

Revelation

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Introduction

“Revelation” is the Greek *apokalypsis*, meaning ‘disclose’ or ‘uncover.’¹ It also has the sense of making something fully known.² The first word should be “A” instead of “The”; it is “part of God’s ongoing self-disclosure: a revelation, one of a number, the origin of which is to be found in God himself, rather than *the* definitive vision, which is never repeated.”³ “Had God not taken the initiative, the human mind could never have understood the real forces at work in the world. Nor could anyone have known how it would all turn out.”⁴

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.⁵

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.”⁶ 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.”⁷ 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

¹ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 152.

² BDAG, 112.

³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 27.

⁴ Mounce, *Revelation*, 40.

⁵ MacArthur, *Revelation*, 1:1.

⁶ TPJS, 290; see also “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p. 1523, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 10, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/166>.

⁷ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 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.

and moves forward according to God's plan.⁸ The principle message of the book can be summed up in four words: 'Don't worry, God wins.'

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."⁹ 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

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 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 artwork 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.

⁸ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 3-4.

⁹ Wall, *Lectio*, Week 1.



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

Though Revelation has few 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.¹⁰ Others might have a different number but agree with the dependence.¹¹ 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.¹²

¹⁰ MacArthur, *Revelation*, 1:15.

¹¹ Beale and Carson, *Commentary*, 1082, give numbers of verses with OT influence tallied by various commentators ranging from 226 to 1000.

¹² Osborne, *Revelation*, 25; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 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

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.¹³ 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.¹⁴

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 37-48.¹⁵

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.¹⁶

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."¹⁷

Numbers

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.¹⁸ 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-

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.

¹³ Beale and Carson, *Commentary*, 1084.

¹⁴ See a detailed discussion with examples in Beale and Carson, *Commentary*, 1085-1086.

¹⁵ Beale and Carson, *Commentary*, 1087.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Beale and Carson, *Commentary*, 1088.

¹⁸ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 58-59; Ryken, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 599-600; Osborne, *Revelation*, 15-19.

19).¹⁹ There are also many small sets of three, four, seven, and twelve throughout the text. These and more number meanings are called out in the detailed commentary on my website.²⁰

Authorship

The author is only identified as “John” (1:1). Traditionally, this is John, the son of Zebedee and one of Jesus’ original Twelve. The author is not a native Greek speaker, using simple vocabulary and language. It is not the same author as the gospel of John or the letters of 1-3 John, based on the style of Greek in those other books. But all five books could have been influenced by John and perhaps written by others.²¹ 1 Nephi 14:18-27 explains that Nephi, John, and others shared similar visions, and that John was particularly charged with writing it—which is why he wrote Revelation and why it is preserved for us today.

Date

It is not known when John wrote the book, but there are two most likely dates. Most believe that it was probably written about 94 CE, a time when pagans, Jews, and Christians struggled in the religious and political arena. In 92 CE, there was an anti-Christian outbreak in Asia (modern western Turkey) because a serious famine was blamed on the Christians. Sanctions were applied against the churches, along with arrests, banishments, imprisonments, and executions. Then in 94 CE, Domitian persecuted Christians because they would not worship Roman gods—especially him. This was possibly when John was banished to Patmos and the book was written.²²

The second possibility is earlier, before the 70 CE fall of Jerusalem. Advocates of this time period cite stylistic distinctions and the tie to the tenth Jubilee year, which ended in 66 CE.²³ They also see the topics addressed in Revelation as being appropriate for the Neronian persecution circa 68 CE.²⁴ However, this is a minority opinion and has gained few followers.²⁵

Interpretations

Revelation has been interpreted many years over the years, as far back as the early church Fathers (second and third century). Here are some potential styles.²⁶

- **Literalism.** This was first espoused by Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, who believed that the events portrayed were literal occurrences that would happen exactly as described in the book. The most well-known modern portrayal of this approach is the *Left Behind* series of books by Timothy LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, where they depicted in novel format the completely literal manifestation of the imagery in the book.

¹⁹ Faulconer, *The New Testament Made Harder*, 492-495.

²⁰ See eleven chapters of detailed notes on <http://davelefevre.website/teaching.html>, on the right side under “The Book of Revelation.”

²¹ Wayment, *The New Testament: A Translation*, 455.

²² Draper, *Opening the Seven Seals*, 3-4.

²³ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 34-35.

²⁴ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 2-3; Mark Wilson, in Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated*, 246-247, makes an especially strong case for the early date.

²⁵ See also Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 15-21 and Osborne, *Revelation*, 6-9 for a full discussion.

²⁶ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 15-16; Frederick, “The Book of Revelation.”

- **Spiritualizing/Allegorical.** Church Fathers Origen and Andreas proposed that Revelation had a meaning that was purely symbolic, with lessons God wanted us to learn. (See Idealist below, which is very similar.)
- **Preterist.** The book is only a first-century, contemporary book, dealing with the issues of that time and place alone.
- **Historicist.** The book covers God's dealing with all of human history up to and including the time of the early Christians, but not beyond.
- **Futurist.** The book's events are future to the author's day and to our own.
- **Idealist.** The book "is a symbolic portrayal of the timeless conflict between the forces of good and evil, God and Satan." It is not perfectly chronological or even historical but does demonstrate the guiding hand of God in his plan of salvation for his people.

Outline

There are many ways to outline any book, and Revelation is no exception. Below is one model, mostly taken from Draper and Rhodes. The outline helps portray the flow of the book, which is helpful in pulling out the major messages.

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)
 - a. Ephesus (2:1-7)
 - b. Smyrna (2:8-11)
 - c. Pergamum (2:12-17)
 - d. Thyatira (2:18-29)
 - e. Sardis (3:1-6)
 - f. Philadelphia (3:7-13)
 - g. Laodicea (3:14-22)
3. God and the Lamb (4:1 – 5:14)
 - 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 (6:1 – 7:17)
 - a. The Six Seals (6:1-17)
 - b. The Seal of the Living God (7:1-17)
5. The Opening of the Seventh Seal (8:1 – 9:21)
 - a. The Seventh Seal and the First Four Trumpets (8:1-13)
 - b. The Fifth and Sixth Trumpets and the Great War (9:1-21)
6. John's Mission; Two Martyrs (10:1 – 11:19)
 - a. The Little Scroll (10:1-11)
 - b. Two Martyrs and the Seventh Trumpet (11:1-19)
7. The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon (12:1 – 13:18)
 - a. The Church and the Devil (12:1-18)
 - b. The Beasts of Sea and Land (13:1-18)
8. Judgment and Praise (14:1 – 15:8)
 - a. The Three Angels and 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 (16:1 – 17:18)
 - a. The Seven Bowl Plagues (16:1-21)
 - b. Babylon the Great (17:1-18)
10. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb (18:1 – 19:21)
 - a. The Fall of Babylon (18:1-24)
 - b. The King of Kings (19:1-21)
11. Heirs of the Celestial Glory (20:1 – 21: 27)
 - a. Satan Bound for a Thousand Years (20:1-15)
 - b. The New Jerusalem (21:1-27)
12. Blessed Are They That Do His Commandments (22:1-21)

Textual Notes

For the thorough verse-by-verse commentary, see Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation of John the Apostle*, or Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, or Osborne, *Revelation*. See also my summary of all these volumes on my website, <http://davelefevre.website/teaching.html>, right side under “The Book of Revelation.”

Chapter 1: The Majesty of Christ

The first chapter of Revelation marvelously sets up the entire book. It quickly focuses our attention on the central character of the story—Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, the Alpha and Omega, the Lamb slain for the sins of the world. He is portrayed in beautiful, symbolic language that tells of his many attributes, which are repeated in chapters 2-3 in the messages to the churches and throughout the work to bring us back to this opening vision of majesty and glory.

John’s work is both prophetic and epistolary. Like Hosea, Joel, and Amos, it opens with a declaration of source and authority—it is the “word of God” to the prophet. It also follows letter-writing conventions of the day, similar to Paul’s greetings (grace and peace in the greeting, which mixes Hellenistic and Jewish terms).²⁷

The introductory verses of the Revelation tell us who received it, who gave it, what it is about (at a summary level), and how others will be blessed as they receive it. It was validated to John by heavenly signs and tokens, so he (and we) could have confidence in the message. This revelation is designed to be read, heard, understood, and lived. It is to prepare us for what is coming soon. As we see the messages of Revelation unfolding, we, too, will know that “all things that he saw” are true.

This full name and title of the Savior is only found three times in the book, and only in the first five verses.²⁸ The word “Jesus” by itself appears eleven times (1:9; 12:17; 14:12; 17:6; 19:10; 20:4, 22:16; 22:20, 21) and “Christ” alone four times (11:15; 12:10; 20:4, 6). Mostly Jesus is known by various symbolic titles and images, including in the rest of this chapter.

Verses 4-8 open with an epistolary greeting but quickly shift to a description of the greatness of Jesus Christ, the power of his atonement, his eternal nature, and the promise of his second coming when the entire earth will declare him “the Almighty.” “. . . what begins as a normal greeting is immediately transformed into a lyrical hymn of praise to Christ. . . . He is singled out as the one whose love purchased freedom from sin. He is the one who by his death and resurrection has equipped us to serve the Father. It is to him that glory and power are ascribed. He is the one who will come on clouds of glory, and the entire human race will witness that triumphal return.”²⁹

These few verses introduce themes found throughout the book: the character of the Father and Son; the situation of the believers; Jesus paying the price for us; the promise of a shared eternal reward; and the return of the triumphant King.

²⁷ Osborne, *Revelation*, 50.

²⁸ Verses 1, 2, and 5. The KJV translators added the word “Christ” to “Jesus” in English four more times (1:9 [twice]; 12:17; 22:21) but it is not in the Greek in those verses.

²⁹ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 52.

There are seven churches listed in 1:11 and again in chapters 2-3. The word “church” today generally means a building where people meet for religious services or a formal organization with leadership and a group sharing similar beliefs. But in the NT it is *ekklesia*, meaning a gathering or assembly. It was used of the gathering of a legislative body in Greek, but the early Christian church adopted it as a term to represent their own meetings, both to tie them to the OT practices (the LXX uses *ekklesia* for the gathering of Israel) and to offer a more legitimate impression of their religion in political circles.³⁰ John’s use of seven churches doesn’t mean his message was limited to just those congregations; because seven represents completion or fullness, the seven stand in for the entire body of Christians.³¹ Indeed, as we will see in chapters 2-3, the characteristics John calls out for each take in a large number of things seen in the church of his day and ours.

Verses 9-18, especially 14-16, describe the Savior in magnificent vision; see also Daniel 10:5-6. This is a great example of how John used Old Testament imagery. Compare also D&C 110:2-4 where Joseph Smith described the Savior as he saw him in the Kirtland temple. The dress reflects elements of kingship and of priesthood, portraying Jesus as both the great High Priest and the King of kings.

