



# “In His Hand a Little Book”

Revelation and After the New Testament

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## Revelation

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*Since we recently covered the book of Revelation in great detail (2016; see notes on the website, <http://davelefevre.website>), I will not replicate all of that here. However, here are some notes from the introductory section that are helpful in trying to understand the overall message and symbolism of the book.*

Revelation is often considered mysterious and hard to understand. For example, John Calvin, the famous reformer, had such a hard time with it that it was the only book of scripture for which he did not write a commentary.<sup>1</sup>

However, Nephi declared, “the things which [John] shall write are just and true; . . . the things which were written were plain and pure, and most precious and easy to the understanding of all men” (1 Nephi 14:23). Additionally, Joseph Smith taught: “The book of Revelation is one of the plainest books God ever caused to be written.”<sup>2</sup> Whether you have found that statement to be personally true or not so far in your study of Revelation, I hope there are some things here that might help it become a little plainer to you.

Revelation is primarily an apocalyptic work, meaning that it “purports to be a divine disclosure, usually through a celestial intermediary to some prominent figure in the past, in which God promises to intervene in human history to bring times of trouble to an end and destroy all wickedness.”<sup>3</sup> Revelation’s title in Greek is *Apokalypsis*, because it is the first word in the book (translated “The revelation” in the KJV). Apocalyptic works are typically: 1) eschatological, meaning they speak of the end of time when God will bring the world to a final reckoning; 2) dualistic, or, binary, we might say in our computer age today, meaning, it deals with things in opposites—God and Satan, now and future, etc.; and, 3) rigidly deterministic, meaning everything happens and moves forward according to God’s plan.<sup>4</sup>

One of the best things you can do to start your study of Revelation is to read the whole thing through in a single sitting, like a good novel—it should only take you about an hour and a half. Don’t worry about trying to understand everything or make sense of it. “Compositions like Revelation have structural integrity and are meant to be read front to back, not in piecemeal.”<sup>5</sup> As you do this, you’ll see patterns, phrases, numbers, and themes that are repeated again and again. You’ll see images duplicated or doubled as opposites. Most importantly, you’ll feel the flow of the text and the message. Armed with that sense of the book, you can then begin a more detailed study of the contents, keeping that overall vision in mind the whole time.

## Symbolism

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As mentioned above, the Greek name for the book is *Apokalypsis*, meaning ‘disclosure’ or ‘unveiling,’ perhaps ironic since many consider it baffling, confusing, and of hidden meaning. The main reason for this is its strong use of symbolism.

Some years ago, I was walking through the Riverwalk mall in New Orleans. As I approached a store that sold books and pictures, I stopped to look at some odd images on display with lots of repeating patterns. The man running the store said, “Do you see it?” Puzzled by the question, I replied, “See what?” “Ah,” he smiled, “you don’t yet know the secret. Let me show you.” He instructed me to look at the picture with my eyes slightly crossed and focus on the reflection on the glass cover, not the image itself. I thought he was a little odd and couldn’t imagine what this

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, 1:1.

<sup>2</sup> TPJS, 290.

<sup>3</sup> Mounce, 1; other apocalyptic works include Daniel, Ezekiel, Matthew 24 and Joseph Smith-Matthew, Nephi’s vision in 1 Nephi 13-14, and Enoch’s visions in Moses 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> Mounce, 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Wall, Week 1.

exercise would do but went along with it. After crossing my eyes and moving my head back and forth, suddenly I saw something, but briefly. “Hey,” I exclaimed, “there’s another image!” He smiled more broadly. I practiced some more and after several minutes could get my eyes to ‘see’ the images in all the art work and books. It was amazing! If I looked just right at what appeared to be a jumble of random images, they turned into an organized, three-dimensional picture that literally leapt off the page at me.

So it is with scriptural symbolism. As we study symbols and look at them in new, different angles, they become meaningful to us in unexpected ways.

## Old Testament

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Though Revelation has no direct quotations from the Old Testament, all agree that it is heavily dependent on the Jewish scriptures for its symbols and messages. One commentary notes that 278 of the book’s 404 verses allude to Old Testament scriptures.<sup>6</sup> Others might have a different number but agree with the dependence.<sup>7</sup> Predominant are references to Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Psalms, but Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Joel, Zechariah, Judges, Proverbs, and the Song of Solomon are all included.<sup>8</sup>

Scholars debate whether John was directly alluding to OT passages and images or that the revelation he received was simply couched in such terms and he simply recorded it as he saw it.<sup>9</sup> But John appears to use the OT in seven ways:

