
THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson #9 (11 March 2016): Revelation 16-17

Seven Last Plagues and Babylon the Great: “They have shed the blood of saints and prophets”

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INTRODUCTION: SEVEN LAST PLAGUES AND BABYLON THE GREAT (16:1 – 17:18)

With the promise in chapter 15 that God is in charge and directly overseeing all that happens, chapter 16 introduces the final seven plagues that set up the earth for its transformation into a celestial realm. 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.¹

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).

OUTLINE

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

1. The Majesty of Christ (1:1-20)
2. The Messages to the Seven Churches (2:1 – 3:22)
3. God and the Lamb
 - a. The Vision of Heaven (4:1-11)
 - b. The Sealed Book and the Worthy Lamb (5:1-14)
4. The Scroll Begins to Open
 - a. The Six Seals (6:1-17)
 - b. The Seal of the Living God (7:1-17)
5. The Opening of the Seventh Seal
 - a. The Seventh Seal and the First Four Trumpets (8:1-13)
 - b. Two Trumpets and the Great War (9:1-21)
6. John’s Mission; Two Prophets
 - a. The Little Scroll (10:1-11)
 - b. The Seventh Trumpet (11:1-19)
7. The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon
 - a. The Church and the Devil (12:1-17)
 - b. The Beasts of Revelation (13:1-18)
8. Judgment and Praise
 - a. The Winepress of the Wrath of God (14:1-20)
 - b. The Seven Angels (15:1-8)
9. **Seven Last Plagues and Babylon the Great**
 - a. **The Seven Bowls (16:1-21)**
 - i. **First bowl: grievous sore (16:1-2)**
 - ii. **Second bowl: sea into blood (16:3)**
 - iii. **Third bowl: rivers into blood (16:4-7)**
 - iv. **Fourth bowl: great heat (16:8-9)**
 - v. **Fifth bowl: darkness (16:10-11)**
 - vi. **Sixth bowl: Armageddon (16:12-16)**
 - vii. **Seventh bowl: great earthquake (16:17-21)**
 - b. **Babylon the Great (17:1-18)**
 - i. **John saw the woman (17:1-6)**

¹ Rob Wall, Seattle Pacific University Lectio series, <http://blog.spu.edu/lectio/gods-demoliton-project/>.

ii. Angelic interpretation (17:7-18)

10. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb
 - a. The Fall of Babylon (18:1-24)
 - b. The King of Kings (19:1-21)
11. Heirs of the Celestial Glory

- a. The Thousand Years (20:1-15)
- b. The New Jerusalem (21:1-27)
- c. Blessed Are They That Do His Commandments (22:1-21)

THE SEVEN BOWLS (16:1-21)

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.² 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.³ One major difference is that the trumpet judgments impacted a third of the earth, the bowl judgments cover the entire planet.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.

FIRST BOWL: GRIEVOUS SORE (16:1-2)

16:1 **a great voice out of the temple.** This is the temple in heaven, from where John has just seen angels departing to declare God's judgments (chapters 14) and the inside of the temple where the "testimony in heaven was opened" (15:5) and one of the four beasts gave bowls "full of the wrath of God" to the seven angels (15:8). Thus the voice was likely the Father himself, or

Christ speaking in his behalf and initiating these judgments on the wicked.

16:1 **pour out the vials.** "Vials" is Greek *phialē*, meaning 'a broad, shallow bowl or saucer.' These kinds of bowls were used in temple worship to carry incense, coals, or blood for the various temple ceremonies that took place. "The imagery also reminds us that, as the pouring out of the blood of the sacrifices cleansed the Israelite tabernacle, priests, and people from sin, so too, the pouring out of God's wrath cleanses all the earth from sin."⁶

16:2 **a noisome and grievous sore.** The first judgment was a plague or pestilence that was poured out on the land and resulted in people who worshipped the beast having "ugly, festering sores" (NIV). This reminds the reader of the sixth plague in Exodus 9:8-11 where the people in Egypt experienced painful boils. "The punishment matches the crime: those who receive an idolatrous mark [of the beast] will be chastised by being given a penal mark."⁷

SECOND BOWL: SEA INTO BLOOD (16:3)

16:3 **upon the sea.** The sea was the home of the first beast and shortly will be interpreted as the people of the earth (17:15). Thus the judgment could represent the sea itself (fishing, trade, etc.) or it could tie into these other symbols and references that inflict judgment on the beast and those who worship him.

