

Article of the Month
March, 2018

Alpha and Omega

The term “Alpha and Omega” is widely recognized as referring to our Lord Jesus. It is used only in the Book of Revelation, although it has connections even in the Old Testament — quite hidden. A look at this term is very beneficial to doctrinal as well as to heart-felt understanding.

Those who do and who do not accept trinitarian concepts find this term necessary to deal with. Trinitarians tend to like it. Non-trinitarians find a need to explain the difficult use of it in Revelation 1:8. We will see that a proper understanding of it is quite lovely and in perfect harmony with the totality of Scriptural testimony.

THE SYMBOLISM

Alpha and Omega are, of course, the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet. This alone helps us understand the implied symbolism. Jesus is the BEGINNING and the ENDING of something. But WHAT?

Some have concluded that this is a reference to the fact that Jesus was the only direct creation of God — therefore the *beginning and ending* of God’s **direct** creative work. While, at least for a while, this was a fact, we do not believe that this is what is meant by Alpha and Omega. Nevertheless, establishing that Jesus was, indeed, God’s sole direct creation (at least for a long time) is helpful. Revelation 3:14 has Jesus’ introducing himself as “The beginning of the creation of God.” John’s Gospel (1:3) tells us that Jesus (in his pre-human condition) was the maker of everything else that was made. In other words, God made Jesus; Jesus made everything else. Hence Jesus was the “omega” — the end — as well as the “alpha” — the beginning — of God’s direct creative effort. John 1:10 confirms again that Jesus (the “Word”) made the world.

This brings us to the fact that MORE THAN ONE expression is used to show Jesus’ unique position. He is called not only “The Alpha and Omega,” but also “The First and the Last” and “The Beginning and the End.” (Revelation 22:13) All three expressions are identical in meaning. The reason for using the three will be discussed subsequently.

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There are, however, two very valid Scriptural reasons which tell us that Jesus' creation IS NOT what is meant by the "alpha and omega" expression:

- (1) While for a very long time Jesus (the "Logos" or "Word") WAS the only direct creation of the Father, that is NO LONGER THE CASE. While Jesus carries the name of "The Only Begotten" (John 3:16, 18; Hebrews 11:17; I John 4:9), we learn that God has a "New Creation" for whom He is the direct Father. This New Creation is said to be "begotten" of God. The term "begotten," when speaking of God's creative efforts, seems to be synonymous with saying that the Father is the DIRECT CREATOR of the one who is "begotten." Jesus, thus, is begotten of God; but SO ALSO are the saints — the "new creatures" of those who will constitute the mystical "Body of Christ." Because of this, the Church are the "BRETHREN" of Jesus (having the same Father — Hebrews 2:11, 12). This word "begotten" (when used of the Father's efforts) is used of Him **exclusively** when speaking of His direct creating, and ONLY used regarding Jesus and his Church. The word (Greek = "gennaō" = Strong's #1080) is not always *translated* "begotten," but this usage can be confirmed by consulting helpful references such as ***The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament***. See John 1:13, I John 3:9 and 5:18 for examples. (See also the Article of the Month for December, 2016.)

Because of all of this, the term "Alpha and Omega" does not seem to apply to the fact that Jesus was God's first and last direct creation because he now is not.

- (2) But there is another more compelling reason that the phrase does not have that meaning. It is found in Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12. In these verses the Father (Jehovah) is speaking, and He says that HE is the First and the Last. Clearly this CANNOT refer to God's creation because He IS NOT CREATED! Thus, somehow, Alpha & Omega, First & Last, Beginning & End have SOME OTHER MEANING.

Clearly we also have created a major question for ourselves: If God is the "First and the Last," how can Jesus be? Jesus ANTICIPATED our asking this question; and he answers it for us in Revelation 1:8.

