life – suffered and died for us,
in order that he might bring us to God!

And as king, he triumphed over the powers of sin, death, and the devil –
through his own death on the cross!

And so for us to be a “kingdom, priests to his God and Father”
means that we have access into the presence of God –
God welcomes *you* to himself – *not because you're so great!* –
but because Jesus died for *you*.

Jesus has brought *you* to himself!

And so now *WE* are called to be faithful witnesses – like him.

The word for “witness” is *martus* –
from which we get our word “martyr.”

We are to bear witness to Jesus – even unto death!

In order that we might also share in his resurrection –
that he might be the firstborn among many brothers!

c. Glory and Dominion to the One Who Comes on the Clouds – Dan 7:13-14 (v6b-7a)

to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

There is glory!

There is dominion – lordship!

Forever and ever!

This language is drawn from Daniel 7 –

which spoke of the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven –
coming to the Ancient of Days –
“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.” (7:14)

So the glory and the dominion belong to Jesus forever!

d. Every Eye Will See Him – Even Those Who Pierced Him – Zech 12:10 (v7b)

⁷Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail^{b/} on account of him. Even so. Amen.

Verse 7 combines two different passages from the OT.

Daniel 7:13 – “behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man”
and Zechariah 12:10 – “when they shall 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.”

John connects these two passages in an interesting way.

In Daniel, the Son of Man is coming on the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days.

In Zechariah it is Jerusalem weeping –
the house of David weeping –
the Levites weeping –
repenting of their sin and returning to the LORD.

John is saying that *all the tribes of the earth* have now been joined to Israel –
and thus Zechariah 12 now applies to *all nations*.

Every eye will see him – even those who pierced him –

Obviously, there were only a few people who were directly responsible
for piercing Jesus –

but *all of us* are responsible for sending him to the cross.
All the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him!

Do you grieve over your sin?
Do you wail over your sin that sent Jesus to the cross?!

Or do you act as though your sin is no big deal?!

If you act as though your sin is no big deal –
then Jesus will *come for you* in a way and a time that you do not expect!

So what does it mean “behold, he is coming with the clouds”?

Some take this to refer to his second coming –
but in Daniel 7, the “coming of the Son of Man”
is about the ascension of Christ to the right hand of God.

As we’ll see throughout Revelation –
the *coming* of Christ refers to his coming in judgment –
which can happen many times in history.

One obvious example is when Jesus “came” in judgment against Jerusalem
in AD 70.

But also just glance over at chapter 2, verse 5 –
“repent, and do the works you did at first.
If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand.”

Because Christ is King, he has the authority to *come* in blessing and in judgment.

Churches that refuse to take sin seriously will find that Jesus comes in judgment against them!

Conclusion: The Alpha and the Omega – Is 41:4, 43:10, 44:6 (v8)

Verse 8 then concludes this opening greeting with a word from the Lord God himself:

⁸ “*I am the Alpha and the Omega,*” says the Lord God, “*who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.*”

In verse 4, we hear that the Father is the one “who is and who was and who is to come.”
Now the Lord God says this about himself.

I am the Alpha and the Omega.

This language is borrowed from Isaiah (“the first and the last”).
“The God who transcends time guides the entire course of history
because he stands as sovereign over its beginning and its end.” (Beale, 199)

God is the Almighty – the ruler of all things.

You have *heard* the opening words of this prophecy.

Blessed are you who hear – and who keep – what is written in it,
for the time is near.

How do you keep what is written?

Repent – wail and mourn over your sin – because *you pierced him*.

And believe the gospel – believe the good news of Jesus Christ,
the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

Prayer

Grant, Almighty God, that as you have been pleased to adopt us once for all as your people for this end, that we might be ingrafted into the body of your Son, and be made conformable to our Head,--O grant that through our whole life we may strive to seal in our hearts the faith of our election, that we may be the more stimulated to give to you true obedience, and that your glory may also be made known through us; and those others also whom you have chosen together with us, may we labor to bring them to a knowledge of the truth, that we may with one accord celebrate you as the Author of our salvation, and so ascribe to you the glory of your goodness, that having cast away and renounced all confidence in our own virtue, we may be led to Christ alone as the fountain of your election, in whom also is set before us the certainty of our salvation through your gospel, until we shall at length be gathered with Him into that eternal glory which He has procured for us by His own blood. Amen.
(from John Calvin)