16:3 **as the blood of a dead man.** The second and third judgments both represent the bloodthirsty nature of men; see verse 6 and Moroni 9:5. The reference to death likely reflects that the result of the seas being turned to blood was death upon all creatures in the sea. Note the similarity to Psalm 79:3, 10, and 12.

² Draper and Rhodes, 1035.

³ Mounce, 291-292.

⁴ Osborne, 576.

⁵ Draper and Rhodes, 1044.

⁶ Draper and Rhodes, 1038.

⁷ Beale and Carson, 1135.

16:3 **every living soul died in the sea.** Not just fish but all living creatures and men associated with the sea died as a result of the plague.

THIRD BOWL: RIVERS INTO BLOOD (16:4-7)

16:4 **the rivers and fountains of water.** The third angel is like the second, turning water into blood, except this time it is all the fresh water. Both are reminiscent of Moses' experience with the first plague of turning water into blood in Egypt (Exodus 7:14-21).

16:5 **the angel of the waters.** Referring to one of the four angels that control the four elements of earth, water, fire, and air,⁸ something we saw with fire in 14:18. This is similar to the four angels controlling the winds (7:1).⁹

16:5 **Thou art righteous, O Lord.** The angel declares God's judgment is just because he is righteous or just himself, meaning strictly observant, honest, and good. The issuance of these judgments on the earth are not whimsical or haphazard but are completely deserved by the lives of those experiencing them—the worshippers of the beast.

16:5 **which art, and wast, and shalt be.** Echoing attributes of God given earlier in the book (1:4, 8; 4:8), the angel not only highlights the eternal, unchanging nature of God, but sets up contrasting descriptions of the beast that come shortly (17:8, 11).

Note that in the oldest manuscripts, only “which art, and wast” is included; the “shalt be” is not part of the best manuscripts, probably because its lack indicates that the end has come so what ‘is’ is now both present and future come together.

16:6 **they have shed the blood of saints and prophets.** The judgment against them is just because of their actions, rejecting and killing prophets and righteous followers of Christ. This harkens back to 6:9-10 and finally directly answers the question there of “How long, O Lord.”

16:6 **for they are worthy.** Not in the sense of being good people but ‘deserving’ of punishment because of their actions against God's people and prophets.

16:7 KJV	16:7 JST
7 And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.	7 And I heard another angel who came out from the altar saying, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.

The best Greek manuscripts don't include the phrase “another out of,” but rather just picture the altar speaking (e.g., “And I heard the altar respond...” in NIV).¹⁰ The JST makes the imagery consistent with the rest of Revelation and has an angel coming from the altar give the doxology. This is the only JST change in chapter 16.

FOURTH BOWL: GREAT HEAT (16:8-9)

16:8 **scorch men with fire.** The fourth judgment is heat and fire from the sun, which causes drought and famine and infliction upon men on the earth. The saints have already been promised in 7:16 that they would not be bothered by a hot sun; here the unrighteous receive that very judgment.

16:9 **blasphemed the name of God.** After these four judgments, the reaction of those on the earth is not to repent or turn to God, but rather to curse him. They are not humbled or sorrowful but angry. They will do this two more times in this chapter (vv. 11 and 21), showing how hard hearted they are.

FIFTH BOWL: DARKNESS (16:10-11)

16:10 **upon the seat of the beast.** Or, “upon the throne of the beast” (NIV, NASB, NAB, RSV). The fifth judgment inflicts the beast in his own kingdom, right where he reigns. Thus the action is aimed directly at him.

16:10 **his kingdom was full of darkness.** His kingdom was already full of darkness through evil deeds, but now it's literal nature matched the darkness of its wickedness. This echoes the darkness of the ninth plague in Exodus 10:22-23, showing the Lord's supremacy over even the sun.

⁸ Draper and Rhodes, 1044.

⁹ Osborne, 581.