1. Judgment and plagues.
2. Tribulation and persecution of God’s people.
3. Seductive and idolatrous teaching.
4. Divine protection.
5. Victorious battle of God’s people over an enemy.
6. Apostasy.
7. The Spirit as the power of God’s people.<sup>10</sup>

Two observations are worth noting here, with more influences noted in the commentary on the verses. First, there is a “dominant influence on the structure of Revelation” from the book of Ezekiel, with the order of the presentation of many things in Revelation following the same order in Ezekiel. This is especially noticeable in Revelation 20-22 which closely parallels Ezekiel 37-48.<sup>11</sup>

Second, the various plagues in Revelation are certainly modeled after those in Exodus, though reworked for the last days and the structure of John’s message. This is especially true for the trumpet (chapter 8) and bowl (chapter 16) plagues.<sup>12</sup>

The point is that a thorough understanding of OT scriptures, history, symbols, and prophetic techniques greatly increases an understanding of Revelation. “Indeed, the reader unfamiliar with the OT is hard pressed to make any sense of Revelation.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> MacArthur, 1:15.

<sup>7</sup> Beale and Carson (1982) give numbers of verses with OT influence tallied by various commentators ranging from 226 to 1000.

<sup>8</sup> Osborne, 25; Smalley, 9. We see this in Joseph Smith’s revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, which is full of OT and NT language. In some cases, he may have expressed the revelation he was seeing in terms familiar to him from the Bible, but in other cases, he may have been writing the exact words the Spirit gave him, which used ‘scriptural’ language. It’s difficult to know the difference in most of his revelations.

<sup>9</sup> Beale and Carson, 1084.

<sup>10</sup> See a detailed discussion with examples in Beale and Carson, 1085-1086.

<sup>11</sup> Beale and Carson, 1087.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Beale and Carson, 1088.

## Numbers

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Numbers are a particularly important symbolic tool in Revelation. Nearly every use of a number in the book adds to the understanding of the symbol. For example, 3 represents the divine; 4 is completeness or wholeness on earth; 7 combines 3 and 4 to represent divine or total completeness; 12 multiplies 3 and 4 to represent priesthood, Israel, and God's ability to fulfill his covenants and promises; and 1,000 represents greatness or even infinity.<sup>14</sup> It's also helpful to recognize that the entire structure of Revelation is organized into seven groups of seven, including seven messages to seven churches (chapters 2-3), seven seals (chapters 4-7), seven trumpets (chapters 8-11, seven bowls (chapters 15-16), and seven things about the fall of Babylon (chapters 16-19).<sup>15</sup> There are also many small sets of three, four, seven, and twelve throughout the text. These and more number meanings will be called out in the commentary as we work our way through the text (*see notes from 2016 class*).

## Symbolism Helps

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Below are three lists of seven things (John would be proud!) that can help us understand Revelation.

Here are important things to keep in mind about symbolism:

1. John wrote the book *to be understood* to the Saints of his day. We may have difficulty because we're not first century Greeks, but he wasn't trying to write something impossible to comprehend.
2. Some things *have been lost*. See 1 Nephi 13: 28 and 1 Nephi 14:23.
3. Revelation is *deeply symbolic*. Mentioned above, taking it too literally is far worse than taking it too figuratively. Commenting on modern misunderstandings of ancient Christian doctrine, such as transubstantiation and the Trinity, one scholar said, "They would never have arisen if it had been sufficiently observed that it was a characteristic of Christ's teaching to adopt the language of picture and of emotion. But to turn metaphor into fact, poetry into prose, rhetoric into logic, parable into systematic theology, is at once fatal and absurd."<sup>16</sup>
4. Though symbolic, the *symbols typically represent real things, persons, or events*, such as the sea of glass representing the earth in its celestial state. "The whole work is couched in symbolism and, to get at the message, one must see beyond these symbols to the important realities that lie behind them."<sup>17</sup>
5. Many of Revelation's *symbols come in contrasting pairs*, helping with interpretation. Two kingdoms; two women; two cities; two harvests; two marks, and many more. In some cases, the paired items are opposites and may not be presented together in the book, such as the sea of glass (4:6) and the lake of fire (21:8).<sup>18</sup>
6. Symbols can be *interpreted only by inspiration*. We can use other tools to help, but in the end, the Spirit gives the only true meaning.
7. We're not responsible for understanding symbols the Lord has not revealed. Said Joseph Smith, "Whenever God gives a vision of an image, or beast, or figure of any kind, He always hold Himself responsible to give a revelation or interpretation of the meaning thereof, otherwise we are not responsible or accountable for our belief in it."<sup>19</sup> Of course, we're to seek such revelation and not just shrug our shoulders and say, 'Oh, that one hasn't been explained.' But after our best efforts, we should not feel bad if we cannot declare with certainty what a symbol represents.