The chapter ends with John’s commission to write the vision (vv. 19-20), which was divine, not just a man’s decision, strongly implying that the interpretation of the vision comes the same way. See also 1 Nephi 14:24-27. Second, the book of Revelation was probably given in stages, perhaps over multiple days but at least with enough of a pause between sections for John to write it down. We see similar injunctions and experiences in D&C 76.

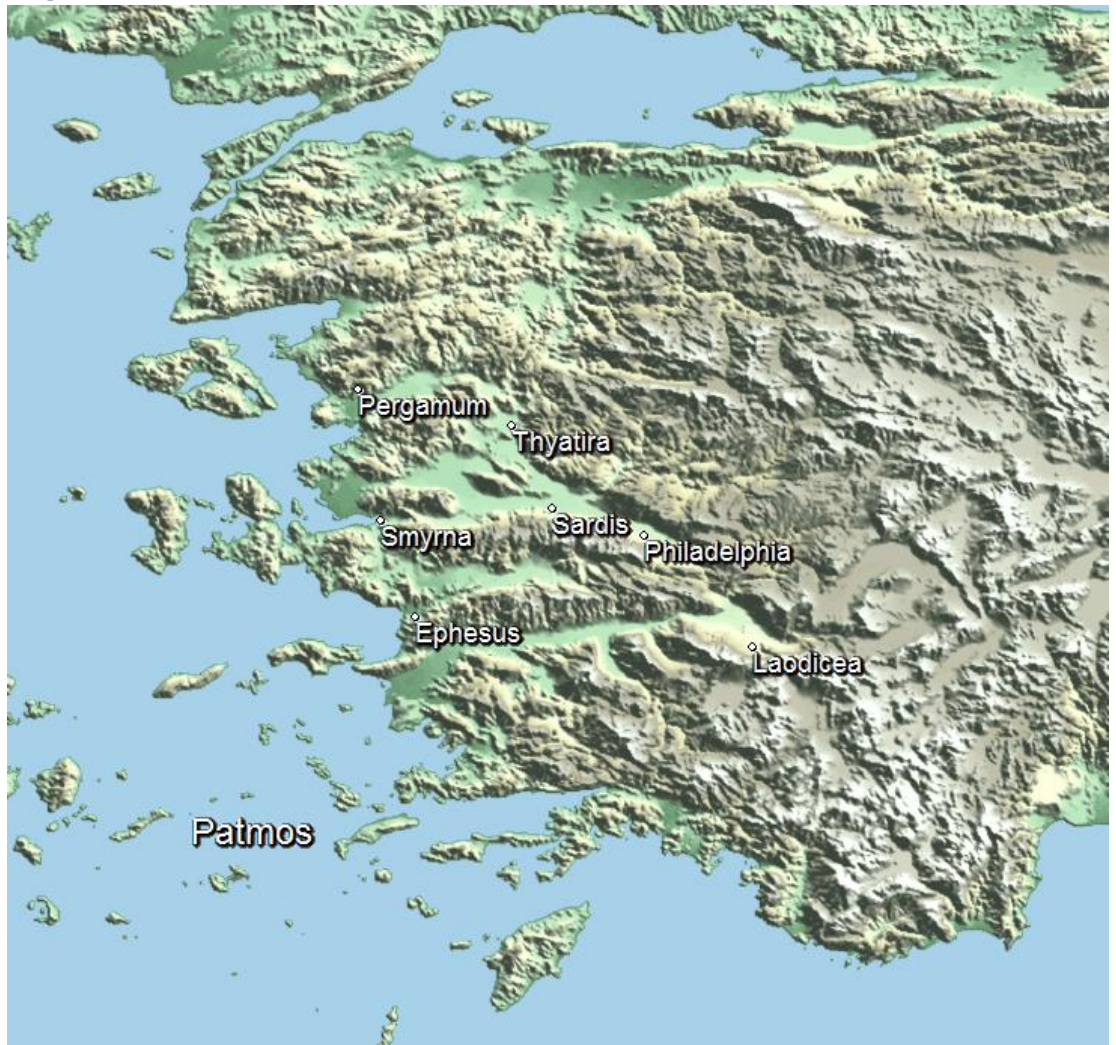
John is writing a letter, but one that doesn’t just contain exhortations or instruction. The opening vision of Revelation sets the tone for the entire unveiling of truth that we experience in these pages—it’s all about Christ. The images in these verses will appear again in chapters 2-3 and throughout the book. We are comforted each time by the symbolism of a Savior who is powerful, truthful, supportive, watchful, present, involved, and loving in every way. He knows us collectively and individually and ministers to us in both manners. He is always with us, even when we might think he is not, when we feel alone, when we struggle with our own sins or the impact of the sins of others on our lives. He is coming again to wage the battle that has already been won. He has “washed [freed] us from our sins in his own blood” (1:5) and made it possible for us to be “kings and priests unto God” (1:6). John bears this testimony in no uncertain terms so we might know to be on the side of God and his Son and not have the sword of judgment come down upon us, but rather experience the sword of blessing, that commends us for our righteousness, perhaps like a king would recognize the service of a noble servant by knighting him with a sword touched on the shoulders. We acknowledge that Jesus is eternal, there from the beginning and there until the end, “the Almighty” (1:8), and we shall one day fall at his feet as did John in love and respect.

³⁰ BDAG, 303.

³¹ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 179.

Chapters 2-3: The Messages to the Seven Churches

Chapters 2-3 include messages to seven cities in Asia (western Turkey today) where there were members of the Church. The message to each church has a similar structure (see the summary below). It starts with a symbol that identifies Christ, taken from Revelation 1, so it was clear from whom the message came. Then there are some compliments or recognition of good, followed by some warnings of the need to repent. Finally, the Lord gives an 'overcome' promise which anticipates



themes developed later in the letter. Not all elements are in every passage to each city, but the pattern is consistent enough to be clearly intentional.

These messages show Christ's individual knowledge of and love for the members of the church and his desire to bring each one of us back to the Father. All the messages apply equally to us today, as John shows by his consistent plural wording: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the *churches*." Seven represents perfection, so using that number also shows he is writing to the entire Church.³²

The messages also show a church in apostasy. The cities that John mentioned were all strong during Paul's day, but now they were slipping away, full of false doctrine and sin. The Lord and John were anxious to reclaim the Saints, but the Lord knew—and John had to also—that the church as a whole was quickly moving away from the truth and into the darkness of confusion that lasted until a spring day in 1820.

A note about the common theme of 'overcoming': See Matthew 16:24, footnote d, where the JST changes the verse to say, "And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments." Overcoming is about leaving the world behind, repenting of our sins, and

³² Draper, *Opening the Seven Seals*, 36-37.

embracing the truths that will bring us eternal joy. These promises provide the hope that the other things in Revelation—and our lives—are truly not significant. The blessings are far greater than the sacrifices and trials.

The messages can be summarized as follows:

A. Ephesus (7:1-7)

- a. Speaker: He that holds the seven stars and walks among the lampstands (see 1:13, 16, 20)
- b. Recognition: Patience, rejection of evil, false apostles, and Nicolaitans
- c. Admonition: Left first love, repent, do first works; will remove lampstand
- d. Blessing: Eat of the tree of life

B. Smyrna (2:8-11)

- a. Speaker: The first and the last, who was dead but is alive (see 1:17-18)
- b. Recognition: Tribulation, poverty, persecution, prison
- c. Admonition: [none]
- d. Blessing: Not be hurt of the second death

C. Pergamos (2:12-17)

- a. Speaker: He with the sharp, two-edged sword (see 1:16)
- b. Recognition: Hold fast God's name, don't deny, even after Antipus's martyrdom
- c. Admonition: Allow the doctrine of Balaam, eat food sacrificed to idols, commit fornication, allow Nicolaitans; will fight against them
- d. Blessing: Hidden manna, white stone, new name

D. Thyatira (2:18-29)

- a. Speaker: Son of God, eyes like flame, feet like brass (see 1:13-15)
- b. Recognition: Charity, service, faith, patience, and works
- c. Admonition: Suffer Jezebel to teach and seduce many to fornicate and sacrifice to idols; tribulation and punishment coming according to works
- d. Blessing: Power over nations, rule with rod of iron, break them, receive the morning star

E. Sardis (3:1-6)

- a. Speaker: Has the seven spirits and stars (see 1:16)
- b. Recognition: Have a name, strengthen what remains, not defiled garments; walk with the Lord in white
- c. Admonition: Not perfect, remember and hold fast to teachings, repent; Lord comes as a thief and surprises them
- d. Blessing: Clothed in white, name in the book of life, confessed before Father and angels

F. Philadelphia (3:7-13)

- a. Speaker: He that is hold, true, has the key of David, opens and shuts and no man can change it (see 1:18)
- b. Recognition: Kept the word and not denied God; others will know of God's love for them, kept from temptation, won't lose crown
- c. Admonition: [none]
- d. Blessing: Pillar in the temple, name of God and his city written on, new name

G. Laodicea (3:14-22)

- a. Speaker: The Amen, faithful and true witness, beginning of creation (see 1:5, 8, 18)
- b. Recognition: [none]

- c. Admonition: Not hold or cold; spewed out of the mouth; rich and happy with the things of the world; buy divine gold and white raiment, anoint eyes to see; the Lord will come in if they open the door
- d. Blessing: Sit with the Lord in his throne and with the Father

Several themes arise in the letters to the churches. First, the messages to the churches are ones that we should all be able to relate to. There are people like those represented here in many churches, and traits like those called out by the Lord in many hearts. A healthy and humble self-examination can lead us to repent and improve our discipleship.

Second, the promised blessings are stunning, piling one atop the other and concluding with the ultimate blessing that we can sit beside Jesus and share in his eternal reign as we overcome evil, sin, and the carnal nature we struggle with each day. But they are only available to us if we “overcome” the world through Christ.

Third, life is full of trials and challenges. In many cases, the Lord does nothing to remove them from our lives because they further our personal growth and discipleship. But he always provides support, encouragement, and an admonition to keep going, move forward, and patiently wait for the greater reward that inevitably follows. We are engaged in a cosmic battle and there are many casualties, but the war has already been won by Jesus, so the outcome is assured. The question for us is which side do we choose?

Fourth, do not follow after false leaders and false ideas. The consistent condemnation and what led to the apostasy in most NT cities was straying from the core gospel message and either getting caught up in ‘extra’ efforts and higher status, or being duped by false teachings that convinced many to act contrary to gospel teachings and their covenants. How critical it is to follow the prophet, follow the scriptures, and follow the Spirit and don’t be moved by false voices that contradict those sources of truth.

Fifth, pride and indifference can kill our progression and separate us from God. The antidote for pride is humility and a correct understanding of who we are. The remedy for indifference is to remember our covenants and have that memory drive us to action.