¹⁰ Though to be fair, most interpret this not as a physical object speaking but as a voice coming from the altar; see, for example, Osborne, 584-585.

16:10 **they gnawed their tongues for pain.** It's not clear how the darkness caused such pain, but perhaps they were feeling the weight of their sins, as it will be at the final judgment when the most wicked are cast into outer darkness (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30).¹¹

16:11 **blasphemed the God of heaven...and repented not.** Once more, the wicked curse and revile God for their suffering and it does not move them to change in any way.

SIXTH BOWL: ARMAGEDDON (16:12-16)

16:12 **the great river Euphrates.** The largest river in that part of the world, it acted as barrier between many kingdoms and peoples over the years. The role of the sixth angel is to remove it as an impediment to travel.

16:12 **the water thereof was dried up.** This reflects the drying up of the sea to allow the children of Israel to escape the Egyptians (Exodus 14:21-22), only this time, those benefitting from the dried up waters are the enemies of God.

According to Herodotus (which John and his readers would have known), the fall of Babylon occurred in 539 BC when Cyrus (a king from the east) diverted the Euphrates River which flowed through the middle of the town, then marched his troops into the city on the dry riverbed under the city walls.¹² Isaiah 44:27-28 also spoke of this prophetically. The dried river here thus prepares Babylon for destruction.

16:12 **the way of the kings of east might be prepared.** Historically, those who attacked Israel came from the north or east (or south, in the case of Egypt). In this case, a whole group of kings from the east will come to battle.

16:13 **three unclean spirits.** Three unclean spirits from the dragon and his two beasts contrast with sword of truth coming out of Christ's mouth (1:16). They represent lies, apostasy, and deception. Recall the story of Ahab and Micaiah (1 Kings 22) where false prophets told Ahab and Jehoshaphat to go to war; Jehoshaphat asked for a prophet of the Lord, so Micaiah was called. Micaiah spoke the word of the Lord, condemning what the false prophets said. Like the false prophets with the lying spirit, the frogs call the men of the earth to war.

16:13 **spirits like frogs.** Frogs were unclean, sent upon the Egyptians, getting into their homes and even their beds and food preparation areas. Their presence must have been overwhelming and away from water in the heat of the sun, they must have died by the thousands, leaving a huge stink in the land (Exodus 8:1-11).

16:13 **the false prophet.** This is the second beast that came from the earth, whose role it was to bear witness of the first beast from the sea and the power of the dragon that lay behind him. This is his name going forward, also used in 19:20 and 20:10.

16:14 **to gather them to the battle of that great day.** The three unclean spirits, called "the spirits of devils," go all through the earth, rallying the various kings to come to a great battle, a showdown with God but which ironically will be the end of them all, thus making the messengers inadvertently those of God, not the dragon or the beast. See the accounts of this battle in Zechariah 12-14 and Zephaniah 3.

16:15 **I come as a thief.** Turning momentarily from his vision narrative, John quoted the Lord to contrast his sudden coming with the gathering of the great armies to battle. This metaphor was used by Jesus in the gospels (Matthew 24:43; Luke 12:39), by Peter (2 Peter 3:10), and previously in this book by John (3:3), signaling that Jesus' return would be in an unknown time and when it was least expected.

16:15 **Blessed is he that watcheth.** The third of the seven beatitudes (see 1:3 notes), this one promises the blessing of preparedness to those who are watching for his coming.

16:15 **keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked.** The righteous are given robes of righteousness (6:11; 7:9, 13-14) but need to keep hold of those robes by maintaining their righteousness through repentance the power the Atonement, lest those garments be taken away and they are found naked and ashamed at the coming of the Lord.

16:16 **a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.** In Hebrew it 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

¹¹ Draper and Rhodes, 1057.

¹² Arnold, 340.

and the scene of many great Biblical battles.¹³ 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).

SEVENTH BOWL: GREAT EARTHQUAKE (16:17-21)

16:17 **into the air**. The last angel pours the contents of his bowl into the air. The contents are unknown but they trigger a series of pronouncements and signs from heaven and anticipate the war.

16:17 **a great voice out of the temple**. The voice is "from the throne" so it is likely the Father.