We have many tools to help us interpret the book of Revelation, and Latter-day Saints are especially blessed with resources well beyond what other students of the book have available to them:

1. Modern scripture, esp. D&C 29, 77, 88, and 130.
2. The Joseph Smith Translation, which includes seventy-five verses changed, or 24% of the book, though many just one word. Relevant JST changes are presented in the notes side-by-side with the KJV with changes highlighted (deleted words struck out in the KJV and added words bolded in the JST).

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<sup>14</sup> Draper and Rhodes, 58-59; Ryken, 599-600; Osborne, 15-19.

<sup>15</sup> Faulconer, 492-495.

<sup>16</sup> Frederic Farrar, *The Life of Christ*, p. 564, n. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Draper and Rhodes, 55.

<sup>18</sup> For a good list, see Parry & Parry, 312-314.

<sup>19</sup> TPJS, 291.

3. Clarifying information in the Book of Mormon, especially Nephi's similar vision (1 Nephi 11-15).
4. Teachings of the modern prophets, especially Joseph Smith.
5. The Greek text of Revelation.
6. Old and New Testament prophecies, customs, culture, and practices.
7. Personal revelation is the ultimate key to understanding; D&C 136:32-33a – humility makes it happen.

Finally, here are seven important points to remember throughout your study of the book, all of which should increase your ability to comprehend John's messages:

1. It is essential to 'pay the price' to learn Revelation. Bruce McConkie said that "the language and imagery is so chosen as to appeal to the maturing gospel scholar, to those who already love the Lord and have some knowledge of his goodness and grace" (*Ensign*, Sep 1975, 87). In other words, it is not a casual read.
2. Revelation is a book of prophecy, plus a little history. Attempts to make it apply precisely to past or future events are likely to fail except in isolated cases.
3. Likewise, it is not a precise timeline but a roughly chronological vision that sometimes jumps around in time and subject to tell the story.
4. It was a letter written by the presiding authority of the Church to Saints in Asia (modern western Turkey), so it's easier to understand as we learn more about these people and their circumstances.
5. It is a book fundamentally about Christ, his atonement and triumph.
6. Because of the focus on Christ, it is also a book of hope to the people of John's day—and ours.
7. It is a book of binary contrasts and a challenge for us to choose between the two—good and evil; since we know God will win, we can 'bet on a winner' and choose to follow God.

## John, the author

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John was one of Jesus' original Twelve and joined Jesus as a disciple right after Jesus' baptism. John was also the last of the twelve to survive; D&C 7:1-4 makes a very clear statement of John's mission and state, an understanding that is unique to Latter-day Saints. 1 Nephi 14:18-27 explains that Nephi, John, and others shared similar visions. John was particularly charged with writing it—which is why he wrote Revelation and why it is preserved for us today.

## Date

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It is not known when John wrote the book, but there are two most likely dates. Most believe that it was probably written about AD 94. It was a time when pagans, Jews, and Christians struggled in the religious and political arena. In AD 92, there was an anti-Christian outbreak in Asia because a serious famine was blamed on the Christians. Sanctions were applied against the churches, along with arrests, banishments, imprisonments, and executions. Then in AD 94, Domitian persecuted Christians because they would not worship Roman gods—especially him. This was possibly when John was banished and when the book was written.<sup>20</sup>

The second possibility is earlier, before the AD 70 fall of Jerusalem. Advocates of this time period cite stylistic distinctions and the tie to the tenth Jubilee year, which ended in AD 66.<sup>21</sup> They also see the topics addressed in Revelation as being appropriate for the Neronian persecution circa AD 68.<sup>22</sup> However, this is a minority opinion and has gained few followers.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Draper, 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> Draper and Rhodes, 34-35.

<sup>22</sup> Smalley, 2-3; Wilson, 246-247 makes an especially strong case for the early date.

<sup>23</sup> See also Mounce, 15-21 and Osborne 6-9 for a full discussion.

## Outline

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There are many ways to outline any book, and Revelation is no exception. Below are the lessons in this series with chapter summaries mostly taken from Draper and Rhodes. For the lesson in these notes, the chapter is broken down into more detailed sections and bolded.

