

Did you know that there are over 125 names/designations/images of God and Christ recorded in the Bible? C.S. Lewis in his Narnia Chronicles uses the image of the Lion of Judah for Christ. Now, I can't remember all of them. To name a few: Lion, Rock, Bright and Morning Star, Alpha and Omega (beginning and the end), Shepherd, Lamb, Suffering Servant, etc. (Now I have probably lost you for the rest of the morning...but if you can come back and work on your list this afternoon!) Images are important. Images help us to grasp difficult concepts (Diane used fraction tile manipulatives to help one of the Wings students to understand fractions. The student needed to see, feel and touch to help her understand fractions.) Each of the images we have of God and Christ helps us to describe what is often indescribable.

This morning we read from two books of worship, Revelation and Psalms. Now we don't usually view Revelation as a book of worship but as we examine it we find it has far more to do with worship than we have previously given it credit for.

John is in exile on the Isle of Patmos. It is there that John has an experience of visions filled with images of God and worship. Most of the images are gleaned from the Old Testament. John is trying to describe to his readers images of things that cannot really be described.

I remember the most vivid and beautiful sunset we have ever experienced. It was on a fall evening at Ocean Shores. We were on our way to our son's wedding and had returned from the Philippines a few days before we were due in Poulsbo to relax and readjust our body time clocks. We had just eaten and were returning to our hotel. The sun was setting on a day with light fog/mist. The sun was the most brilliant orange filtered by the fog and mist and larger than we have ever seen. We did not have our cameras and so the image is only in our minds! It is almost impossible to describe. People stopped and were in awe of the beauty of the moment.

I understand what John is trying to do. He has looked through a door to heaven and has seen a scene that he now has to try to describe. He sees and hears worship in heaven. There is lightning and thunder (OT images of God's presence). There is what John describes as a crystal sea. {Remember Sylvia's story of the man who wanted to take his riches to heaven. Finally God relented and said he could take two suitcases. After much thought he brings two suitcases of gold. St. Peter wonders why he would bring street paving material!}. Here in John's vision is all of creation involved in praising God (Lion, Ox, Man, Eagle). The important point of John's vision is not what these images represent but what they are doing—worshipping and praising God. They are engaging with one another in worship.

We know that most of the Psalms were written for use in worship. They are songs to be sung. Prayers to be prayed in the act of worship. They cover the whole range of emotions: joy and celebration; anger and weeping. They are praises and complaints. They are filled with anger and love. All are presented in an act of worship – performed and prayed as a part of Temple worship. Sung to remind Israel of their heritage: their past, present and their future. They are the emotions of the people lifted before God in worship. A recent hymn has the line, “tears are a language God understands.” The psalmists would say, Amen!

The 150th Psalm ends with, “*Let everything praise the Lord!*” I had a great aunt who was a member of a church that did not believe in the use of musical instruments in worship. She had difficulty in worshipping with us – we used piano and organ in worship. She would say, “they didn't have pianos and organs in the Bible.” I would respond, “But what about trumpets, tambourines, cymbals, stringed instruments, etc.” I never did get an answer about them!

Music and instruments have been a part of worship. As the Ark comes to Jerusalem we have this record:

The priests then withdrew from the Holy Place. All the priests who were there had consecrated themselves, regardless of their divisions. All the Levites who were musicians—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives—stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets. The trumpeters and the singers joined in unison, as with one voice to give praise and thanks to the Lord. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices to the Lord and sang: “He is good; his love endures forever” (2 Chronicles 5:11-13 NIV).

Doesn't this sound like the vision John has in Revelation? God accepts our praise in any form. (2 Chronicles 35:25 includes women as singers!)

John is asking us to LOOK and see what is happening in heaven. God is worthy of our praise. God accepts our praise. From the greatest masterpiece to the simplest praise God is pleased. God is seeking the condition of our heart not the quality of our performance. Children singing “Jesus loves Me” with a rhythm band is as great in the ears of God as is the greatest choir and orchestra. John is seeing an act of spontaneous worship in heaven. God's splendor is apparent in his vision. All of creation is involved in the celebration and praise of God.

Have you ever noticed that the majority of hymns in our hymnal are devoted to praise and adoration of God and Christ?

Look, what does John see? A people/creation united in worship. They are not fighting with one another over positions of power and authority. They are not trying to decide who has the best or the right theology. They are not concerned with who may be in and who may be out. They are not separating and dividing because someone does not like the hymns they are singing, the prayers they are praying or the translation of Bible they are using. They are united as ONE in their praising God with one voice.

This is how Eugene Peterson translates the 150th Psalm.

Hallelujah!

Praise God in his holy house of worship, praise him under the open skies. Praise him for his acts of Power, praise him for his magnificent greatness; Praise with a blast on the trumpet, praise by strumming soft strings; Praise him with castanets and dance, praise him with banjo and flute; Praise him with cymbals and a big bass drum, praise him with fiddles and mandolin. Let every living, breathing creature praise God!

Hallelujah!

John sees the fulfillment of the 150th Psalm in his vision—“*Let everything praise God.*”

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989
NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1989
Peterson, Eugene, The Message, Zondervan, 2004, 2006