16:17 **It is done**. The Greek is *gegonen*, with several meanings, including to be born, produced or made, occur, happen, or become something or move. It is "a verb with numerous nuances relating to being and manner of being."¹⁴ The sense here is expressed in the English phrase in the KJV but a more concise translation would simply be 'Done!'

16:18 **voices, and thunders, and lightnings**. As with other passages where there is an important transition, the pouring of the final bowl of judgment is accompanied by loud noises and lightning and thunder (4:5; 8:5; 8:13; 10:3-4; 11:115, 19). This is the last time we see this in Revelation.

16:18 **a great earthquake**. To emphasize just how huge this quake was, John explains a second time in this verse that it was "such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great." This could be the same earthquake mentioned in D&C 45:48 where the mount of Olives will "cleave in twain" and the earth will "reel to and from, and the heavens also shall shake." The quake shakes the ground and the sky! See also Daniel 12:1 which doesn't mention an earthquake but does prophecy of a "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation" after which the people of God, "every one that shall be found written in the book" will be delivered.

16:19 **divided into three parts**. The final judgment divides the city into three parts; compare to Ezekiel 5:1-

¹³ Deborah and Barak (Judges 4-5); Gideon (Judges 7); Saul (1 Samuel 31); and Josiah (2 Kings 23:29-30).

¹⁴ Danker, 196.

2 where that prophet cuts off his hair then divides it into three parts as a prophesy of what will happen to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. As Babylon did to Judah in that day, so in the last days God will do to (symbolic) Babylon.

16:19 ***the cities of the nations fell***. The quake shakes the entire earth, so that cities of nations all around the world collapse and are destroyed.

16:19 ***Babylon came in remembrance before God***. Or, “God remembered Babylon the Great” (NIV). The Lord is reminded of the wickedness of Babylon, the seat of the beast and the headquarters of the dragon, perhaps by the continued prayers of the faithful as expressed first in 6:9-11. This remembrance compels him to action.

16:19 ***the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath***. Like 14:10, the wicked drink of the full-strength wrath/wine of God, given to them because of their foul lives and evil deeds.

16:20 ***every island fled away, and the mountains were not***. Islands and mountains were the outliers in

the ancient world view, remote and difficult to get to or cross. Getting rid of them makes way for a world with greater ease of travel and communication. See D&C 133:20-24.

16:21 ***a great hail out of heaven***. Hail comes to destroy those left after the war; see Joshua 10:10-11 taking place in Gibeon; Isaiah used the same imagery (Isaiah 28:16-17, 21); also D&C 29:16.

16:21 ***the weight of a talent***. Each hailstone is about ninety¹⁵ or one hundred¹⁶ pounds! These are massive boulders of ice that come crashing down on everything, destroying anything left by the earthquake. By comparison, the largest hailstone ever recorded was one in Bangladesh in 1986 that weighed 2.25 pounds.¹⁷

16:21 ***men blasphemed God***. For the third time, men are not humbled to repentance by these clear judgments from God but curse and revile him for the things they are suffering.

BABYLON THE GREAT (17:1-18)

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.

JOHN SAW THE WOMAN (17:1-6)

John saw another woman—the first was in chapter 12, representing the church. This one was not the church of God, but the church of Satan. Nephi also saw this symbol (1 Nephi 14:10-12) and said it was “the whore of all the earth” representing “he that fighteth against Zion” (2 Nephi 10:16). For a fuller account of this part of the vision with less symbolic imagery, see 1 Nephi 13:1-9 and 14:9-17.

17:1 ***one of the seven angels***. It’s not specific which one but one of the seven bowl judgment angels now turns to John to offer some interpretation of the images of the vision.

17:1 ***the great whore***. As mentioned in the introduction, Nephi’s “church of the devil” was also referred to as “the whore of all the earth” (1 Nephi 14:10). The concept of wickedness and forsaken covenants being represented by prostitution is common in the OT, such as Isaiah 1:21; 23:15-17; Jeremiah 3:1-3; 13:27; Ezekiel 16:15-17; chapter 23; Hosea 2:5; 4:10-18; 5:3-4; 6:10; 9:1.

The identity of the woman is given in two verses: she is Babylon the great (v. 5) and “that great city” (v. 18), equating the two terms.