Finally, love is at the core of all God does for us and with the world. Love is action—it inspires good works and service to others, as well as repentance and an improved relationship with God, because God is love.

Chapter 4: The Vision of Heaven

After the opening letters to the churches, most of the rest of the book takes places in John’s future—and much of it in ours—but with the same message as before: Don’t worry, “hold fast,” God will win this war, no matter how it looks today.

Chapters 4-5 set the stage for the rest of the story because they show John’s audience why they can have faith in God. One author calls it “the fulcrum of Revelation.”³³ Imagine a predominantly Gentile audience who has been raised in a culture that feared capricious gods and never knew what they were going to do. They were taught to pray to many gods because you never knew which one was listening or would answer. They knew that the gods saw them more as slaves than children and would just as soon harm or kill them than bless them.

³³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 141.

John's vision of who God and Christ are show them as powerful, unchanging Gods, dedicated to the salvation of those who worship them—their children. Their love, trustworthiness, and self-sacrifice for us allows us to have faith in them, believe their promises, and trust that all things truly will work out for our benefit.

In chapter 4, the revelation shifts gears with a new vision and perspective, though John and the Lord carried forward many of the metaphors already introduced in the first three chapters. With these chapters, the vision moves into the heavens, right into the throne room of the Father. The action of going up into the heavenly temple and being in the presence of the Father adds great drama to the story. The sights and sounds John witnesses are stunning, full of meaning, and rich in pathos. He experiences joy and exultation, deep sorrow when the plan of the Father appears at risk, and eternal gratitude when one steps forward to execute it. Finding and identifying the one worthy to do the Father's will and praising them both for their acts in our behalf are the main points of these verses. Throughout the rest of the book, John's view will shift between earth and heaven, as if the Lord is offering him sober truth alternating with divine comfort.

The message of chapter 4 is that God the Father is the sovereign Lord of the universe, though John carefully never portrays God himself. Instead, John describes his attributes through various symbols. The whole chapter parallels Ezekiel 1 and has elements of Exodus 19. D&C 77 is the key to understanding many images in this chapter. It portrays a God who is surrounded by his creations, those he exalts and who therefore eternally praise him and give him glory. He is life and death and victory and power. This image is one of the heavenly council, where God surrounds himself with "angelic beings and lesser deities" and the divine will is made known, often to prophets who are invited to watch and learn.³⁴

This chapter introduces several strange animals. These are *zōa*, or 'living creatures,' contrasted with *thēlion*, which means 'wild beasts' (the word used in chapters 13 and 17). Ezekiel sees similar creatures in his vision (Ezekiel 1:6-10). What are these creatures? There are many, many interpretations (one author lists twenty-one³⁵); but see D&C 77:2-3 for the inspired response: they are "figurative expressions" to describe "the paradise of God, the happiness of man, and of beasts." Each is a "spiritual being in the likeness of that which is temporal," or in other words, "four individual beasts...to represent the glory of the classes of beings in their destined order" enjoying "eternal felicity."

Joseph Smith taught that the beasts may have "lived on another planet than ours."³⁶ He also declared, "Says one, 'I cannot believe in the salvation of beasts.' Any man who would tell you that this could not be, would tell you that the revelations are not true. John heard the words of the beasts giving glory to God, and understood them. God who made the beasts could understand every language spoken by them. The four beasts were four of the most noble animals that had filled the measure of their creation, and had been saved from other worlds, because they were perfect; they were like angels in their sphere. We are not told where they came from, and I do not know; but they were seen and heard by John praising and glorifying God."³⁷

Jewish synagogues often had windows with pictures of the twelve tribes' symbols, so these were very familiar to Jews of John's day. The four beasts were also representative of all of creation, standing for wild and

³⁴ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 111, cites Job 15:8; Psalm 89:6-7, and Jeremiah 23:18 as examples of the council, with Jeremiah 23:22 and Amos 3:7 as examples of prophets taking part.

³⁵ Cited by Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 124.

³⁶ Parry and Parry, *Understanding*, 61, quoting from Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 171.

³⁷ *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 291-292.

domestic animals, man, and fowls of the air. They also acted as guardians of the throne of God, like cherubim.³⁸

Chapter 5: The Sealed Book and the Worthy Lamb

Though we saw the Father on his throne in chapter 4 and are astounded at the powerful images of his attributes, he makes no action or movement in John's portrayal. Action is delegated to the character dramatically introduced in chapter 5, who carries out the Father's plan. As the message shifts to the Lion who is also the Lamb of God, we see him as the only one who is worthy, by virtue of his sacrifice, to open the sealed book that has the Father's plans. The seals are not opened until chapters 6-8, but this chapter allows us to have certainty that they will be, because of the one who is prepared to do so. As chapter 4 and Ezekiel 1 are closely aligned, so chapter 5 and Ezekiel 2 have many parallels.

The scroll introduced in this chapter is written on both sides and sealed with seven seals. Technically this type of scroll is called an episthograph.³⁹ If on papyrus, it was written *recto* (papyrus strips horizontal, easy to write on) and *verso* (strips vertical, harder to write on). If it was parchment, then it was written on the skin side (easier to write on) and the hair side (the hair is gone but it is more difficult to write on). The point is that the scroll contains so much information that the entire thing is covered with writing and not any part of it is left blank. This compares to Ezekiel 2:9-10, where that prophet also saw a scroll from heaven written on both sides.

A signet ring stamped in wax produced a seal, typically used by kings or high officials to verify their documents when having them delivered remotely. Seven seals perhaps related to the custom of that day of having seven witnesses at the signing of important documents like wills who then bind/tie and seal the document. The purposes of sealing them up included keeping them secret until they were delivered to the right people, or to create a copy that could be preserved in a sealed (unchanged) state if it was needed for comparison or consultation later, such as if there was a contractual disagreement (Jeremiah 32:9-15 describes such a document). Seven seals also mean that the document was perfectly sealed, and that God's will cannot be defeated.

Joseph Smith explained, "We are to understand that the first seal contains the things of the first thousand years, and the second also of the second thousand years, and so on until the seventh" (D&C 77:7). This is not so much a statement as to the age of the earth but as a representation of God's involvement in the history of mankind throughout the age of the earth (seven thousand years representing the completeness of a long period of time), just as the creation is represented in seven days in Genesis 1 but was actually a much longer period of time.

Everything hinges on these scenes of the Father and the Son. "With the consummate skill of an artist, John structures his material in the Revelation so as to advance his central, christological subject in a series of dramatic disclosures towards a climax."⁴⁰ We see with these verses how the perfect plan to save the human race originates with the Father but cannot be carried out without the perfect sacrifice of the Lamb. In John's vision, the Father is static and takes no action; it is the Son who makes everything happen, representing the immeasurable debt we owe to him for our salvation.⁴¹ When the Lamb is recognized for who he is and what he

³⁸ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 379.

³⁹ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 128.

⁴⁰ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 110.

⁴¹ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 423.

has done and will do, all of heaven and earth fall down to worship and acknowledge him. The rest of the book merely shows how what is recognized as already accomplished in these chapters plays out in the history of the earth, assuring John's readers, including us today, that we can have perfect faith in God's plan and the outcome he has promised, because the Lion/Lamb has fulfilled the plan in every way. Have faith, not fear, and hold fast!

Chapter 6: The Six Seals

In this chapter, the Lamb will open the first six seals. Having taken the sealed scroll from the Father, the Lamb does what he alone is worthy to do—open it and expose the contents to John and the world. He sets in motion the judgment of each dispensation throughout the history of the world, some of which are represented here only briefly, with the seventh getting the bulk of the attention, starting with chapter 8.

The seven seals seem to be grouped into four and three (as are the later trumpet and bowl judgments in chapters 8-9 and 16). Here the first four are represented by similar symbols—horses and riders—while the latter three present multiple symbols to characterize their periods.

This section is the beginning of the 'revelation' or unveiling of the Father's plan for mankind through the opening of the seven seals on the book introduced in chapter 5. There are many interpretations of the book and the seals and what their opening means.⁴² Fortunately, we have D&C 77:6-7 to clarify that it is a symbol of "the revealed will, mysteries, and the works of God" during the earth's "temporal existence." The dispensational model works well, since the seven thousand years is a figurative and not literal time of the earth's temporal existence.

The horse imagery used with the first four seals is from Zechariah 1:8-11 and 6:1-8. The four beasts (originally from chapters 4-5), messages, and horses represent geographical completeness—these four seal-opening events cover the earth, or at least all of it in the vision.⁴³ They also represent a progression—conquest to civil war to famine to death—that demonstrates man's self-inflicted consequences when he ignores God's commandments.⁴⁴

With the fifth seal, John sees martyrs, which ties back to the twenty-four elders—this is John's day. He sees them in white robes under the altar crying, how long until their blood would be avenged (verse 10)? This reflects a promise of the Lord to the house of Israel in Deuteronomy 32:43, "Rejoice, O ye nations, *with* his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, *and* to his people."

In opening the seals, the vision goes through the time prior to John's day very quickly, then spends a bit more on his own day and ours. But then nearly the entire rest of the book is on what happens during the seventh seal (starting in chapter 8). This fits the declaration at the beginning that John was going to write about "things which must shortly come to pass" and "the things which shall be hereafter" (1:1, 19; 4:1).

⁴² Various commentaries (e.g., Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 141-142; Osborne, *Revelation*, 276) propose that it is Christ; the spirit of conquest; the Anti-Christ; the Parthians; or invasion by the Roman empire. D&C 77 make the intent of the images clear and straightforward, and impact the interpretation of the entire work, knowing that the seals represent periods of the earth's history and thus the images events or persons during those time periods.

⁴³ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 456.

⁴⁴ Osborne, *Revelation*, 272.

With the sixth seal, John's pace slows, providing many more details. This may represent the time of the Restoration—our day—leading up to the Millennium. See D&C 88, which was given just a short time after Joseph Smith did the translation of Revelation, for several interesting parallels and interpretations.

For John's first century audience especially, the events of the sixth seal are the answer to the question, "How long?" In the fifth seal, they were not promised relief or vindication, but in the sixth and seventh seals, the Lord reveals his hand to do both.

Additionally, there are seven consequences of wickedness in verses 12-15: 1) earthquake; 2) darkened sun; 3) red moon; 4) stars falling; 5) heavens rolling up; 6) mountains and 7) islands moving. Many of these same consequences are mentioned in D&C 88:87-91.

