

I AM THE ALPHA AND OMEGA (Rev 1.8)

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Rev 1.8: **I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty** (NRSV; NIV)

Other versions

- REB: I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is, who was, and who is to come, the sovereign Lord of all
- GNB: I am the first and the last, says the Lord God Almighty, who is, who was, and who is to come
- *The Message*: The Master declares, 'I'm A to Z. I am THE GOD WHO IS, THE GOD WHO WAS, AND THE GOD ABOUT TO ARRIVE. I'm the Sovereign-Strong'

THE ALL-ENCOMPASSING GOD

One of my first literary efforts was to write an article for a magazine entitled *From B to Y*. It didn't claim to have the last word on the subject, but rather to have almost the last word. If you wanted to know about youth work, then almost everything – but not quite everything – you wanted to know was contained in the magazine. But God is not the B-Y; he is the A – Z. He is all encompassing – nothing is beyond his knowledge, nothing is beyond his power, nothing is beyond his love.

Notice that it is God who says: “**I am the Alpha & the Omega**” – “the A and the Z”. The Jews used to talk of keeping the law ‘*from ‘aleph to tau*’ (the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet): i.e. to keep the law in its entirety – the first commandment and the last commandment, and everything in-between.

Significantly God the Father speaks on only two occasions in the book of Revelation (1.18; 21.5-8). In both places God says ‘**I am the Alpha and Omega**’, adding ‘**the Beginning and the End**’ in 21.6.

In these contexts, Jesus also defines himself as ‘**the first and the last**’ (1.17) and as “**the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end**” in 22.13. In other words here the characteristics of God Almighty are assigned to Jesus the Lamb. The Father and the Son are separate entities within the Holy Trinity – and yet they have much in common.

So what we do we learn here from this ‘all-encompassing’ God?

THE GOD OF TIME

In the first place, God the Father – as also God the Son – is eternal in nature. God is the Eternal One. When he says “I am the Alpha and Omega”, he is in effect saying: ‘As I was there at the beginning of time, so I shall be there at the end of time – and all the time in-between’.

This emphasis on the eternal nature is highlighted in the phrase “**who is and who was and who is to come**”, an expression which occurs not only here but in Rev; 1.4 and 4.8

The designation of God here is a deliberate play on the divine name found in Ex 3.14 where God reveals himself to Moses as “I am who I am” (or perhaps “I will be who I will be) Fee: *“Whatever else is true about God, he is the Eternal One, always the ‘I am’; so John begins with the present tense, and then backward and forward to stress God’s eternal nature”*. Fee also writes: *“Whatever human language could possibly express regarding God and all reality, the God who is speaking to John... is the eternal, all-embracing God”*. GK Beale adds another interesting insight: *“The middle element [who is] is actually put first, out of order, to highlight for the readers that God is present with them, ruling over all the circumstances in which they find themselves”*.

THE LORD OF TIME

Secondly, John goes on to give a twist to the divine name which no Jew had apparently thought of, and which no Greek was capable of imagining. Instead of affirming God just in terms of time, he speaks of God as the God who will act. He is the God who will come in grace in power, in grace to take his people to himself, in power to judge the living and the dead. In the words of Rev 1.7: **“Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail”**.

He is not just the God of time, but also the Lord of time. For him to say, **“I am and the Alpha and Omega”** is in effect to say ‘I am the beginning of history and the end of history and of all the time that lies between. God is the sovereign Lord of all time and of all ages. The God who set the world in motion at the beginning of time will surely at the end of time bring all things to a conclusion: right and not just right will triumph.

This is brought out by the expression: **“The Lord God... the Almighty”**. The underlying Greek word is *‘Pantocrator’* – the ‘All Powerful One’. In the LXX this term *‘Pantocrator’* is the standard translation for the Hebrew ‘the Lord God of hosts’. Apart from one Scripture quotation in 2 Cor 6.18, John is the only NT writer to use this term of God. In fact he uses the term nine times: 1.8; 4.8; 11.17; 15.3; 16.7,14; 19.6, 15; 21.22).

For John God the Almighty is very much the one on throne. John for instance writes in Rev 4: **“I looked, and there in heave a door stood open (4.1)... There in heaven stood a throne with one seated on the throne” (4.2)**. At the time John was writing Emperor Domitian was on the throne, but John realised that his tin-pot throne was overshadowed by a greater throne. God – and not Domitian – would have the final say. Had John known the song, he too would have joined in singing *‘Our God reigns, Our God reigns’*. Not Domitian, not Satan, but God reigns. God is the Almighty, the All-Powerful One. He, not Caesar, is the Lord of time and history. In the words of Gordon Fee: *“It is not difficult to see in this emphasis a Christian response to the Empire, whose emperors and armies had caused her to regard herself in term of invincibility”*.

THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Thirdly, I believe we can go on to say that the God of whom John speaks here is also the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. True, this is not made explicit here. Indeed, according to one recent commentator “Unlike Paul, John accents God’s power and majesty so strongly that he never calls God ‘our Father’, only the Father of Jesus (see 1.6...). To know God as Father is at most a promise in the book of Revelation, even for victorious Christians (see 21.7), not a present reality.” (J. Ramsey Michaels).

However, there is a link between God as ‘Alpha and Omega’ and as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is a famous word square, discovered in the ruins of Pompeii (destroyed in AD 76) and also found elsewhere, where the declaration that God is ‘Alpha and Omega’ is combined with ‘Our Father’.

The word square is as follows:

SATOR
AREPO
TENET
OPERA
ROTAS

At first sight this word square seems to same no more than ‘*Arepo the reaper holds the wheels with care*’. But on closer examination we discover that it is a secret Christian confession of faith, which contains the opening words of the Lord’s Prayer (Pater Noster – our Father) surrounded by the Alpha and Omega

A

P
A
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R
A PATER N OSTER O
O
S
T
E
R

O

Note too that the central letter in each side of the cross in the letter T. No in ancient times the letter T was written as a cross. What is more, the Paternoster is in the sight of the cross – surrounded by the A & O. In other words, we can say that the God who is the Alpha and Omega of all things has been revealed as ‘the Father’ in the Christ who died on the cross!