

Revelation 19:1-10

“John Rebuked for Worshipping a Created Being”

“After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS [Psalm 19:9; 119:137]; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER’ [Deuteronomy 32:43; 2 Kings 9:7; Psalm 79:10]. And a second time they said, ‘Hallelujah! HER SMOKE RISES UP FOREVER AND EVER’ [Isaiah 34:10]. And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, ‘Amen. Hallelujah!’ And a voice came from the throne, saying, ‘Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.’ Then I heard *something* like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.’ It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, ‘Write, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”’ And he said to me, ‘These are true words of God.’ Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Yeshua; worship God. For the testimony of Yeshua is the spirit of prophecy.’”

Following the defeat of Babylon detailed in Revelation chs. 17 and 18, there is great rejoicing witnessed before the throne in Heaven, where God the Father is venerated (Revelation 19:1-3). Revelation 19:4 employs both the verbs *piptō* (πίπτω) or “to fall,” and *proskuneō* (προσκυνέω) or “to worship,” in recording the action directed by the twenty-four elders and four living creatures: *kai epesan hoi presbuteroi hoi eikosi tessares kai ta tessares kai ta tessara zōa kai prosekunēsan tō Theō tō kathēmenō epi tō thronō* (καὶ ἔπεσαν οἱ πρεσβύτεροι οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες καὶ τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα καὶ προσεκύνησαν τῷ θεῷ τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ), “and fell [down] the elders – twenty-four and the four living beings and worshiped – God – sitting on the throne” (Brown and Comfort).⁷⁰ The praise issued to God on the throne is rightly regarded to be worship (Revelation 19:5-6).

Further in what is recorded, the Apostle John is seen issuing veneration to the Heavenly messenger or angel, who has been relaying the information to him of the apocalypse. Revelation 19:10 also employs both the verbs *piptō* and *proskuneō*: *kai epesa emprosthen tōn podōn autou proskunēsai autō* (καὶ ἔπεσα ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ προσεκύνησαι αὐτῷ), “and I fell before the feet of him to worship him” (Brown and Comfort).⁷¹ But, in attempting to fall down and worship this figure, John is immediately rebuked, and instead told to worship God (*tō Theō proskunēson*, τῷ θεῷ προσκύνησον).

While the Apostle John must have initially thought that the figure speaking to him was Divine—hence the urge to bow down in worship—it is made clear that this messenger is a created being, and hence he refuses worship. As John is rebuked, “Don’t do that! I’m a servant just like you and your brothers and sisters who hold firmly to the witness of Jesus. Worship God!” (Revelation 19:10, Common English Bible). Angels are, to a degree, to be regarded in the company of servants of God, like human beings are, and as such may be considered our “comrades” (NRSV). The Jewish philosopher Philo, recognizing the dignity of angels, still had to warn that angels were not to be worshipped: “Let us, therefore, reject all such impious dishonesty, and not worship those who are our brothers by nature, even though they may have

⁷⁰ Brown and Comfort, 902.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 903.

received a purer and more immortal essence than ourselves" (*Decalogue* 64).⁷² Witherington interjects that the rebuke of John, attempting to worship the messenger or angel, would have been important, given the presence of some form of angel worship in Asia Minor (cf. Colossians 2:18):

"No one and nothing other than God should be worshiped, but John himself makes the same mistake many have made. The angel had given the prophet the word of God, but the messenger must not be mistaken for the sender of the message. Thus John is exhorted not to worship the angel. The angel is but John's fellow servant of God, and the brother of those having the witness of Christ. This verse may reflect John's awareness that there was a problem in Asia, even among syncretistic Jews, with the worship of angels (though Col. 2:18 may mean worship with rather than of angels)."⁷³

This is not the first time in the Scriptures where veneration as borderline worship, or outright worship, has been witnessed of the created being—and subsequently refused. Joseph refused the veneration of his brothers in Egypt (Genesis 50:19). Peter refused worship from the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:25-26). Barnabas and Paul were aghast at the Lystrans thinking that they were Zeus and Hermes (Acts 14:11-15). What is most important about all of these scenes, is that when worship is being issued to a created supernatural being or another human being, that it is refused. There are scores of scenes in the Apostolic Scriptures where worship is issued to Yeshua the Messiah, and it is not refused.

Revelation 19:11-16

"King of Kings and Lord of Lords"

"And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, 'KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.'"

When the Messiah returns to Planet Earth, a scene of intense judgment will be witnessed (Revelation 19:11-15). The Messiah possesses an extreme distinction as He arrives and issues Divine vindication upon His enemies. It is frequently concluded that the description of the Messiah witnessed here is broadly taken from the description of God seen previously in Isaiah 63:1-4:

"Who is this who comes from Edom, with garments of glowing colors from Bozrah, this One who is majestic in His apparel, marching in the greatness of His strength? 'It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.' Why is Your apparel red, and Your garments like the one who treads in the wine press? I have trodden the wine trough alone, and from the peoples there was no man with Me. I also trod them in My anger and trampled them in My wrath; and their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments, and I stained all My raiment. For the day of vengeance was in My heart, and My year of redemption has come."

Of significance is how Revelation 19:16 communicates, "On His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, 'King of kings, and Lord of lords'" (TLV), *Basileus basileōn kai kurios kuriōn*

⁷² *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, 523.

⁷³ Witherington, *Revelation*, 233.