In ancient Jewish thought, mankind's evil directly impacted the heavens, causing things to move out of their places and order. Earthquakes were also a symbol of divine displeasure. We may have scientific explanations (or think we will) for these events, but that doesn't change the fact that God is using them to get the attention of a wicked world and call them to repent.⁴⁵ At any rate, they may not be literal but rather symbolic of massive divine judgment, in whatever form it may actually take.⁴⁶

Old Testament precedent for the phrases come from many passages, including Isaiah 13:10-13; 34:4; Ezekiel 32:6-8; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:15-16. Jesus also invoked these images in Matthew 24:29 and Mark 13:24-25.⁴⁷

Chapter 7: The Seal of the Living God

Chapter 7 continues the story and message of the sixth seal. But now the focus shifts from the fate of the wicked to that of the righteous in the sixth seal period. Angels come to seal up 144,000 members of the tribes of Israel who have given themselves to the Lord, then we learn that there is also a vast number of people too large to count who will join these 144,000. With all these people saved, the men and creatures around the throne of God join them in singing praises to God and the Lamb. The promise to seal a group in their foreheads before the destruction of the wicked is also found in Ezekiel 9:4-8.

Slaves in the Roman world were sometimes marked in their foreheads when their relationship with their master was permanent. Other people put a mark of their favorite god in their forehead.⁴⁸ Here the messenger from the east will seal the righteous with the mark of God himself, showing to whom they belonged. Compare Exodus 12:7-28 where the doorposts were marked and Ezekiel 9:4-8 where the people were marked; in both cases, it was a mark to protect the people from destruction. Paul likely had this in mind when he wrote to Timothy that "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Timothy 2:19).

One of the most interesting comparisons is from Exodus 28:36-38. There the Lord instructs that Aaron, the high priest, shall wear a cap with a gold plate attached that hangs down on his forehead. On the plate were the words *qadosh l'yahweh*, "holiness to the Lord." Wearing this, "Aaron bears whatever guilt the Israelites may

⁴⁵ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 482-483.

⁴⁶ If we took them literally, they've all been fulfilled in one way or another in the last century, even in a single lifetime, with earthquakes, eclipses, meteor showers, etc. Considering the metaphorical meaning can yield great insights into the revelation's message for us today (Wilcox, *Understanding*, 78).

⁴⁷ Beale and Carson, *Commentary*, 1104-1105.

⁴⁸ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 505.

incur in consecrating any of their sacred gifts [temple offerings of sacrifice and thanks]." Aaron is instructed that "this plate must always be over his forehead, so that they [the people] may find favor with the Lord" (Exodus 28:38, NAB).⁴⁹ The people in white robes in John's vision are "kings and priests" (1:6; 5:10), and the image of being sealed up in their foreheads like Aaron the high priest with a phrase that consecrated them to the Lord, evokes the idea of Jesus as our great high priest (Hebrews 4:14) bearing our guilt so that we can be free and offer thanks to him eternally.

Wilford Woodruff said: "Can you tell me where the people are who will be shielded and protected from these calamities and judgments which are even now at our doors? I'll tell you. The Priesthood of God who honor their priesthood, and who are worthy of their blessings are the only ones who shall have this safety and protection. No other people have a right to be shielded from these judgments. They are at our very doors; not even this people will escape them entirely. They will come down like the judgments of Sodom and Gomorrah. And none but the priesthood will be safe from their fury. God has held the angels of destruction for many years, lest they should reap down the wheat with the tares. But I want to tell you now, that those angels have left the portals of heaven, and they stand over the earth waiting to pour out judgments. And from this very day they shall be poured out. Calamities and troubles are increasing in the earth, and there is a meaning to these things. Remember this, and reflect upon these matters. If you do your duty, and I do my duty, we'll have the protection, and shall pass through the afflictions in peace and in safety. Read the scriptures and the revelations. They will tell you about these things" (*The Young Women's Journal*, 5:512-513).

As with chapters 4 and 5, symbols in chapter 7 received particular attention in D&C 77:8-11. Armed with an inspired interpretation of these images, the meaning of the chapter is very clear—it relates to the Lord's work to prepare the earth for the opening of the seventh seal, which is the beginning of the millennial reign of Christ after his Second Coming.

For example D&C 77:11 explains that the 144,000 "are high priests," ordained out of every nation, "to bring as many as will come to the church of the Firstborn." In *History of the Church* 6:365, Joseph Smith further associated them with the temple. We learn more about these people in Revelation 14.

The number 144,000 is twelve (meaning, priesthood) squared (emphasized) and multiplied by 1000 (fullness or totality). That makes it a thoroughly symbolic number, representing a huge number of priesthood holders carrying the gospel to the world (compare Isaiah 42:6-7). This is the only dispensation when full priesthood authority operates throughout the world, thus the sixth seal is the only time such a huge number of priesthood holders could be sent out.

There is also a tie to Numbers 1 where a census is taken of Israel's able-bodied men, in preparation for military duty.⁵⁰ In Numbers, men are counted from each tribe who are ready for service. In Revelation, the men are "not defiled with women" (abstinence was often a requirement for military service) and they are willing to "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" (14:4) as an army would follow the orders of their leaders. The 144,000 of Revelation are not a military force, but they are God's army, with his name inscribed on their foreheads (14:1), ready to carry the message to the millions of souls needing salvation in the world.

⁴⁹ Beale and Carson, *Commentary*, 1107.

⁵⁰ Beale and Carson, *Commentary*, 1107.

Several times John's view switched between things happening on earth and in heaven—seeing the throne is the key to know when he is looking at heaven (v. 10-11). The vision of the 144,000 was looking at the earth, but in verses 9-17 the great multitude he sees is clearly in heaven. The purpose of returning the view to heaven was to remind him and us of his core message—*hope*—and that God is in charge. The image of the people in this section arrayed in white and waving palm branches was invoked in the dedicatory prayer of the Kirkland temple by the Prophet (D&C 109:76).

This vast throng was before the throne, with the elders and beasts, praising God. The 144,000 were the high priests, whereas this multitude is *all* the exalted. Though the connection is never drawn directly, the 144,000 were probably the means of this great multitude being brought to Christ. It fulfills the promises to Abraham that his seed would be as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5) and the sand on the beach (Genesis 32:12).

There are distinct parallels in phrasing and imagery with chapters 5 and 7; the Lion becoming the Lamb may align with the 144,000 turning into a vast crowd as “every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation,” redeemed by Christ in 5:9 become “all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” who are saved out of the great tribulation in 7:9.⁵¹

For John, these verses are a vision of the future, for the great multitude represents those who have come through a future time of difficulty; John sees them as victorious before the trials occur.⁵² That he jumps around in time should not trouble us, because the entire book does that. “John's eschatology in Revelation is dynamic, and not linear.”⁵³

The opening of the sixth seal turns our attention to the time before the Second Coming—to our day. It is full of signs that should lead the world to recognize the hand of the Lord but still many do not repent. Instead, they try to hide from the glory of God. But even as the wicked fear and ask, “Who shall be able to stand?”, a great multitude, too large to count, called out of the world symbolically by missionaries from the tribes of Israel, are sealed up to eternal life. This vast crowd sing praises to God and fall down to worship the Lamb, who gives them eternal food and drink without end and wipes away anything that would bring them sorrow or pain.

Said John Taylor, “And there is something that goes a little further than we think about sometimes; and that is, while we profess to be followers of the Lord, while we profess to have received the Gospel, and to be governed by it, a profession will amount to nothing unless we have washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb . . . we must get there before we shall be prepared to inherit glory and exaltation.”⁵⁴

Sadly, one of the messages of John's vision is that the first century church will fail—that is, she will go into hiding for a time until conditions are right for her to return and make herself known. This does not mean there were not good, strong, faithful Christians in those early centuries; John's vision, in fact, shows that there were. It does mean, however, that “there simply was not enough overall righteousness to stop the apostasy.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ Beale and Carson, *Commentary*, 1108.

⁵² Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 161.

⁵³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 196.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 529.

⁵⁵ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 355.

But the important long-term message is that this short-term failure is just a temporary setback and that God's plan to save as many of his children as possible works patiently and appropriately in the history of the world to bring truth to all who will receive it. God's full victory will happen, we can trust.

Chapter 8: The Seventh Seal and the First Four Trumpets

Now it's time to open the last of the seven seals, which happens in chapter 8. This event signals the beginning of the completion of God's work among men, because the seventh seal is the final one—its opening shows that the end is near. It begins with a period of quiet when the events of the previous six seals might be temporarily forgotten, but it quickly moves into dramatic events that are directly tied to God's intervention.

The judgments of the seventh seal come in two 'waves': the trumpet judgments and the bowl judgments. In chapters 8-9, we'll see six of the seven trumpet judgments. Though true for the whole book, it is especially important to recognize in these chapters: Revelation is not about chronology but is instead a tapestry of related images being woven together to show the ultimate victory of God and Christ over Satan. "From this point on, the Apocalypse becomes a multidimensional presentation of the final triumph of God over evil. Any attempt to arrange the material in a strictly sequential pattern is doomed to failure."⁵⁶ Readers should keep that broad picture in mind and not get too caught up in the interpretation of the details, especially the too literal interpretation that plagues many readers and teachers of Revelation today.

The judgments portrayed in chapter 8 particularly are modeled on those given in Exodus, as the Lord was softening Pharaoh's heart to let the slaves of Israel go. As with the opening of the seals on the scroll, the trumpet judgments naturally group into four and three—the first four impact the earth and the natural world, and the last three have a more complex story to tell. (We'll see the same pattern with the bowl judgments later in chapter 16.)

There is also an element of 'de-creation' in these judgments, as the Lord enacts "a systematic dismantling of the created order of Gen. 1, though not in the same order."⁵⁷ Light, air, vegetation, the sun, moon, and stars, sea creatures, and man are all targeted.

Some see the acts of hurting the earth, seas, trees, etc., as symbolic of judging people, as reflected scriptures that speak of people like trees, waters, and more.⁵⁸ However, hurting the environment does in fact, hurt the people living in it and can bring them to think of God more than in the past. It seems likely that the judgments against the earth come first to prepare people for—and potentially avoid—judgments against them.

Many Christian interpreters tie these judgments to Daniel 9 and other chapters, creating their vision of the last days that includes Rapture/Seven-Year Tribulation/Second Coming. Michael Wilcox overlays D&C 88 with these chapters to deduce that "the last act of the sixth seal or the first act of the seventh, if you prefer, will be the great sign in heaven that all people will see." This is then followed by the events here in chapters 8 and 9, in his estimation.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 207.

⁵⁷ Beale and Carson, *Commentary*, 1112.

⁵⁸ Wilcox, *Understanding*, 17-121.

⁵⁹ Wilcox, *Understanding*, 104; he does suggest that this may not be the case on page 105: "I do not wish to be dogmatic; I simply find it interesting and worthy of reflection."

The events of these chapters are surely those spoken of by the Lord when he said, “For I am no respecter of persons, and will that all men shall know that the day speedily cometh; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand, when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion. And also the Lord shall have power over his saints, and shall reign in their midst, and shall come down in judgment upon Idumea, or the world” (D&C 1:35-36).