1. The Majesty of Christ (1:1-20)
  - a. Opening of the Vision (1:1-3)
  - b. The Almighty (1:4-8)
  - c. The Vision of the Son of Man (1:9-18)
  - d. John's Commission (1:19-20)
2. The Messages to the Seven Churches (2:1 – 3:22)
3. God and the Lamb
  - a. The Vision of Heaven (4:1-11)
  - b. The Sealed Book and the Worthy Lamb (5:1-14)
4. The Scroll Begins to Open
  - a. The Six Seals (6:1-17)
  - b. The Seal of the Living God (7:1-17)
5. The Opening of the Seventh Seal
  - a. The Seventh Seal and the First Four Trumpets (8:1-13)
  - b. The Great War (9:1-21)
6. John's Mission; Two Prophets
  - a. The Little Scroll (10:1-11)
  - b. The Seventh Trumpet (11:1-19)
7. The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon
  - a. The Church and the Devil (12:1-18)
  - b. The Beasts of Revelation (13:1-18)
8. Judgment and Praise
  - a. The Winepress of the Wrath of God (14:1-20)
  - b. The Seven Angels (15:1-8)
9. Seven Last Plagues and Babylon the Great
  - a. The Seven Bowls (16:1-21)
  - b. Babylon the Great (17:1-18)
10. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb
  - a. The Fall of Babylon (18:1-24)
  - b. The King of Kings (19:1-21)
11. Heirs of the Celestial Glory
  - a. The Thousand Years (20:1-15)
  - b. The New Jerusalem (21:1-27)
12. Blessed Are They That Do His Commandments (22:1-21)



## After the New Testament

After the apostles, the story grows dim quickly. With the rejection of priesthood authority and keys, people were left to their own wisdom to determine doctrine and practices. The church quickly moved away from NT beliefs. Most Christians today consider this the maturing of the church, but Latter-day Saints see in these changes the clear signs of the apostasy, requiring a full restoration from God through his prophet, Joseph Smith.

### What happened to the original apostles?

Who were the original Twelve? There are four lists given in scripture:

Matt 10:2-4	Mark 3:16-19	Luke 6:14-16	Acts 1:13
Simon Peter Andrew James John	Simon Peter James John Andrew	Simon Peter Andrew James John	Peter James John Andrew
Philip Bartholomew Thomas Matthew	Philip Bartholomew Matthew Thomas	Philip Bartholomew Matthew Thomas	Philip Thomas Bartholomew Matthew
James ben Alphaeus Lebbaeus surnamed Thaddaeus Simon Judas Iscariot	James ben Alphaeus Thaddaeus Simon Judas Iscariot	James ben Alphaeus Simon Judas of James Judas Iscariot	James ben Alphaeus Simon Judas of James -----

Here is a list of other men who were called "apostles" in the NT (note: as we've discussed, this doesn't mean they were members of the Twelve):

- Matthias (Acts 1:23-26)
- Andronicus and Junia (Romans 16:7)
- Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Corinthians 9:5-6)
- Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25)
- James, the brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19)
- Paul (Acts 14:14; Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1, 15:9; 2 Corinthians 1:1, 12:11; Galatians 1:1, 17; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:1, 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:1, 11; Titus 1:1)

Only two of the deaths of the Twelve are recorded in scripture (Judas Iscariot and James), the rest we only know from the writings of early church leaders.

### Simon Peter

Peter continued to lead the church. At some point he seems to have gone to Rome. Eusebius (2:14-15) and the apocryphal *Acts of Peter* say that he had an encounter in Rome with Simon Magnus which lead to his martyrdom. Eusebius (2:14) confirms that Peter went to Rome and also to Corinth (2:25), as well as several cities in Turkey (3:1). Eusebius (3:1) says that Peter requested that he be crucified upside down since he wasn't worthy to die like Christ. Clement adds that he was first forced to watch his wife crucified. This was probably about 68 CE, shortly after Paul was beheaded.

### Andrew

Eusebius and Jerome say that Andrew went to Scythia (3:1) to preach (even today he is the patron saint of Russia). In the apocryphal *Acts of Andrew* we're told he was crucified in Achaia (southern Greece) because he converted a governor's wife, which the governor didn't appreciate. He was lashed instead of being nailed to the cross to make it last longer. While hanging there, he continued to preach about Jesus to all who came by.

## James

**Acts 12:1-3** – Fourteen years after the crucifixion, James was beheaded by Herod Agrippa I. This is the only place in the Bible where James is portrayed alone. Did James' boldness in the end bring him to the attention of Herod? We know no other details, but he was the first apostle killed—and the only one recorded in scripture. Eusebius, quoting Clement, adds that James' guard was converted by his testimony, and thus both were led away together to die, after James blessed and kissed him.

## John

Early Christian records indicate that, later in life, John moved to Ephesus and led the Church from that city where Paul established a strong congregation. Local legend says he took Mary with him (you can visit her house there), but other early writings indicate he stayed in Jerusalem with her until she died. He was imprisoned on the island of Patmos for a time, from where he wrote the book of Revelation. Jerome, who is only passing on a tradition from about two hundred years before his time, says John was so frail in later life that he had to be carried into church, but he was always saying, "My little children, love one another."