A NOTE: If the reader is using the King James Version, there is an interpolation error which is corrected in more recent translations. The early manuscripts confirm that the words "the beginning and the ending," which are present in the KJV, **are not present** in the early Bible. Thus, the verse actually reads:

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

There is NOTHING erroneous about the verse (other than the interpolation). But UNDERSTANDING the verse can be difficult if we read it incorrectly. The "Lord God" and the "Almighty" are both clearly references to the Father. Jesus is NOT the "Almighty;" he is the "mighty God." (Compare Isaiah 9:6.) So, is this verse saying that

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the Father is the “Alpha and the Omega” of this verse? NO! But it CAN be read that way if we are not careful.

We have just seen in Isaiah that the Father DOES claim for Himself the “First and Last” reference. We have also seen that “First and Last” are *equivalents* of “Alpha and Omega” and of “Beginning and End.” Thus it would be EASY (though INCORRECT) to think that the Revelation 1:8 reference to Alpha & Omega is referring to the Father. But it is HOW WE READ IT that will determine the meaning. For the sake of explanation clarity, we would like first to *paraphrase* the verse in order to make its intent plain.

Jesus would NEVER usurp anything that belongs to his Father. What is clear in the New Testament, however, is that God BESTOWS upon Jesus certain things that USED TO BE exclusive to the Father. For instance: (1) In Revelation 5:7, we see the Lamb (Jesus) being offered the right to take the scroll out of the hand of the Father who had previously been the ONLY ONE with access to it. (2) In Matthew 28:18, the Father gives to Jesus “all authority...in heaven and on earth.” Clearly the Father PREVIOUSLY had it exclusively. He now chooses to SHARE it with the Son. It’s not that God GIVES UP the power; He simply *delegates* it. As Paul says in I Corinthians 15:27, “It is evident that God is excepted” from the statement that “all things are put in subjection” to Jesus. These lessons help us to explain and to interpret Revelation 1:8. In Revelation, Jesus is suggesting to us that God, Himself, is the true First and Last, but that God, Himself, is *DELEGATING* that title to His Son. With that in mind, here is the paraphrased meaning of Revelation 1:8:

I (Jesus) am the Alpha and the Omega. (My Father), THE Lord God, SAYS SO.
And HE is the one who IS, WAS, and ALWAYS WILL BE, the ***ALMIGHTY***.
[Therefore, what HE says is automatically the case!]

We hope this has helped to shed light on a very beautiful verse which has given many much difficulty. We will return to this verse later to see an exciting Old Testament connection to it in a prophecy regarding our Lord, Jesus. That connection will verify the interpretation we have just offered.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

We have hopefully demonstrated what “Alpha and Omega” *does not mean*. But this leaves us wondering what the expression *DOES* mean. Fortunately, the contexts of both the Isaiah texts (44:6 and 48:12), when read carefully, suggest the answer. Before the Gospel or Christian Age (before Jesus’ first advent), God was EVERYTHING for Israel. He was the First Word and the Last Word on ANY subject. He used this expression to help Israel understand that HE was the one to go to. There was NO OTHER source for information or for help. He was the beginning and the end of all inquiry. In terms of the 119th Psalm, He was the “Aleph” and the “Tau” — the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet — and thus the Hebrew *equivalent* of the New Testament Greek’s “Alpha and Omega.”

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But that is the point of Revelation 1:8. The Father appointed that Jesus would be the carrier of this title in the Gospel and Millennial Ages — from his first advent on. So Jesus is now the First and the Last authority on any subject. He is the Beginning and the End of all inquiry. He is the whole alphabet of information for those who seek God. There is no other source to go to for all who would know and seek God. “There is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

REVELATION 1:6-8

The context of Revelation 1:8 brings to our attention some intriguing gems. It reads:

(6) And he (Jesus) has made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father; to Him (God) be the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

(7) Behold! He (Jesus) is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over him. Even so. Amen.

(8) I (Jesus) AM the Alpha and the Omega. THE Lord God says so — He who IS, and who WAS, and who IS TO COME — THE Almighty!

The layout of these verses, their Old Testament references, and who is speaking — all of these factors enhance our understanding of the verse we are considering.