In regards to the trumpets, it’s not known if these were the *shofar* (ram’s horn) types used by priests to call people to worship or the metal trumpet (more like big bugles) such as used by an army to rally the troops or signal orders.⁶⁰ One could also be used to signify the coronation of the king.⁶¹ There were “at least twenty-one blasts of the trumpet daily in the temple, and on feast days as many as forty-eight.”⁶² Either way, the angels stand ready to announce God’s will.

The seven trumpets here echo the seven trumpet blasts used to signal the destruction of Jericho as the Israelites entered the Promised Land (Joshua 6:4-20). When the ark came to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 15:24) and when the walls of Jerusalem were dedicated after the return from exile (Nehemiah 12:41) we see two other occasions where seven trumpets were used to mark the event.⁶³ Seven angels blowing trumpets are also mentioned in D&C 88:94-110.

D&C 77:12 teaches: “Q. What are we to understand by the sounding of the trumpets, mentioned in the 8th chapter of Revelation? A. We are to understand that as God made the world in six days, and on the seventh day he finished his work, and sanctified it, and also formed man out of the dust of the earth, even so, in the beginning of the seventh thousand years will the Lord God sanctify the earth, and complete the salvation of man, and judge all things, and shall redeem all things, except that which he hath not put into his power, when he shall have sealed all things, unto the end of all things; and the sounding of the trumpets of the seven angels are the preparing and finishing of his work, in the beginning of the seventh thousand years—the preparing of the way before the time of his coming.”

In other words, just as the seven days of creation are symbolic of the creation of the world, so the seven trumpets are symbolic of the end of it (or at least the beginning of the end). They may or may not represent actual individual events but are given to teach us how God will interact with mankind prior to the Second Coming and Millennial day.

Chapter 9: The Fifth and Sixth Trumpets and the Great War

Chapter 9 now offers the next two trumpets, which are more complex scenes than that of the first four trumpets and focus on the impact on mankind more than the world around them. Each one is a “woe” by itself, so the fifth trumpet is also the first woe, and so on. The final trumpet will be sounded in the next chapter. The two in this chapter first portray the devil and his ultimate destination, and how great trials come to mankind from the smoke of his bottomless pit. The second woe and sixth trumpet speak of a staggering army whose numbers cannot be counted and who do great damage to everything around them. Sadly, in the end, the people who are suffering under these judgments neither repent nor turn to God, which the limited

⁶⁰ Arnold, *Zondervan*, 300-301.

⁶¹ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 173.

⁶² Osborne, *Revelation*, 342, quoting the Mishnah, *m. Sukk.* 5.5.

⁶³ Osborne, *Revelation*, 342-343.

judgment is designed to help them do. Instead, they grow more strong in their anger, bitterness, and sin, and leave themselves completely vulnerable to the plagues.

D&C 77:13 records: “Q. When are the things to be accomplished, which are written in the 9th chapter of Revelation? A. They are to be accomplished after the opening of the seventh seal, before the coming of Christ.”

This means that all the events of this chapter precede the Second Coming still, as do subsequent chapters.

The judgments of the trumpets blown by the seven angels signal the coming of the wrath of the Lord on the unrepentance inhabitants of the earth. In these scenes, the church and the righteous are not seen, though their presence is implied in chapters 6-7; they will be the subject of chapters 11-13. They are protected from the judgments just as the children of Israel were protected from the plagues in the Exodus account as they prayed, stayed faithful, were silent, and put the blood of the lamb—the mark of God for their day—on their doorposts.

The promise of Revelation is that those who give their lives fully to God and become his known slaves and possession will be able to watch these judgments of the seventh seal without concern for themselves. See D&C 45:66-70 for a similar promise. Also, in a quote that surely applies here with locusts that sting like scorpions and horses with snake-head tails, Jesus promised the faithful “power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10:19). However, watching all this, those sealed of God, like the heavens in Moses 7:37, will surely weep for the suffering of all those struggling souls around them.

Chapter 10: The Little Scroll

As readers, we anxiously await the blowing of the seventh and final trumpet. But before that happens, there is an interlude, a pause in the narrative that temporarily turns our focus to two other topics, just as the sealing of the 144,000 and the heavenly multitude were a break between the sixth and seventh seals.

The first topic in the interlude here in chapter 10 bears upon the mission of the prophet who is writing the revelation, what he is doing at the time of the vision and what he will do later. Because his mission lasts until the return of the heavenly King in glory, his vision becomes his life.

The second has to do with two other prophets in chapter 11 who have significant roles in the great latter-day scene that is the seventh seal’s purpose—to prepare the earth for the coming of the Lord. Only after these scenes does the seventh trumpet sound, though in a quiet, almost imperceptible way that instead of wrapping everything up, opens us to additional visions of the past, present, and future, and to another set of judgments before the true final end of the wicked and the reign of the King of Kings.

While Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were translating 3 Nephi in 1829, they came across a passage that spoke of three of the Nephite disciples desiring of Jesus “the thing which John, my beloved, who was with me in my ministry, before that I was lifted up by the Jews, desired of me.” Jesus therefore granted unto them that they would “never taste of death; but ye shall live to behold all the doings of the Father unto the children of men, even until all things shall be fulfilled according to the will of the Father, when I shall come in my glory with the powers of heaven” (3 Nephi 28:6-7). This may have led them to John 21:20-23 which is a somewhat enigmatic discussion of the fate of John.

Considering these two passages, the two men had a discussion, wondering if John was granted the same thing as the three Nephite disciples? 3 Nephi merely said he desired it but does not make clear that he received it.

The two took opposing positions and determined to seek an answer from the Lord, which they did using Joseph's seer stone. The result was a vision of a document that John himself wrote and hid up, which the brethren were able to translate as they were doing with the Book of Mormon. In this document, it is clear that John was permitted by the Lord to "tarry until I come in my glory, and shalt prophesy before nations, kindreds, tongues and people" (D&C 7:3).

This section alludes to that mission using similar language: that John would "prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings." In short, John's mission became extended down to our own day and beyond, making him not just a prophetic viewer of these events but a key player. He was seeing his own personal future tied up in the events of the last days.

D&C 77:14 explains John's role is to gather Israel, Elias-like: "Q. What are we to understand by the little book which was eaten by John, as mentioned in the 10th chapter of Revelation? A. We are to understand that it was a mission, and an ordinance, for him to gather the tribes of Israel; behold, this is Elias, who, as it is written, must come and restore all things."

Joseph Smith said, "John the Revelator [is] among the Ten Tribes of Israel who had been led away by Shalmanaser, King of Israel,⁶⁴ to prepare them for their return from their Long dispersion, to again possess the land of their father's."⁶⁵ He was also one of the three who appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to restore the Melchizedek priesthood (D&C 27:12), thus making him a restorer Elias.

In verse 4, John had to seal up things he saw so a later prophet could write about them more fully, just as Nephi did for John; see 1 Nephi 14:24-28 where Nephi was told not to write some things because John will later; see also Daniel 12:9 where Daniel is also shown things that are sealed up "till the time of the end." Similarly, Daniel was told to seal up some of his visionary material (Daniel 8:26; 12:4, 9) and Paul was commanded not to write some of his vision (2 Corinthians 12:4).⁶⁶ The act of sealing up the vision is accomplished by *not* writing it (notice the order).⁶⁷

Some of the sealed things are possibly now revealed in D&C 88:87-116, followed by 117-126 which tell us what to do to prepare!⁶⁸

Chapter 11: Two Martyrs and the Seventh Trumpet

There is much confusion about this chapter in general, with some calling it the most difficult chapter in the book to understand. Fortunately, with the help of latter-day prophets, it's much clearer.

Though we have not heard the seventh trumpet sound yet, the imagery of this chapter takes us down to the critical moment of the formal establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth. John's focus shifts from his own mission in chapter 10 to some scenes at the very end of the world—which are now at the end of his personal mission as well. In essence, he is again being reassured (and to comfort us all) that though things will look dark, God's plan accounts for all of it and it will turn out good in the end.

⁶⁴ This is a scribal error as it should be Assyria; see 2 Kings 17.

⁶⁵ Joseph Smith Papers, John Whitmer, History, 1831-circa 1847, p. 31, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/john-whitmer-history-1831-circa-1847?p=31>.

⁶⁶ Arnold, *Zondervan*, 309; Mounce, *Revelation*, 203-204.

⁶⁷ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 262.

⁶⁸ Wilcox, *Understanding*, 134-136.

The remainder of the book cannot be taken as chronological but representational of God's purposes being fulfilled. We will move back and forth between times, places, and events, each one building to the crescendo of the final triumph but not necessarily in order.

John was instructed to measure the temple to set the bounds between the righteous and the wicked. The attack of a large army was temporarily thwarted by two prophets with great power. They were overcome in the end with much celebration by the wicked, but soon their true victory was assured in front of all of their enemies, which then triggered the seventh trumpet blast.

In the last explanation provided in D&C 77, the following is given about these witnesses: "Q. What is to be understood by the two witnesses, in the eleventh chapter of Revelation? A. They are two prophets that are to be raised up to the Jewish nation in the last days, at the time of the restoration, and to prophesy to the Jews after they are gathered and have built the city of Jerusalem in the land of their fathers" (D&C 77:15).

"Witnesses" is the Greek *martys* from which we get martyr. Persecution and possible death are implied in being a witness of the truth of God. Two witnesses are the minimum required to make an action legal in the Mosaic Law (Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15).

Olive trees represent peace while lamps ('lampstands' is a better translation than "candlesticks") equate to light and truth. They also figure in the prophecy of Zechariah about Joshua and Zerubbabel who rebuilt the temple after the Babylonian destruction (Zechariah 4:1-14; 6:11-12). Zerubbabel and Joshua were anointed king and high priest, respectively, and referred to as "two olive trees" providing oil to light two lampstands (Zechariah 4:11). Their partnership was the key to rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple after the Babylonian destruction.

The context is even more linked to John's vision when we consider the vision in Zechariah 1:12-17 and 2:1-5 where an angel measures Jerusalem and promises Zechariah that the city and temple will be rebuilt.

In other words, John is essentially saying to the inhabitants of Jerusalem with the olive tree and lampstand images, 'There will be a future Zerubbabel (king) and Joshua (high priest) with the latter-day temple in Jerusalem!'⁶⁹ The two prophets together play the role of king and priest to the city under siege.

It's interesting to note that Zerubbabel means 'sown in Babylon' and Joshua is the Hebrew name equivalent to Jesus, meaning 'Jehovah is salvation.' Together their two names represent coming out of Babylon and being saved by the Lord, which is the call of the two prophets here in Revelation.

2 Nephi 8:18-20 is the Book of Mormon's version of Isaiah's prophesy (Isaiah 51:18-20) that seems to refer to these same two prophets as "two sons" who have not fainted like the others but like "a wild bull in a net, they are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of thy God."