## Philip

Tradition has it that Philip was a great missionary in Phrygia (Asia Minor), but that eight years after the beheading of James, he was stoned to death in Heliopolis, then crucified. Eusebius records the words of Polycrates who says Philip brought his three daughters to that area with him; one died in Ephesus, the other two in Heliopolis, like their father.

## Nathanael Bartholomew

Tradition holds that Nathanael went to Persia and India. One story is that he was tied up in a sack and cast into the sea, another (*Foxe's*) that he was beaten with staves, crucified, then beheaded.

## Thomas

Early Church fathers said Thomas went to India to teach the gospel. There is a place marked there that claims to be his grave where he was placed after being run through with a spear.

## Matthew Levi

Tradition is that Matthew preached to Jews in Israel and surrounding areas, including Egypt and Ethiopia, and that he died by being burned at the stake or run through with a spear (*Foxe's*).

## James ben Alphaeus

Early legends say he took the gospel to Syria and Persia. He is said to have died by stoning, by being beaten to death, or by crucifixion.

## Juda Lebbaeus Thaddaeus

Judas Lebbaeus Thaddeaus is said to have preached in Edessa, Turkey, and healed the king, Abgar. Eusebius says the full record of his visit is recorded in Edessa, but it's never been found. Tradition is that he was clubbed to death.

## Simon the Zealot

Legend is that Simon went north and traveled as far as the British Isles. There is no account of his death other than the legend that he was crucified while preaching (*Foxe's*).

## Judas Iscariot

**Matthew 27:3-8** – Judas' sorrow was not one of repentance but a realization that his actions didn't bring the expected satisfaction, that his sin had brought misery upon him. He did not cry out to God, but out of control, went and hanged himself. **Acts 1:18-19** – He fell and died on the rocks. Modern commentators agree with Joseph Smith's change in JST Matthew 27:5 "and hanged himself *on a tree*. And straightway he fell down, and his bowels gushed out, and he died."

Of the other people called apostles, we find little:



## James, the brother of Jesus

After preaching boldly in Jerusalem, the scribes and Pharisees took James up to the pinnacle of the temple and threw him off. But he was not killed by the fall, continuing to pray, so they stoned him, but that didn't kill him either so a many took a big club and hit him on the head, taking his life (*Foxe's*).

## Paul

Beheaded in Rome by Nero, according to early church fathers, probably in 68 CE.

## Conclusion

Jump ahead several decades. John has seen the Twelve killed off one by one until only he is left against the coming, unstoppable apostasy. Alone on Patmos, he must have pondered the fate that left him in this position. He's watched them all go, heard about their murders, and must have wondered how this could possibly be God's plan. Then comes the great vision, Revelation, in which a key theme is that though it looks bad now, Jesus will triumph in the end. **Revelation 18:20** – "Her" is Babylon (v. 2), and God will avenge the murders of the prophets and apostles upon her. Perhaps John took some comfort in this long-term vision of how things will work out.

## The apostasy

Apostasy comes from the Greek *apostasía*, meaning a changing of loyalties, a revolt, or a desertion. It has the sense of a deliberate rebellion and mutiny, not just a casual 'falling away' as it is translated in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. In a mutiny, the point is to remove the existing leadership and replace them with someone else, probably with different ways of thinking and doing things. Thus the apostasy was a rejection of priesthood authority established by Jesus, replacing it with an uninspired and unauthorized leadership of men.

In his book, *Turning from Truth*, Elder Morrison points out seven issues to consider relating to the apostasy, summarized here, then in more detail below:<sup>24</sup>

1. **We don't know all the details.** There are simply insufficient historical records to piece together the steps that led to the apostasy.
2. **The victors wrote the histories.** The apostate but "orthodox" church determined doctrine and scripture, and ultimately who was heretical and who was not. When others didn't agree with their views, the winners changed them, suppressed them, or destroyed them.
3. **An institutional apostasy occurred.** The priesthood keys were lost, covenants were changed or broken, and divine approval was withdrawn. These changes were a fundamental move away from the truth established by the Savior.
4. **The transfer of divine authority failed.** Additional apostles were ordained when the original ones died, but at some point, that activity ceased until only John remained, and then he left the scene. Bishops became the highest authority and the office quickly became a political one of power and influence.
5. **The damage was done early.** We often talk about the Council of Nicaea as the mark of the apostasy, but it was well established by then. Greek philosophy didn't create the apostasy; rather, it was a sign of it being complete. The original apostles knew this—and even saw it in their day.
6. **External persecution played a role.** Though not as important as internal problems, harassment and intolerance influenced some early church members to abandon their beliefs.
7. **Most of it was from internal dissent and contention.** The bulk of the damage was self-inflicted by some well-meaning and some deliberately mutinous members, who rejected apostolic authority or gave in to greed and power.

