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SUMMARY

The Book of Revelation is the climax of all themes that are in the entire Scriptures. It is the fulfillment and zenith of all prophecies. The Apocalypse of John is perceived, especially among the African Christians, as a veiled text, irrelevant for our times, riddled with obscure, indecipherable symbols, mysterious visions and prophetic language. The Book of Revelation is often used sparingly and selectively to enrich worship and sermon material. The primary purpose of this work is to stimulate fresh interest among those traditional Africans who view the Book of Revelation as a thick bush and a terrain for New Testament scholars and their students. This research also intends inviting Africans to view the songs found in the Book of Revelation as the vehicle to reveal the Kingship of God as a theological motif in the same hymns or songs.

This study will follow a pyramid format – wherein the general concept of the “Kingship of God” will be traced within the entire Scriptures (both Old and New Testaments), and then zoom in on the “Kingship of God” in the Book of Revelation, with special emphasis on the hymns found in the Book of Revelation. The Kingship of God will emerge as a thread that spirals throughout the entire Scriptures, and specifically as an organizing principle, and the theology of the Book of Revelation as depicted in the hymns of the same book. This work has critically evaluated the primary
and popular approaches to interpreting the Book of Revelation, and opted for the historical approach because of its sensitivity to the immediate audience, and for being germane to different and difficult situations affecting Christians, but similar to those of the primary, intended audience. The historical approach rests on and depends on its tool – the “year-day principle” for the purpose of locating the prophetic time frames within the Christian history. The Old Testament writings do not use the phrase “Kingship of God,” or “Kingdom of God,” or “Kingdom of heaven.” While all those phrases carry the same meaning, they are not used nor appear in the Old Testament text, but the concept of the “Kingship of God” permeates the entire Old Testament writings.

In the Book of Genesis, God creates a dominion or a kingdom, and then populates it with His created creatures. The Book of Genesis reveals that God shared His dominion with humankind or first couple – Adam and Eve. The great controversy between the forces of evil and good, hinged on the concept of “kingship.” The fundamental question was: “Who, between God and Satan, should receive homage, and rule the entire universe?” The aim of Satan’s rebellion against God was to usurp God’s Kingship, and dethrone Him – and then occupy a seat higher than to God’s throne. Isaiah, referring to Satan, prophetically wrote,

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most
High.’ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit,” (Isa. 14: 12-15).

God demonstrated His Kingship within the first five Books of the Old Testament in that He miraculously liberated His chosen nation (the Israelites) from the kingdom of Pharaoh, and then settled them in Canaan under His theocracy. The Coronation Psalms allude to the Kingship of God and that of Jesus Christ. The Book of Daniel discusses the Kingship of God within the framework of Babylonian captivity wherein God’s subjects were subjected to or under the kingship of Nebuchadnezzar. The Kingship of God surfaced and demonstrated in the Book of Daniel in that God revealed the future-demise of the earthly kingships and kingdoms, and ultimately climaxing in the establishment of the universal, eternal “Kingdom of God.” In the Apocalypse of Daniel God proved that He is still seated on His throne when He appointed and deposed the earthly kings and rulers and their regimes. The concept of the “Kingship of God” permeated the Old Testament historical and prophetic writings.

The “Kingdom of God” or “Kingdom of heaven” was the content, ethos, and power of the proclamation and mission of the Jesus Christ, together with His New Testament Church. The New Testament text referred to the “Kingdom of God” or “Kingship of God” as an event that has already and is invisibly operating in the world, in that the miracles freed the captives from the kingdom of Satan. The ethics of the “Kingdom of God” regulated, and is still regulating the lives of the saints. The “Kingdom of God” or “Kingship of God” is also understood as an eschatological reality
wherein the inhabitants of earth will finally acknowledge the “Kingship of God,” un-controverted and un-contested at Parousia.

The “Kingship of God” is expressed through the preaching of the New Testament, Primitive Church with the sole aim of bringing everyone under the “Kingdom of God.” Although the New Testament Church shifted its emphasis from the “Kingdom of God” to Jesus Christ’s event at the Cross as an interpretation of the mission and message of the Old Testament ceremonial systems, and also perceived Jesus Christ as the very agent of our salvation because of His death and resurrection, but the concept of the “Kingdom of God” permeated their preaching and regulated their daily lives. The ethics of the “Kingdom of God” formed the basis and ethos of the Epistles of Paul, Peter, John and Jude – and it was connected to and was informed by the expectation of the Parousia.

The “Kingship of God” in the Book of Revelation is established through the instrumentality of the life, death, resurrection, and Parousia of Jesus Christ. The witness of the saints through their word and life, the guidance and invitation of the Holy Spirit, serve as another indirect means of establishing God’s Kingship on earth. The teachings of the “two witnesses” – defined and interpreted as the Old and New Testaments, constitute a text that contributed to, defined, explained and pointed to the means and modes of establishing God’s Kingship.