The powers demonstrated by the two martyrs evoke images of Elijah and Moses, meaning that these witnesses have priesthood power over their enemies and are stronger than earthly forces and false gods, reminiscent of the two most famous prophets of the Old Testament who symbolically represent the Law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah).

- Elijah: Called down fire to destroy enemies (2 Kings 1)

⁶⁹ Wilcox, *Understanding*, 151.

- Elijah: Caused it to stop raining (1 Kings 11, 17)
- Moses: Turned water into blood (Exodus 7:20)
- Moses: Inflicted other plagues on Egypt (Exodus 8:12)

Both Moses and Elijah were translated and returned to the Mount of Transfiguration. In our day, they both also returned to give keys to Joseph Smith (D&C 110).

Verses 15-19 are an interlude, even a table of contents, for chapters 12-19. John again looked to heaven, saw what was happening there, and then turned back to earth in chapter 12 to see how those actions impact the planet. Before this point (the seventh trumpet) it would almost appear that Satan could win, with Church members suffering martyrdom and persecution, and the city being overcome by its enemies. But with the sounding of this trumpet and the view into heaven, John again saw that there was no doubt that God would triumph. It's as if we were all holding our breath during the events of the sixth trumpet, praying that it would turn out better than it looked like it might.

With our eyes fixed on two prophets who defend Jerusalem for a lengthy time against enemy attack, we finally see them die at their enemies' hands. The enemies may celebrate for a season but it is in vain; the prophets rise up and ascend at the invitation of a heavenly voice, seen by their enemies who cannot believe their own eyes. An earthquake destroys the most wicked and the remainder begin a conversion that will culminate only when they personally see Jesus Christ appear before them and recognize the wounds of his Atonement. Though Jesus is rightfully declared the ruler of the world at that point, the battle with evil is not yet fully over, and won't be for a few more chapters. Next, John will look back to give us some insight into the eternal nature of this battle, followed by more heavenly praises. The true end of the wicked in the world must wait until chapters 16-20 before at last God can wipe away all tears shed for death, pain, and sorrow (21:4).

Chapter 12: The Church and the Devil

The seven seals have been opened and the seven trumpets have sounded. The heavens are cheering that Jesus reigns over the earth, and though that is the inevitable outcome, the actual event has not yet occurred. But rather than take us straight there, John's vision turns to some related topics on a different timeline and sets the stage with fascinating characters for the grand finale coming in chapters 19-22.

Some see seven divisions of content in chapters 12-14, though the division is not as clear as with the seven seals, trumpets, and later the bowls. There are, however, seven "signs of the end" (in contrasting pairs for the first six) in the woman and the dragon, the war in heaven and the war on earth, the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth, and finally the judgment by the angels. Two interludes where we hear a song of praise in heaven and a vision of the redeemed complete the chapters.⁷⁰

Chapter 12 is the most changed chapter in Revelation in the Joseph Smith Translation; the changes are found in the LDS Bible Appendix. These changes not only help us understand this chapter but ripple through the next several chapters, giving us insight into how best to interpret those events, as we see what happens to the various beings first presented here. "Chapter 12 serves as the pivotal point of the whole book. It is the key to

⁷⁰ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 311.

understanding all that went before and that comes after.”⁷¹ Indeed, it is at the center of a chiastic structure of the whole book.⁷²

Here is a list of the major persons and creatures introduced in chapters 12 and 13, and the general meaning we can apply to them from the JST and other sources. “The activity of these characters helps to outline and explain the troubles which may beset God’s people at any moment in the history of salvation, and provides an assurance that ultimately the messianic community will prevail over the forces of evil.”⁷³

Chapter 12

Woman clothed in the sun	The church of God
Child she delivers	The kingdom of God and his Christ
Red dragon	Satan

Chapter 13

Beast out of the sea	Power and politics
Beast out of the earth	The false prophet
Mark of the beast	Pursuit of wealth

A woman, child, and dragon were familiar symbols to the Saints in John’s day. Here are examples the New Testament itself and from other cultures:⁷⁴

- New Testament: Christ taught that he was the bridegroom, the Church the bride; their faithful union could bring about a son—Zion.
- Egypt: Set-Typhon the red dragon pursued Isis and was later killed by her son, Horus.
- Egypt: Each day Nut, the goddess of heaven, gave birth to the sun which was chased by the dragon of darkness who ate it at the end of the day.
- Babylon: Tiamut, the seven-headed dragon, was killed by young Marduk, the god of light.
- Greece: The pregnant Leto was pursued by the dragon Python, but she was brought to an island where she gave birth to Apollo; Apollo returned (at four days old!) and killed the dragon.

In a nearly eternal battle of good versus evil, the woman, who is the church, gave birth to a son, the kingdom of God. The dragon, representing Satan, tries desperately to defeat one or both of them. He has never been nor ever will be successful.

Many scriptures mention the sun, moon, and stars together,⁷⁵ but in Joseph’s dream, the sun (Jacob), moon (Rebekah), and stars (brothers) all bowed down to him (Genesis 37:9). In apocryphal books such as the Testament of Abraham, Abraham, Sarah, and their posterity are portrayed as the sun, moon, and stars. And Philo and Josephus, from the time of John, see those symbols in the dress of the high priest.⁷⁶ In short, the

⁷¹ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 751.

⁷² Arnold, *Zondervan*, 317.

⁷³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 310.

⁷⁴ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 230.

⁷⁵ For example, Deuteronomy 4:19; Psalm 148:3, Ecclesiastes 12:2, Isaiah 13:10; Jeremiah 31:35; Ezekiel 32:7; Joel 2:10; Matthew 24:29; Luke 21:25)

⁷⁶ Beale and Carson, 1122; Smalley, 315.

imagery is associated with ancient Israel, with the covenants made with them, and with the priesthood—all fitting tie ins with the church.

Notice the pattern of the symbols on the woman: the stars are on top (on her head), she is clothed in the sun (her body), and standing on the moon (under her feet). This is how the Nauvoo, Salt Lake, Palmyra, and other temples display those symbols—stars highest, then sun, then moon. They do not represent the three degrees of glory (as some have supposed; if that were the case, why are the stars on top?). Instead, they derive from the Woman/Church as shown in this chapter.⁷⁷ The symbols mean that it is within the temple that the kingdom of God is born!⁷⁸

Armed with an understanding of the nature of the eternal battle, in verse 13, our attention is turned back to the woman and the dragon introduced in the first six verses, as the dragon attempts to defeat her and her children. The woman versus the dragon harkens back to Genesis 3:1-6 with the confrontation between Eve and the serpent. The serpent/dragon has always sought to devastate God's plans by his personal intervention, but both Genesis and Revelation show that he is not successful, "for he knew not the mind of God" (Moses 4:6).

Chapter 13: The Beasts of Sea and Land

In chapters 13-18, John shows us Satan's arsenal—political power; apostate doctrine; and economic temptation. Satan was saying, in essence, 'I will take the treasures of the earth and buy armies, power, and false priests, and reign with blood and war upon this earth where you have cast me!'

Joseph Smith is recorded to have taught, "When God made use of the figure of a beast in visions to the prophets, he did it to represent those Kingdoms who had degenerated and become corrupt—the Kingdoms of the world, but he never made use of the figure of a beast nor any of the brute kind to represent his kingdom." He continued, "John saw beasts that had to do with things on the earth, but not in past ages; the beasts which he saw had to devour the inhabitants of the earth in days to come." After reading Revelation 13:1-8 to the congregation, he explained that some say "the beast that received the wound was Nebuchadnezzar, . . . some say it means the kingdom of the world. One thing is sure, it don't mean the kingdoms of the saints." He stated, "The beast John saw was an actual beast to whom power was to be given. An actual intelligent being in heaven and this beast was to have power given him...it must have been a wonderful beast that all human beings wondered after it, and I will venture to say that when God gives power to the beast to destroy the inhabitants of the earth, all will wonder."⁷⁹

This chapter speaks of a mark in the hand or forehead, related to the beast. Contrast with the seal or mark given to saints by God in 7:3-4 and 9:4. The word for "mark" means a brand or a tattoo.⁸⁰ The imagery possibly comes from several sources:

- Deuteronomy 6:7-8 (*shema* and *tefillim*/phylacteries)
- Heathen marks in the forehead for other gods
- Runaway Roman slaves marked in the forehead or hand to show their shame
- Some slaves who decided to commit to their masters for life were marked to indicate their loyalty

⁷⁷ See http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_temples/Symbols_on_the_Nauvoo_Temple.

⁷⁸ Wilcox, *Understanding*, 162.

⁷⁹ Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 183-187.

⁸⁰ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 888.

- Soldiers defeated in battle were sometimes marked as the losers

Michael Wilcox wrote, “If the things of the world — wealth, possessions, and power — become the central focus of our lives; if we transfer these ambitions to our children; if we think of positions, influence, riches, investments, and owning more and more constantly; if we find ourselves talking about them during the day; if the last thoughts of our minds before retiring and the first thoughts upon rising gravitate toward all that Babylon has to offer; if our hands reach to grasp more and more while our eyes wander and roam through the stocked shelves of material gain and domination; if we fear that we cannot survive without acquiring the qualities of the predatory beast — then we may be assured that the mark is beginning to burn its way into our foreheads and hands. The beast with his false prophet and his image is receiving our worship. They may one day claim us as their own.”⁸¹

John’s vision of the beasts must have been remarkably similar to Nephi’s of the “great and abominable church,” “the whore of all the earth” (1 Nephi 13:6-8, 26-28; 14:3, 9, 15; 22:13; 28:18). That institution persecuted the Saints, focused on the riches and power that the world could offer, and inflicted wars and rumors of wars upon the nations of the earth.

The dragon and his two beasts make an evil trinity, but it was the trinity of imperfection. Satan seeks to replace God; Christ got his authority from the Father, and the first beast gets his from Satan; the Holy Ghost testifies of Christ, while the second beast declares the power of the first. They know their time is almost up but are determined to go out in a blaze of glory, taking as many of us with them as they can.

Those marked by the Father remain faithful in the midst of persecution, loss of financial opportunities, inability to interact with the world, and more. But God is surely caring for them, giving them the Bread and Water of life. The patience of the saints will pay off in the end, as they remember to whom they owe everything and reject the temptations of the dragon and his beasts of power, politics, prosperity, and possessions.

Chapter 14: The Three Angels and the Winepress of the Wrath of God

We saw six “signs of the end” in chapters 12-13: the woman and the dragon, the war in heaven and the war on earth, and the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth. That list concludes in this chapter and the next. John calls on us to choose, and we each have to decide. Will we choose Christ or Satan; the heavenly Jerusalem or Babylon; the seal of God or the mark of the beast? God, Christ, angels, John and other prophets, and saints in all ages pray we’ll choose well.