**1. We don't know all the details.** The NT itself records incidents in the early church, but not many. Acts focuses mainly on Peter and Paul and the letters are mostly Paul's. We have nothing about the activities of most of the apostles. The majority of the NT was written before 68 CE, with only John's writings after that date. Then there is a large gap in the record, with very little known between 70 and 150 CE. With so little information, it is impossible to

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<sup>24</sup> See Morrison, *Turning from Truth*, 163f.

say something like, 'The apostasy occurred on 15 June 113 CE.' What is clear is that the church that emerges from this time of few records is very different from the one founded by Jesus and run by the apostles—more fragmented, lacking authority and unity, without revelation—and ironically recognizing that there had been a loss of authority, direction, and truth.

**2. The victors wrote the histories.** As with most things historical, the records left behind are those of the winners of the great contest. One of the likely reasons we have so few records in the gap period is that the survivors suppressed or destroyed the documents—the scriptures—of the losers they considered incorrect or uninspired.

"Orthodoxy" and "heresy" are also labels attached by the victors. Christianity's history is one of many opposing groups vying for leadership, control, and power. Each group considered themselves 'right' and all others 'wrong.' (Interestingly, the doctrinal differences in the first three centuries were more pronounced than they even are today among the hundreds of modern Christians churches.) The ones that finally won out were the ones that got to decide what 'right' and 'wrong,' orthodox and heresy, ultimately were.

**3. An institutional apostasy occurred.** With the passing of the apostles, priesthood authority was gone, and so were the keys of the kingdom and the keys of revelation. Without those, the Church of Jesus Christ was no longer in existence, and the apostasy was complete. In its wake, church leaders changed the doctrines and ordinances to support their own beliefs and philosophies. These changes moved the church away from the doctrines of Christ and his apostles and toward Greek philosophy, but it is the rejection of Christ and his duly ordained priesthood leaders that caused the apostasy and let such thinking into the church in the first place, not the philosophies themselves that somehow corrupted the church and caused the apostasy. It gets to the meaning of the word, "apostasy"—rebellion, mutiny, overthrow. It was a deliberate act.

**4. The transfer of divine authority failed.** At first, the succession continued with Matthias (Acts 1:21-26) and perhaps others, such as Paul, Barnabas, and James. But at some point, not documented in scripture or history, the Lord instructed his leaders to ordain no more. By about 90 CE, John was the only apostle left, and somewhere near 100 CE he left the scene. This was not an accident, but the result of the general rejection of priesthood authority and apostolic keys.<sup>25</sup>

This battle being temporarily won by the forces of evil are what Nephi saw in his vision (1 Nephi 13).

## **5. The damage was done early.**

Sometimes we imagine medieval monks or 4th century councils being the mark of the apostasy. But the reality is that the rebellion was accomplished long before any of these activities. Prophesied by prophets and apostles, the rejection of priesthood authority and teachings began almost as soon as the church began to grow. By the end of Paul's life, he was lamenting how many problems there were. Three decades later, John saw the problems well entrenched.

Some scriptures that anticipate the apostasy include:<sup>26</sup>

- Matthew 24:5, 10-11 False Christs and prophets will deceive many.
- Acts 20:29-31 False teachers from within the church will draw others away.
- 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 The apostasy reveals the man of sin.
- 1 Timothy 4:1-3 Some will leave the faith, following after seductive doctrines.
- 2 Timothy 4:3-4 People will turn away from the truth to fables.
- 2 Peter 2:1-3 False teachers among the church introduce heresies, drawing away many.
- 1 John 2:18 Antichrist will come.
- Jude 1:4, 17-19 Mockers and other will creep into the church.

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<sup>25</sup> Jackson, *From Apostasy to Restoration*, 19-20.

<sup>26</sup> From Jackson, *From Apostasy to Restoration*, 10-12.

- Revelation 13:1-9 Satan overcomes the saints and the whole earth.