17:1 ***sitteth upon many waters***. Her position represents her evil because of her association with the beast from the water, Leviathan. It also represents the many people (v. 15) over which she rules.

¹⁵ Draper and Rhodes, 1089-1090.

¹⁶ Osborne, 600.

¹⁷ Wikipedia, “Hail”, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hail>.

17:2 **committed fornication.** Sexual sin is almost always associated with idol worship. In addition, in the Old Testament, it was also a symbol for leaving God and not keeping covenants.

17:2 **made drunk with the wine of her fornication.** See Isaiah 28:7; no drunk person can walk the strait and narrow path. Also, the wine she served was “the blood of the saints” (verse 6); appropriately, the verb “made drunk” also means to ‘shed blood.’

17:3 **away in the spirit.** This was the third time John mentioned this (see 1:10; 4:2).

17:3 **in the wilderness.** This may refer to a time of apostasy (see 12:14 where the same word was used).

17:3 **upon a scarlet coloured beast.** The attributes of the beast (blasphemous and with seven heads and ten horns) make it clear that it is the first beast from the water in chapter 13.

17:3 **sit upon a scarlet covered beast.** She has control and dominion over the beast.

17:4 **purple.** The color of royalty, wealth, and power.

17:4 **scarlet.** Ties into the luxury of the purple color. “The red color is derived from the eggs of an insect (*Coccus ilicis*) that lives in oak trees in the Holy Land and is used to dye cloth. The Arabs call it *kirmiz*, which is the source of our English word *crimson*. Scarlet was occasionally symbolic of royalty, but often it is identified with things evil or sinful” (Ogden, 338-339). “A ribbon of this color, representing the sins of Israel, was tied round the neck of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement before it was driven into the wilderness to its death.”¹⁸ The clothing and jewelry are also open symbols of her trade—prostitution.¹⁹

17:4 **gold and precious stones and pearls.** This imagery continues to portray her as having great wealth and possessing the finer things of the world.

17:4 **a golden cup.** This also shows her wealth but also portrays her true intent, because the cup hold “abominations and filthiness.”

17:5 **MYSTERY.** The word was not part of her name as the capitalization in the KJV would indicate, but an adjective meaning ‘secret,’ modifying “name”—in other

words, her secret name, now revealed to the whole world through John’s writing (thus giving the world power over her), is ‘Babylon the Great, the Mother of all Prostitutes and Detestable Things of the Earth.’

17:5 **MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS.** To be the “mother” of something is not just to have a child but to reproduce those things in others.²⁰ In other words, the woman on the beast has caused many to participate in these sins.

17:6 **drunken with the blood of the saints and...the martyrs of Jesus.** The woman drinks the blood of slain saints and witnesses of Jesus, alluding to those killed with the fifth seal (6:9) and the witnesses/prophets who stood up against evil for 3-1/2 years but were killed in the end (11:3-9), among many others who faithfully lived according to their covenants and boldly bore testimony of Christ and suffered for it.

17:6 **great admiration.** Or, ‘Astonishment,’ ‘wonder,’ or ‘amazement.’

ANGELIC INTERPRETATION (17:7-18)

John’s amazement and wonder leads to an angelic interpretation of the images, which are not likely meant to represent specific people or kingdoms, but patterns and concepts of apostasy and wickedness that applied in John’s and still apply in ours.

17:8 **the beast.** The same beast as in 13:1-8. He not only speaks blasphemy, but puts himself up as a false messiah (see 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

17:8 **was, and is not; and shall.** Twice in this verse the beast is characterized as something that was, then was not, but will be again. In this first instance, what he will be is a beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit, only to go into perdition, referring to what will be portrayed in more detail in at the end of chapter 19.

17:8 **go into perdition.** “Perdition” is *apoleia*, meaning ‘ruin’ or ‘utter destruction.’ Satan is called Perdition and his followers face eternal destruction (see D&C 76:26, 31-48).

17:8 **was, and is not, and yet is.** Contrasted with Jesus who is, was, and is to come (1:4). The beast in chapter

¹⁸ Draper, 187; also Parry and Parry, 221.