Sometimes we may look around and think we’re outnumbered, even all alone, in trying to obey God. But like Elijah, who felt that way (see 1 Kings 19:14-18), the Lord reassures us that is simply not true.

The first beast stood on the shifting and unstable sand (13:1); Christ in contrast stands on the rock of Zion.⁸² Mount Zion is symbolically “the center place or capital of God’s eschatological kingdom.”⁸³ Used 155 times in the OT, Zion refers “to God’s dwelling in the temple” or it can “be a symbol for the people of God.” The

⁸¹ Wilcox, *Understanding*, 197-198.

⁸² Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 353.

⁸³ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 922; they reference Joel 2:32; Isaiah 24:23; 31:4; Micah 4:7; Zechariah 14:4-5 as OT scriptures where this is illustrated.

specific use of “mount Zion” is only found nineteen times, typically used with the idea of God saving a remnant of his covenant people.⁸⁴

To Latter-day Saints, the term has particular meaning having to do with a place of gathering and safety for the saints in the last days, even the New Jerusalem, a concept developed through 187 references to the term in the Doctrine and Covenants and 14 in the Pearl of Great Price.⁸⁵

A pericope in verses 6-20 introduces six angels and a voice from heaven (in the middle of the angels and to make the total seven). They each relate something concerning those who have wholly given themselves to the dragon and his beasts. Their roles or messages can be summarized as follows, with the first three giving warnings and the last three executing on those warnings:

- Angel 1 (vv. 6-7): the everlasting gospel
- Angel 2 (v. 8): Babylon is fallen
- Angel 3 (vv. 9-12): those with the mark drink of the wrath of God
 - Voice from heaven (vv. 13-14): blessed are the dead which die in the Lord
- Angel 4 (vv. 15-16): the time is come to reap
- Angel 5 (v. 17): has a sharp sickle
- Angel 6 (vv. 18-20): tells Angel 5 to gather the grapes

We quote verse 6 relating to Moroni and see it fulfilled in his coming, which is a great application. But in John’s context it can apply to more revelations of the gospel and more messengers than Moroni. The message of this angel that is the everlasting gospel is in the next verse. See D&C 133:36-39 where the angel is “flying through the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel.” He appears to some and commits it to them, and that gospel is then preached throughout the world by “the servants of God.” Thus the missionary force going throughout the world are the fulfillment of this scripture.⁸⁶

Chapter 15: The Seven Angels

In chapter 15 we see the beginning of the seventh sign, the judgment by the seven angels. But before this last sign, we see how God counteracts the things shown in the other chapters—the acts of the dragon and his beasts. Saints can take hope that the seeming control that this evil trinity has over the earth comes to an end, as declared by the angels.

Seven more angels are going to inflict seven last plagues on the earth (the bowl judgments of the next chapter), but first John had another pause and look up into heaven, perhaps to help him and us keep seeing the big picture and God’s constant care for the faithful.

As said above, the story is not moving along in chronological order here, but rather is looking back at the efforts that result in the harvest of the followers of the dragon and his beasts and how that came about, through these seven bowl judgments.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Beale and Carson, *Commentary*, 1131.

⁸⁵ For example, D&C 45:68, 71; 84:2; 115:6; 124:36; and Moses 7:62.

⁸⁶ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 953-954.

⁸⁷ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 991.

The world's influence can be overpowering. "We look around, and the mark of the beast appears to be on everyone's head."⁸⁸ We might feel very alone in trying to keep the standards of the Church and the commandments that are so quickly mocked by those in the large and spacious building, the members of the great and abominable church. John wants us to always remember that we are not alone but are joined with and supported by a symbolic 144,000, which stands for an innumerable company of saints who have stayed true and received their eternal inheritance. Keeping the beast's mark away and only having the marks of the Father and the Son allows us to be part of that massive effort and enjoy the same reward.

Chapter 16: The Seven Bowl Plagues

We have seen seven seals that announced God's plans for mankind, and seven trumpets that declared the coming judgment. In this chapter we are introduced to seven bowl judgments, which are the fulfillment of the promises of the trumpets. As one commentator put it, demolition precedes construction, and in this case, God has to demolish all that is sinful and evil in order to build a new heaven and a new earth.⁸⁹

It might seem that with these judgments nature is being punished for the sins of man, but actually God is using nature to inflict the punishment, because it is the wickedness of people that have inflicted pain upon nature. In Enoch's vision of Christ's day, when the wicked killed the Son of God, "all the creations of God mourned; and the earth groaned" (Moses 7:56). Likewise, in our day, "the whole earth groans under the weight of [humanity's] iniquity" (D&C 123:7).

The bowl judgments are remarkably similar to the trumpet judgments of previous chapters. Some believe they are a second rendition of the same events because the order is the same: 1) the earth; 2) the sea; 3) the rivers; 4) the sun; 5) the seat of wickedness; 6) the Euphrates; and, 7) the world.⁹⁰ Others see that approach as too general and see the two judgments as different events that simply follow a similar pattern, with the bowl judgments completing the seventh trumpet.⁹¹ One major difference is that the trumpet judgments impacted a third of the earth, the bowl judgments cover the entire planet.⁹² Either way, they inflict great trials on the followers of the dragon and his beasts and represent a complete judgment on those who choose not to follow the Father and the Lamb.

As an interesting note, the four ancient elements are all part of the judgments: earth (2); water (3-4); fire (8); and air (17). Each has an angel that controls them, in Hebrew cosmology.⁹³ But the driving concept is not the elements but the judgments themselves and God's justification for imposing them, and the reaction of evil men to them. They recognize that God is the source of the suffering but do not humble themselves or repent in any way. In fact, they curse and revile him to the very end, shaking their fists, as it were, against the very being who could save them from their self-inflicted pains.

In Hebrew, Armageddon is *har Megiddo*; *har* is 'hill or mountain' while Megiddo is a town but which also means 'to crowd, assemble, gather.' The location is likely more symbolic than literal, since Megiddo has no mountain but was indeed a crossroads of the great armies in most of the history of the ancient Near East and

⁸⁸ Wilcox, *Understanding*, 202.

⁸⁹ Rob Wall, Seattle Pacific University Lectio series, <http://blog.spu.edu/lectio/gods-demoliton-project/>.

⁹⁰ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 1035.

⁹¹ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 291-292.

⁹² Osborne, *Revelation*, 576.

⁹³ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 1044.

the scene of many great Biblical battles.⁹⁴ John's message is that we can gather to Mount Zion with the Lord or Mount Megiddo with Satan. Compare Zechariah 12:10-11.

D&C 87 is about the Civil War, but more, very much relating to this symbolic battle. Consider especially D&C 87:6-8:

And thus, with the sword and by bloodshed the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn; and with famine, and plague, and earthquake, and the thunder of heaven, and the fierce and vivid lightning also, shall the inhabitants of the earth be made to feel the wrath, and indignation, and chastening hand of an Almighty God, until the consumption decreed hath made a full end of all nations; That the cry of the saints, and of the blood of the saints, shall cease to come up into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth [armies], from the earth, to be avenged of their enemies. Wherefore, stand ye in holy places, and be not moved, until the day of the Lord come; for behold, it cometh quickly, saith the Lord.

Two days later came D&C 88, which tells us how to find peace in the world coming in D&C 87:

Behold, this is pleasing unto your Lord, and the angels rejoice over you; the alms of your prayers have come up into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, and are recorded in the book of the names of the sanctified, even them of the celestial world. Wherefore, I now send upon you another Comforter, even upon you my friends, that it may abide in your hearts, even the Holy Spirit of promise; which other Comforter is the same that I promised unto my disciples, as is recorded in the testimony of John. This Comforter is the promise which I give unto you of eternal life, even the glory of the celestial kingdom; . . . Therefore, tarry ye, and labor diligently, that you may be perfected in your ministry to go forth among the Gentiles for the last time, as many as the mouth of the Lord shall name, to bind up the law and seal up the testimony, and to prepare the saints for the hour of judgment which is to come; That their souls may escape the wrath of God, the desolation of abomination which awaits the wicked, both in this world and in the world to come. Verily, I say unto you, let those who are not the first elders continue in the vineyard until the mouth of the Lord shall call them, for their time is not yet come; their garments are not clean from the blood of this generation. Abide ye in the liberty wherewith ye are made free; entangle not yourselves in sin, but let your hands be clean, until the Lord comes. (D&C 88:2-4, 84-86).

Chapter 17: Babylon the Great

Chapter 17 is an explanatory pause, where one of the seven angels comes to John to make sure he understands the vision he has just been seeing.

Chapters 17 along with 18 also serve to demonstrate why the judgments in chapter 16 are justified. Ironically, the final destruction of Babylon is not so much the judgment of God as self-destruction by her wicked lovers; compare 1 Nephi 13-14, 22.

Chapters 16-18 deal with wrapping up scenes in the end of evil. Plagues are inflicted upon the unrepentant who only further dig in their heels and get angry with God. Great armies led by kings gather for battle but end up turning on the one trying to dominate them, the whore of all the earth, and soon on each other.

⁹⁴ Deborah and Barak (Judges 4-5); Gideon (Judges 7); Saul (1 Samuel 31); and Josiah (2 Kings 23:29-30).

John's understanding of this is aided by an angelic interpreter who provides help but also is still a bit cryptic. However, using what we know from other more certain interpretations (the battle in chapter 11, the woman in chapter 12, and the dragon and beasts in chapter 13), we can safely navigate these images and realize that in many ways, we're seeing the same stories repeated for emphasis and with new details. It's as if we're watching several news channels reporting the same event, each one from a different perspective and vantage point. All come together to provide a fuller picture of the event and help us put it into context.

In all of it, John's ongoing message continues to ring clear and true: God wins, so stay on his side. We stay on his side with patient obedience and resistance to the allure of the beast the prostitute who sits on his back and pretends to rule the world. In the end, the world sees her for what she really is and rejects and destroys her in a great civil war. Meanwhile the Saints pray and wait and watch, for soon the Lord of lords and King of kings will end all wickedness and make the earth a pure and glorious place for them to enjoy.

Chapter 18: The Fall of Babylon

Babylon has been promised that it will fall and fail; now we will witness the fulfillment of those words. Those who have believed in her and her power to make them happy will be astonished at her rapid and surprising fall, and will stand back as if to avoid the same fate. But they will not.

The Lord will host two meals: the first is the marriage supper of the Lamb, which is the covenant celebration of the triumph of righteousness and truth; the other is the supper of the Great God, where those who participated in the lifestyle of the great whore will share in her fate. Each day we choose which feast we will be invited to. Which one are we choosing today?