Some scriptures that note the apostasy already occurring include:<sup>27</sup>

- 1 Corinthians 1:10-16; 3:3-10; 5:1-13; 11:18, 23-24; 14:1-14, 33 Paul corrected many false teachings at Corinth.
- Galatians 1:6-7; 3:1-5; 4:10; 5:2-4 The Galatian saints were being led away by false teachers.
- Colossians 1:15-2:23 Paul contends against worship of angels and a lowering of Christ's supremacy.
- 1 John 4:2-3; 2 John 1:7 John speaks out against Docetism, or the belief that Jesus was not flesh.
- 1 John 2:18-19; 4:1-3 The antichrist and false prophets are already in the church.
- Jude 1:3-4, 19 Those rejecting authority are already in the church.
- Revelation 2:2, 4-6, 14-16, 20-24; 3:2-4, 15-17 False prophets and other apostate doctrine and behavior.
- 3 John 1:9-10 A local church leader rejects John's authority.

In an early document attributed to Clement, bishop of Rome around 95-97 CE, we learn that the church in Corinth had rejected the leaders appointed by the apostles (John?) and installed leaders of their own choice (1 Clement, 42, 44). Clement condemns this, saying that righteousness and peace thus come to an end (1 Clement, 3:4).

Thus we see that "the Catholic Church was no more responsible for the Apostasy than were the Baptists, the Presbyterians, or any other of today's churches; like all other Christians since the first century CE, they were the inheritors of it."<sup>28</sup>

## 6. External persecution played a role.

Though not having as important an impact as the internal challenges, persecution from outside the church caused some early church members to forsake their commitments and covenants and even abandon their beliefs. Persecution was generally limited to certain emperors (Nero, Domitian, etc.) and certain locations (Rome especially). Because it wasn't consistent nor universal, it didn't have the impact that we might imagine.

## 7. Most of it was from internal dissent and contention.

The church did not leave the truth by accident or by external force; the mutiny against duly ordained leaders came deliberately from the inside. Though some of it could have been motivated by well-meaning but misinformed local leaders, the bulk of the efforts that created the apostasy were those who gave way to greed and power. Many had "itching ears" (2 Timothy 4:3-4) for doctrines that were more pleasing to their carnal minds (see Alma 30:53), more aligned with the comfortable philosophies of the day, or more intellectually stimulating. "The Early Church died from internal, self-inflicted wounds brought about by the introduction of alien ideas that gained widespread acceptance at the expense of the pure doctrine of Christ."<sup>29</sup>

There were many divisions that arose from the earliest days. We'll discuss just three here.<sup>30</sup>

**Ebionites:** Not much is known about them (see #2 above), but this group of Christians from the second to the fourth centuries adopted the practice of giving away all their goods to live in poverty. They adopted a very Jewish view of the gospel, believing that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah sent in fulfillment of the Jewish scriptures. They observed Jewish customs like the Sabbath, circumcision, and Levitical eating laws. To them, Jesus was not pre-existent or born of a virgin (he was the son of Joseph and Mary) but became the Son of God by divine adoption because he kept God's law perfectly, better than any other man. That enabled him to be God's sacrifice. Being raised from the dead was the sign of God's blessing on him. They accepted the OT but not the gospels, except perhaps Matthew in Aramaic, nor the writings of Paul.

<sup>27</sup> From Jackson, *From Apostasy to Restoration*, 12-16.

<sup>28</sup> Jackson, *From Apostasy to Restoration*, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Jackson, *From Apostasy to Restoration*, 21.

<sup>30</sup> From Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 99f.

**Marcionites:** Led by a second century theologian named Marcion from Pontus (near the Black Sea), he and his followers rejected all things Jewish and thus appealed to a larger, pagan audience. Marcion loved the writings of Paul, especially the parts about mercy, love, grace, and forgiveness. He couldn't see how that God could be the same one as the one in the OT. He therefore concluded that there were (at least) two gods, the God of the Jews and the God of Jesus who came to man's attention with the coming of Christ (before that he had not made himself known to man). He also believed that Jesus did not have a physical body—he just looked human.

**Gnostics:** This group believed that there was a secret knowledge (*gnosis*) attained only by the best Christians, a combination of Platonic philosophy with Christianity. They believed in a hierarchy of gods, that it all started with the One True God who is a perfect, eternal spirit. By his thoughts he created other lesser gods called Aeons. They create other lesser aeons and soon there were hundreds of gods. One of them, Sophia, tried to have a son without a father, but the son was imperfect so she hid him away on Earth. His name is Yaldaboath/Yahweh. He created lesser and now evil beings on Earth—humans. He bragged to them about being the only god, but some of them learned the truth of the One True God, who sent Jesus Christ to give them the secret knowledge needed to return to his presence. Jesus was (with variations, depending on which gnostic texts are read) either a phantom who looked like a human or a spirit (Christ) that inhabited a man's body (Jesus) to convey his teachings. Either way, Christ wasn't crucified, but the man Jesus was and was raised from the dead by Christ.