In verse 6, the Apostle John (the Revelator) is speaking. He is explaining that Jesus has made his promised kingdom FOR THE SAINTS to share with him! He explains that the kingdom will be OURS as well as Jesus', and that WE will function as PRIESTS (mediators between God and man). Then John gives the lovely benediction that assures us that God's kingdom will be everlasting. And he concludes it all with “Amen” — the word that virtually means “Thus let it be.”

In verse 7, John quotes from Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10. Both quotes add much to the point that John has made in verse 6.

The word “Behold” (verse 7) is important. It is a part of the Daniel quote. It always means that we should *stop, think, and ponder* on what is about to be said. The Daniel passage has many points in it beyond what John quotes. But John quotes ONLY that part which refers to the nature of the time when Jesus returns to set up the kingdom which John had just talked about in verse 6. “Clouds” in prophecy represent both obscurity and trouble. Thus John is telling us (“Behold!”) that the promised kingdom will begin without most of the world's knowing that it is beginning. Jesus, as he

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promised, returns “like a thief” — secretly and unobserved, AND accompanied by a “time of trouble” — clouds. (Daniel 12:1)

But John continues (all in one sentence in which he quotes two prophets) to point out that that obscurity will end at a time when ALL will learn of Jesus’ presence and rule. Since “those who pierced him” will be among those that “see” him, we know that this prophecy from Zechariah takes place AFTER the earthly resurrection has begun — after the troublous clouds. Those who pierced him will have returned from the grave. We will examine IN DETAIL Zechariah’s words in a moment because they are connected to “Alpha and Omega.”

When verse 7 states that “all the tribes of the earth will mourn over him,” we must read with great care. It DOES NOT SAY that they will mourn BECAUSE OF HIM. It says they will mourn OVER HIM. This is NOT saying that the families of the earth will be in trouble because of him! It is saying that they will REALIZE who he really is and what he has really done ON THEIR BEHALF. In other words, they will mourn lovingly in the sense that they will be saddened by what Jesus had to go through — and even what his disciples throughout the Gospel Age have had to endure — all in order to provide for the salvation of the race. It will be a healthful and instructive “mourning.” John is SO LOOKING FORWARD to the fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy that he exclaims “EVEN SO! AMEN” — this is EXCITING; LET IT BE! He is NOT saying, “It will be gruesome; I can hardly wait to see how gory it will be! Bring it on!”

How does this connect with “Alpha and Omega?” Let’s look carefully at the words of Zechariah 12:10.

And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplication so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only son; and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born.

First, please note that Zechariah makes it plain that this is NOT a mourning of fear or foreboding. They have “grace and supplication.” They have a wonderful spirit in the matter. They “mourn” like someone who has lost his only child! It is important from these words that we learn not to ascribe fear and torment to Revelation 1:7!

Now we will look at something HIDDEN in the Hebrew. Most of us cannot be aware of a Hebrew grammatical particle which is used throughout the Old Testament but which IS INVISIBLE to us who read translations instead of the original language. This “particle” is the Hebrew word “*heth*.” It is NOT translated; it is invisible to the English reader. But it does appear in the original language. It is spelled: aleph, tau — the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet (and, therefore, the Hebrew equivalent of Alpha & Omega.) It seems to be used to clarify sentence construction; and, unfortunately, a clear definition of its actual purpose seems obscure — even when we ask rabbis to explain it! But in the Zechariah text, it appears just after the word “ME.” Hence, to be quite literal,

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the phrase appears to the Hebrew eye as “...they will look on upon Me, Alpha & Omega, whom they have pierced.” How exciting! It begins to be clear why Revelation 1:7 placed this prophecy JUST BEFORE Revelation 1:8 with its reference to Alpha & Omega.

It is as though God wanted us to PROBE this prophecy by giving us something STRANGE in it to grab our attention. We have (above) underlined two pronouns in the Zechariah text which **must bother** those who have any sensitivity to language. Note the STRANGE change of pronouns: “...look on ME ... and mourn for HIM.” Why does the prophet DO this? It is likely because he wants to draw our attention to the fact (as we inquire in our studies) that the word “Me” is literally followed by Alpha & Omega. Then the prophet can return grammatically to the third person, “him,” as he continues the prophecy. Seeing this, we can now return to the Revelation context. God supplies great treasures for us when we examine and question *every word* of His Scriptures.