The hymns of Rev. 4 elevate the “Kingship of God” in that they point to the truth that God should receive homage because He is Holy – we worship Him for Who He is. He is the King who not only rule, but also
created His own domain or dominion from nothing. The history of this world unfolds theothronicly. The existence of God, as a Creator, challenges the theories of atheism, pantheism, deism, and humanism - theories that explain the issues of origin outside and independent of God. He (God) spoke, and creation came into existence.

The 24 elders represent the terrestrial redeemed, resurrected saints of Matt. 27: 51-53. It is unlikely that those resurrected saints of Matt. 27: 51-53 went back to their tombs, but ascended with Him to heaven to constitute the first fruits of salvation. The possible explanation and background of the 24 elders is Matt. 27: 51-53. The 4 living creatures play a role of an imbongi\(^1\) (in Xhosa and Zulu languages) or seroki\(^2\) (in Sesotho). The izimbongi\(^3\) or diroki\(^4\) (or 4 living creatures) set a pace for worship in the Book of Revelation. God on His throne is the context and centre of worship in the Book of Revelation.

The songs Rev. 5 not only ease the tension in the throne room, but also concentrate their limelight on Jesus Christ as an agent of our salvation, Who established God’s Kingship through His Blood. Jesus Christ becomes worthy of receiving worship because of His death; this becomes the very reason for the newness of the song. He shares in the Godhead and receives worship not only because of His death, but also because of His pre-existence and His life that is un-derived and un-borrowed.

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\(^1\) A person who is commonly assigned the responsibility of praising the king or any royalty among the Xhosa, Zulu and Sesotho speaking traditional Africans.

\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) A plural form of the word.

\(^4\) Ibid.
The songs of Rev. 7 and 14 reveal the Kingship of God in that He rewards His saints through meting judgment on their oppressors. The concepts of the Old Testament “first fruits” and “tithes” are instrumental in unlocking the identity of the 144,000, together with their relationship with “a great multitude.” The liberative plagues in Exodus and also in Revelation point to the Kingship of God in establishing both His heavenly and earthly Kingdoms for His followers. Judgment and salvation are twin sisters. Whenever God judges His enemies, He also saves His faithful followers.

The songs of Rev. 11 and 12 demonstrate God’s Kingship in that God reigns forever in Rev. 11, and that His Kingship has been acknowledged and accepted in heaven, Rev. 12, but remains invisible and contested on earth. The establishment and restoration of God’s Kingship in heaven guaranteed the establishment of God’s Kingship on earth at Parousia.

The songs of Rev. 15, 16, 18, and 19 point to the Kingship of God in that God righteously and fairly judges His and saints’ enemies. The judgment of God’s enemies paves way for the salvation of God’s children. The themes of judgment and creation interact and interlink in the Book of Revelation. In His patience, God warns His children to make a decisive stance against His enemies before He executes judgment.

The songs of Rev. 19 acquit God in the way He handled and dealt with Satan’s rebellion. The 24 elders, the 4 living creatures, the heavenly hosts, the figurative souls under the altar, and the entire creation all sing Hallelujah and declare “Amen” to God’s judgment on His enemies. They
finally understand that God is love and just even in His dealings with His enemies.

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb has a parallel within many African traditions relating to marriage. Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom paid His dowry or *lobolo* (in Xhosa and Zulu languages), *bohadi* (in Sesotho, Setswana and Sepedi). The *white flag*\(^5\) flies higher as an announcement and invitation to everyone to attend the marriage feast. The Terrestrial family flies its *white flag* through their witness of the word and their lives as a way of inviting others to accept the Lamb on His altar before they could welcome Him as their King on the throne. The Celestial family has started singing songs of victory while the Terrestrial family anticipates the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

The death and Blood of Jesus Christ on the Cross brought together the Celestial and Terrestrial families. Jesus Christ hanged between heaven and earth – meeting the requirements of the broken law and saving and reconciling humankind back to God. The nature of singing and songs of Revelation not only provide context, content and meaning for the African liturgy, but they also serve as a carrier of a rich theology of God’s Kingship. The Marriage Supper of the Lord, premised on the Hebrew traditions of contracting marriage, provides a home for Africans in the

\(^5\) A practice among the traditional Sesotho speaking Africans of flying a white flag at the house of either the bridegroom or groom as a sign that there is an impending marriage ceremony, and that the community is invited to that ceremony. This sign takes place after necessary traditional preliminaries have take place – such as paying of *lobolo* or *bohadi* or dowry, and after a covenantal ritual to seal a relationship between the bridegroom and groom’s families.
Book of Revelation. Therefore, the text of Revelation is relevant today as it was then. In deed, the entire universe will join and sing and say,

“... Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.” (Rev. 19: 6b).