The imagery in this chapter is very similar to Jeremiah's description of the fall of Babylon (Jeremiah 50-51). This chapter is the beginning of the promised end of evil and the victory of the righteous. Three voices declare her destruction and call for the saints to stay away from Babylon completely. Several lists are presented to represent the various things that are lost to the wicked with the destruction of the city, those who suffer the losses, and the justification for God's judgment. The saints are called to come out and be separated, stay pure, and avoid the contamination of the whore with all of her worldly attractiveness and allure. This is all a fulfillment of the promise John received from an angel that he would witness "the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters" (17:1).⁹⁵

Separation of the righteous from the wicked is a common theme: Abraham, Joseph, Jaredites, Lehi, Nephi (from his brothers), John the Baptist, the Essenes, the Rechabites, and more. The voice says, 'Leave Babylon to avoid its sins *and* judgments' (as in those outlined in chapters. 8, 9, and 16). See Isaiah 48:20-22 (read the version in 1 Nephi 20:20-22) – come out with no regrets, no hesitation, with enthusiasm, not like ancient Israel did coming out of Egypt (Numbers 11:4-6). See also Isaiah 52:11; Jeremiah 51:6; D&C 133:5, 7, 14; and JST Matthew 16:25-29a (KJV Matthew 16:24-25, with footnote and appendix changes combined here):

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. **And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments. Break not my commandments for to save your**

⁹⁵ Osborne, *Revelation*, 631.

lives; for whosoever will save his life in this world, shall lose it in the world to come. and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. Therefore, forsake the world, and save your souls.

In a very practical sense, coming out of Babylon will also save the saints physically, for when the collapse comes, it will leave all those who have the mark of the beast without means to feed, clothe, shelter, or otherwise care for themselves. Only those who have heeded the words of the prophets and kept themselves clean and prepared will survive the day.⁹⁶ See D&C 133:7, 14 – “Yea, verily I say unto you again, the time has come when the voice of the Lord is unto you: Go ye out of Babylon; gather ye out from among the nations, from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other . . . Go ye out from among the nations, even from Babylon, from the midst of wickedness, which is spiritual Babylon.”

Chapter 19: The King of Kings

Chapters 12-18 were really a step out of the flow of the book, examining certain aspects of the last days, the hand of God, and the efforts of Satan and his supporters. Starting with chapter 19, we return to essentially where we left off at the end of chapter 11,⁹⁷ and the rest of the book captures the ultimate and final victory of God over evil, death, and hell, starting here with the first of two meals to which the world is invited (hint: you want to go to the first one and stay away from the second one completely).

John hears three ‘voices’ praising God—much people (verse 1); a group around the throne of the twenty-four elders and four beasts (verse 4); and a voice from the throne (verse 5). This is contrasted with the laments of the three groups (kings, merchants, and sailors) of chapter 17. The voice calls all servants of God everywhere to join in the hymn.

The wait is over. This is the wedding, which in Jewish custom followed a year after the betrothal in which both parties pledged their full faithfulness but were not yet man and wife. Now the wait is over, and they come together at last. Compare Ezekiel 16; Hosea 2; Matthew 22; D&C 33:17-18; 109:73-74. The marriage theme continues in chapters 21 and 22.

The bride, who fled into the wilderness for protection from the dragon in chapter 12, has been faithful during the waiting period and is ready in every way for the marriage. This is the promise the bride made in several prophetic works, including Isaiah 54:6; Ezekiel 16:7; Hosea 2:14-23.⁹⁸ Now the bridegroom comes—not as a humble sacrifice like he did the first time, but in the full power and authority of his status as Redeemer, Savior, King, and God. The triumphal appearance of the King portrayed here is described in different detail in D&C 133:46-51, where he comes with dyed garments but also glorious apparel, mighty to save, eclipsing the glory of the sun, moon, and stars, treading the winepress alone, and trampling the wicked in the righteous anger of judgment.

As the scenes of judgment in Revelation wrap up, we might cheer “Alleluia” just to have them over with. But these past several chapters have served many purposes, including making perfectly clear the rejection of God by the world, their following their own path of greed, lust, and pride, their giving dominance to the things of this world over the things of eternity, and their complete commitment to the dragon, his beast, and their false teachings.

⁹⁶ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 1192-1193.

⁹⁷ Draper and Rhodes, *The Revelation*, 1233.

⁹⁸ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 482.

On the other hand, we have seen glimpses of the righteous—suffering, struggling, but staying faithful. For a time, it might even look like they cannot win against the forces of evil that so dominate the world. But with continual reminders and now moving into the final stages, John makes it clear that Christ has always been victorious and will one day move to make that clear to the whole earth. His powerful return to reign on the earth will be declared repeatedly and then suddenly there he will be, “as a thief in the night,” in full glory and authority. His defeat of evil, sin, death, and hell will be complete and eternal, represented by the supper of the great God where the enemies are consumed and their leaders are left in eternal torment.

The converse image is the marriage supper of the Lamb, where the bride who has prepared herself and stayed faithful and true to her betrothed is now ready for the wedding, the covenant of eternity that will bind her to the bridegroom Lamb that is Faithful and True. The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world makes all this possible, and those invited to the wedding—all the faithful saints made holy by their faith in Christ—are given white robes cleansed in his blood and eternal, glorified bodies in which to spend their eternity praising the Father and the Son who have saved them.

Today we are not yet at the point where Babylon is destroyed. In fact, it is all around us. Elder Neal A. Maxwell stated that we cannot have our primary residence in Zion and keep a summer cottage in Babylon, or as some have put it, have one foot in God’s kingdom and the other in Babylon.⁹⁹ When we leave Babylon, “our cry must be ‘Alleluia,’ not ‘Alas, alas.’”¹⁰⁰ We have to choose whose kingdom we prefer and secure the name of our allegiance on our forehead. John pleads with us to choose well.

Chapter 20: Satan Bound for a Thousand Years

In this chapter, we see what happens to the devil and the earth as Jesus rules over our planet directly and in-person. The focus on the Millennium is short, and John’s vision quickly moves to the end of that period, the great final battle, and the complete defeat of evil. Finally, there is a new heaven and a new earth for the faithful, the patient, those who boldly wore the mark of God in the heads and hands. The New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven is the perfect eternal home for the perfect God and his perfect Son and those who have been perfected in their grace.

As chapter 20 begins, all things evil have been put away except one—the dragon, the serpent, the devil, Satan—the one who started it all. In these verses he meets an angel who will put him where he belongs, at least for the next 1,000 years. At the end of the Millennium, as the earth moves from telestial to terrestrial states, Satan is loosed again for a period of time, to once again deceive the nations and raise a vast army to battle Michael’s host. But they are no match for the power of God and the battle is over in a sudden stroke of fire from heaven. Then comes the resurrections and the judgment of all mankind.

The entire Millennium is covered in three verses. This is clearly just an interlude for John leading to the final scenes,¹⁰¹ but also an opportunity to demonstrate that the patience of the Saints is rewarded in the end. Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16 teaches that God prepared “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” for the faithful who felt they were “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” while looking for the city that

⁹⁹ https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/r-bruce-money_lords-country-kingdom-passport/; also Larry Gibbons, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2006/10/wherefore-settle-this-in-your-hearts?lang=eng>; also Carlos Asay, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1992/04/be-men?lang=eng>.

¹⁰⁰ Wilcox, *Understanding*, 266.

¹⁰¹ Draper, *Opening the Seven Seals*, 220.

God had prepared, while D&C 45:11-14 says that Enoch's city was "separated from the earth" and "reserved until a day of righteousness shall come," a day "sought for by all holy men" but not found because of wickedness.

Those who live with Christ during this time are a combination of resurrected beings who were already faithful ("them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus") and those left on the earth who "had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark" (therefore meaning they *do* have the mark of the Father).

Chapter 21: The New Jerusalem

Judgment is complete and we are given a vision of the final fate of the earth itself as it progresses from its Millennial and terrestrial state to a final celestial one. We also see the glorified followers of Christ who live on it. Portrayed at first as the bride ready for the wedding, the scene shifts to a view of the great city in which God and the saints reside. It is a city of incomprehensible size, beauty, and light, a place of peace and safety like nothing ever known before. Compare Ezekiel 40-48.

Everything old is gone; no more persecution, pain, tears, grief, or death. The phrase "new heaven and a new earth" appears to apply to the earth and the atmosphere (one of the levels of heaven), not to the entire 'heavens' (sun, moon, stars, etc.). "New" refers less to the time of the change than the quality of it.¹⁰² "And the end shall come, and the heaven and the earth shall be consumed and pass away, and there shall be a new heaven and a new earth. For all old things shall pass away, and all things shall become new, even the heaven and the earth, and all the fulness thereof, both men and beasts, the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea; And not one hair, neither mote, shall be lost, for it is the workmanship of mine hand" (D&C 29:23-25). See also Isaiah 65:17; 66:17, 22; 2 Peter 3:10-13.

In the Bible, Revelation is the only book to use "new" with "Jerusalem." The first use was in 3:12, in the promise to Philadelphia. Now that promise comes to fulfillment. The New Jerusalem is mentioned many times in latter-day scripture, including 3 Nephi 20:22; 21:23-24, Ether 13:3-5; D&C 42:9, 35, 62, 67; 84:2, 4; 133:56; Moses 7:62-64. Some of these scriptures refer to a New Jerusalem that will be on the earth in the last days, and some to this New Jerusalem that John sees with the celestialization of the earth. See also JST Genesis 14:32-34 (Selections in the back of the Bible) where Melchizedek's people were caught up to Enoch's city, which will come down again as the New Jerusalem.

Chapter 22: Blessed Are They That Do His Commandments

Revelation ends much as it began—revealing the majesty of Christ and his triumph over death, sin, hell, and all enemies, and his infinite care for each of us, then calling for his return and earthly reign to happen—soon!. The authenticity of the vision is confirmed by a divine witness, followed by blessings and penalties for the righteous and disobedient, respectively. But first, we finish the tour of the city by looking at the water flowing through it and the tree of life.

The dragon, the beast, the false prophet, the whore, and the merchant city may look like they're winning the battle today, as they did in John's day. But John's message of hope comforted the churches in his day, and it should do the same in ours.

¹⁰² Draper and Rhodes, 1353.

The prominent signs of the last days—earthquakes, wars, and all the rest—have been on the earth since the beginning. So an increase in earthquakes or other natural disasters in the short-term is difficult to interpret with confidence as being any specific part of the last days. The most powerful sign is the restoration itself, the manifestation of the love of God—the water and tree of life—given to this last dispensation that we might be prepared and say each day: “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

“The book of Revelation is thus a manual of preparation that will steady us in the days ahead.”¹⁰³ John’s—and the Lord’s—ultimate message in Revelation is: ‘Don’t worry and have hope—God rules and God wins.’

Further Reading

Abbreviations:

- TWNT – Thomas Wayment’s New Testament for Latter-day Saints
- AT – Author’s translation
- BYUNR – BYU New Rendition
- JST – Joseph Smith Translation
- KJV – King James Version
- LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)

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