When 1:8 opens, it is no longer the Apostle John speaking. It is Jesus INTERRUPTING! Jesus does not do much interrupting in the book of Revelation; but when he does, it seems that he does so because he wants to comment on what has just been said. Well, WHAT HAS JUST BEEN SAID? What has just been said in verse 7 is Zechariah’s prophecy. Apparently what Jesus wants us to see, and apparently WHY he interrupts, is that he is virtually saying, “I AM THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA in that Zechariah prophecy that John just quoted!” This creates a smooth and wondrous FLOW from verse 7 into verse 8 — a flow which is totally missing if we do not see this connection. Then Jesus says, “I am not usurping this title, which really belongs to my Father, but HE SAYS that I now can use this title and what it represents.”

THE REASON FOR THREE TERMS:

- (1) Alpha & Omega
- (2) Beginning and End
- (3) First and Last

We have mentioned that “Alpha and Omega” appears three times in Revelation. The variants of it (“Beginning and End” and “First and Last”) occur also more than once. There is a PECULIARITY, however, in that (in its first appearance) “Alpha and Omega” stands by itself (Revelation 1:8). In its second appearance (21:6), it is accompanied by the phrase “The Beginning and the End.” In its last appearance (22:13), it is accompanied by the two expressions, “The First and the Last” and “The Beginning and the End.” (In Revelation 1:17 and 2:8, “The First and the Last” occurs by itself.)

If we carefully examine WHEN each of these occurrences happens, we find the secret as to why the three terms are used IN A CUMULATIVE way. When Jesus refers to himself with only ONE of the expressions (1:8; 1:17; 2:8), it is ALWAYS made at the BEGINNING of the Gospel Age. We might recall that in Matthew 28:18 Jesus stated that all authority in heaven and on earth was given to him at that time. But the exercise of that authority INCREASES as time passes. Thus, at the BEGINNING of the Gospel

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Age, Jesus uses ONLY ONE phrase to express his authority because his authority in the earth will not be increased and manifested in a greater sense until his return. But when he DOES return, but BEFORE he manifests total authority over all the affairs of men, he makes note of the increasing use of his powers by using TWO of the three expressions. This is the case in Revelation 21:6. In that verse, Jesus HAS returned, and “The Times of Restitution of all things” (Acts 3:19-21) have begun. His authority IN THE EARTH has expanded. But Jesus’ authority of Mediator over all the earth has NOT then begun. Hence he uses an INCREASED, but not total, use of the three phrases available to him: “The Alpha and the Omega” and “The Beginning and the End.” He thus shows an INCREASED, but not yet a totally applied, AUTHORITY in the earth.

When, however, Jesus assumes that total control — when the Peaceable Kingdom, the period of Mediation arrives — he uses ALL THREE of the available expressions (22:13): “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, The Beginning and the End.”

Groups of THREE represent total completion — such as “Holy, holy, holy” in Revelation 4:8, and “woe, woe, woe” in 8:13. A double (not triple) usage represents an event that is NOT complete — such as “Fallen, fallen” in Revelation 14:8 and 18:2.

Thus, we have an additional witness to the true meaning of “Alpha and Omega” — that it means the position of being the first and last word (the *authority*) on anything. Jesus, by using the cumulative power of the three expressions, has manifested that we have learned the true meaning of the expressions. He shows the EXPANDING USE OF HIS AUTHORITY (first at the first advent, secondly at his return, and finally at his mediatorship) by ADDING at each point one additional phrase which clearly expresses the exercise of AUTHORITY. Our conclusion seems well-founded that “Alpha and Omega” does, indeed, mean the first and the last word on everything, the only authority, the sole source of information and help.

It is for our spiritual health and happiness if we do, indeed, make him our ONLY source for doctrine and practice — OUR Alpha and Omega.