¹⁹ Arnold, 4:344-345.

²⁰ Osborne, 613.

13 was, then was wounded unto death, then was yet again, but he has no promise of being there in the future.

17:9 **seven heads are seven mountains.** The word used, *orē*, could be ‘mountain’ or ‘hill.’ Most likely this refers to Rome, a city with seven hills.²¹ Rome was called “Babylon” by Peter (1 Peter 5:13). Still, Rome should be considered symbolic of the point here, that of evil wherever it exists,²² especially since the heads are not only mountains/hills but also kings. Many attempts have been made to determine which seven kings are discussed here,²³ but they are more probably symbolic of all evil kings (seven being the number of completion/perfection). The eighth king is the beast itself.

17:12 **ten horns.** Ten other kings who have power ‘one hour’ (a short time), just long enough to gather their forces to join the beast (at least for now; see verse 16) to make war against the Lamb. This is similar to Daniel’s vision of ten horns with one little horn in the midst (Daniel 7:7-8, 20-25).

17:13 **one mind.** This means that the kings are fully in line with the beast’s agenda and requests; they give him their “total allegiance and support.”²⁴

17:14 **the Lamb shall overcome them.** John did not want to leave us in doubt as to the outcome of this great battle—Jesus shall win because “he is Lord of lords, and King of kings.”

17:14 **called, chosen, and faithful.** Those with Jesus participate in his victory. Compare to D&C 121:34-36 where many are called but few are chosen because they don’t understand that the powers of heaven can only be controlled upon the “principles of righteousness,” which are then laid out in D&C 121:41-46, “long-suffering,” “gentleness and meekness,” and “love unfeigned,” among many others.

17:15 **the waters.** This symbol is interpreted by the angel as the people and nations of the earth who are in awe of the woman and her beast.

17:16 **these shall hate the whore.** The ten short-term kings all fight the whore, because they detest her power over them. In the end, the wicked will kill off the wicked

with their pride, jealousy, and infighting. See 1 Nephi 22:13-14; Mormon 4:5; also Ezekiel 23 which describes the destruction of wicked Jerusalem.

17:16 **make her desolate and naked.** She will lose all of her fine clothing and jewelry that distinguish her from others and represent her greatness, thus removing her worldly status.

17:16 **eat her flesh.** The kings act like wild animals; the story is reminiscent of Jezebel’s death in 2 Kings 9 where wild dogs tore her apart. This also alludes to the fate of these kings in chapter 19.

17:16 **burn her with fire.** Her final destruction at the hands of kings is thorough, leaving nothing behind. Interestingly, daughters of priests in the OT who defiled themselves as prostitutes were “burnt with fire” (Leviticus 21:9).

17:17 KJV	17:17 JST
17 For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.	17 For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

The JST change is the only one in chapter 17. It adds emphasis that God’s promised are fulfilled not just someday but all the time.

17:18 **the woman.** Babylon, in her high status of political rule, economic power, and apostasy was shown verse 4. She is “the reverse image of the woman with the man child....Unlike the virtuous woman, the whore has no son; indeed, one of her most striking features is her perpetual barrenness. All her glitter and ornamentation do not hide the reality; she personifies sterility and death.”²⁵ In verse 4, she mimics the priesthood with her golden cup filled with wickedness, the colors of her clothing, and the words on her forehead (the high priest simply had “Holiness to the Lord” engraved on his cap). See 2 Nephi 10:16 where the whore is broadly defined as “He that fighteth against Zion.”

²¹ Osborne, 617.

²² Draper, 193; Parry and Parry, 229.

²³ Arnold, 4:346-347.

²⁴ Osborne, 622.

²⁵ Draper, 185.

CONCLUSION

These chapters 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.

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.

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Bible versions cited (if no version is cited, it is the KJV; any translation or paraphrase in single quotes is the author's):

KJV – King James Version (Authorized Version)

JST – Joseph Smith Translation

BYU – BYU New Testament Rendition (from Draper and Rhodes)

CJB – Complete Jewish Bible
LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)
NAB – The New American Bible
NASB – New American Standard Bible
NIV – New International Version
NJB – New Jerusalem Bible
NLT – New Living Translation