### Baptism as an example

An interesting example of how this progressed is in the ordinance of baptism. At first, scholarly consensus is that adults only (or at least those old enough to "know Christ" and understand the covenant) were baptized by a priesthood holder by immersion in any available water source. But after the passing of apostolic guidance, changes began to come into the ordinance, difference region by region.

- Immersion was no longer considered essential by the third century. Where there was insufficient water, or if the person was too infirm to go down into the water, pouring or sprinkling could be used instead.
- Baptism by a single immersion was the practice at the beginning, but some groups in the third century began to immerse three times, one for the Father, one for the Son, and one for the Holy Ghost.
- By the fourth century, those being baptized removed all their clothing, symbolic of their leaving the world behind, and were baptized naked. After baptism, they were reclothed in white as a symbol of their purity.
- Elaborate baptisteries were constructed, and it was no longer acceptable to be baptized in rivers or ponds. Fonts were constructed in shape either round (symbolic of a tomb) or octagon (eight being a Greek symbol for sacred rites; also a new creation, as in the eighth day), though sometimes in the form of a cross or a long and narrow shape, to represent a birth canal. The number of steps was either three (the Trinity) or four (universality). Over 400 such baptisteries have been discovered, built between the third to seventh centuries, many with several pools and entrances.
- In earliest days, instruction, including fasting and prayer, was required before baptism so the person would understand the covenant and repent of their sins. By the fourth century in some areas, baptism had taken on the form of a Greek mystery, and the person knew nothing of what was going to happen as they were led into the baptistery. After the baptism, they were then instructed in the mystery (secret) of baptism.
- Other rites were associated with baptism by the fifth century, including exorcism just prior to baptism (to rid the person of Satanic influence) and eating salt, physical examination, and standing barefoot on an animal skin. After baptism, candidates were given a milk/honey mixture to drink, then bread and wine.
- Because baptism was considered a one-shot deal to rid yourself of all sins, many in the early centuries thought they should delay baptism until they were ill or old, to try and end life as clean as possible. But the church tried to encourage baptism, so this led to the making of it more elaborate and ceremonial to try and bring people in.
- Though clearly and explicitly opposed in the second and third centuries, infant baptism began in earnest the fourth century, church leaders citing Jesus' words to let little children come unto him.
- At first, only those children who seemed to in danger of dying were baptized. By the fifth century, it was so common that Augustine successfully used it as an argument in support of original sin. By the sixth century, only infants were baptized, giving rise to the confessional for adults.

For an excellent summary from a Catholic perspective, see Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 217-219.

## How did the NT canon come together?

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Various groups preserved letters and writings from early church leaders. Over time there were passed around and shared. By 367, the list of twenty-seven books in our NT was proposed by Athanasius, but before and after that, depending on the church, that list expanded and contracted. Jerome and Augustine had different opinions about what books should be scriptural (Augustine won). Eventually the Roman church settled on the NT used by most Christians today, though the Greek church has a slightly different version even today.

## What books were 'on the edge' of the canon?

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A number of books were considered scriptural at some point, though they didn't end up in our NT today. These include:

- 1 Clement
- 2 Clement
- Shepherd (or Pastor) of Hermas
- The Epistle of Barnabas
- The Martyrdom of Polycarp
- The Didache

Other books were considered scriptural by some groups but not by 'mainstream' Christianity, including Gnostic works such as *The Gospel of Philip*, *The Secret Gospel of Mark*, *The Acts of Paul* and *The Acts of Peter*, *The Apocalypse of Peter*, and many more.

How should Latter-day Saints approach these 'on the edge' books? D&C 91 is our guide—certainly, some things in these are inspired, but many are no more than the thoughts of men. We learn much about the thinking of early church leaders from them and can see the impact of the apostasy on what was left of the church after the rejection of apostolic authority. They are interesting reading and worthy of our attention to expand our knowledge in those areas. But we have plenty of canonized scripture in our four standard works and the promise of more legitimate scripture if we show ourselves worthy of it, to keep us busy enough in gospel doctrine classes and personal scripture study for a lifetime.

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### Abbreviations:

- AT – Author's translation
- BYU – BYU New Rendition
- CJB – Complete Jewish Bible
- ESV – English Standard Version
- JST – Joseph Smith Translation
- KJV – King James Version
- LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)
- NAB – New American Bible
- NASB – New American Standard Bible
- NIV – New International Version
- NJB – New Jerusalem Bible
- NLT – New Living Translation
- NRSV – New Revised Standard Version
- TNT – William Tyndale 1534 New Testament
- TW – Thomas Wayment translation

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