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Gaspar de Crayer, *St. John at Patmos*

At the time John wrote Revelation, a power struggle raged within the Christian community. John wrote his work for those who yet clung to the truth.

Teaching the Book of Revelation: Five Considerations

RICHARD D. DRAPER

Richard D. Draper (richard_draper@byu.edu) is a professor emeritus of ancient scripture at BYU.

If there is one book that often gets overlooked in classes dealing with the New Testament—be they seminary, institute, or Sunday School—it is the Revelation of St. John the Divine. There is little wonder: the book seems mysterious, obscure, and challenging to the point that many do not want to tackle it.¹ This perception is unfortunate because the book plays a number of important roles as one of the twenty-seven texts that form the primary witness of Jesus as the Christ. Perhaps its most important role is that it finishes the story that the Gospels and Acts begin and the Epistles further. A careful reading of Acts through Jude leaves the thinking reader saddened, if not downhearted. The Epistles' combined witness suggests that Jesus and his Apostles failed. By the end of that era, the gospel was no longer being preached (see Jude 1:3), many antichrists reigned in various branches of the Church (see 1 John 2:18–19; 3 John 1:9–10), and false teachers abounded (see Revelation 2:14–15; 20–23). Is that the end of the story? If it were not for Revelation, one could only conclude from these scriptures that God lost.

John's masterwork, however, tells the rest of the story. It reassured the Saints of his day that, no matter how bad conditions looked, Jesus was still

in charge, history was playing out according to God's will, and the Christians would, in the end, triumph. To the modern reader, John's work paints a graphic picture of the last days, pointing out the dangers the Saints will face and showing them how to overcome. Not covering this important material leaves a major message of the New Testament untold, the witness of Jesus incomplete, and the Latter-day Saints vulnerable to attack.

Consideration 1: Why John Wrote Revelation

Understanding why John wrote Revelation helps both teacher and student understand the major message of the book. The Seer wrote with a definite objective in mind. It was to fulfill the commandment given him directly by Jesus Christ on an unforgettable Sabbath some time during the last decade of the first century (see Revelation 1:11). However, that was not the only reason he wrote. He was living when many of the Saints were discouraged, even frightened. They were in the midst of the greatest crisis yet faced by the early Church. The ordeal through which they were passing had terrifying prospects. Rome, the seemingly omnipotent master of their world, had determined that holding to the Christian faith constituted a crime worthy of death. The Asian churches already knew the effect of that brutal decision (see, for example, Revelation 2:13), and many wondered how a few powerless Christians could survive against the Roman colossus.²

As bad as the external danger to the fledgling Church was, there was a greater internal danger—apostasy. Those with eyes to see knew that, after a half century of struggle, apostasy was gaining the upper hand. The Savior's apostles and prophets knew it was coming. It was one of the themes on which the Lord had dwelt during his forty-day ministry after his Resurrection (see Acts 1:3).³

From the days of that ministry, the shadow of the antichrist haunted the peace of the Saints. Paul warned the Thessalonians, the Miletians, and others that a "falling away" would occur because men would not endure sound doctrine (see 2 Thessalonians 2:1–5; 2 Timothy 4:3–4; Acts 20:29–31). "Also of your own selves," he told them, "shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). As a result of this falling away, "that man of sin," a son of perdition, would be revealed, "who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple [that is, the Church] of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thessalonians 2:3–4).

The Greek word that Paul used was *apostasia*, which is translated in the King James Version as "falling away." It meant literally "to stand apart in immovable opposition" and, in a civil sense, "to rebel," or better, "to mutiny." It carried the idea of an internal takeover by parties hostile to the established authority, leadership, and constitution.⁴ Paul warned the Church for over three years that there would be such a rebellion (see Acts 20:31). Though the leaders whom the Savior had chosen were once successful, they would be replaced by others of a perverse nature (wolves in sheep's clothing) who would change the doctrine (constitution) of Christ to fit their own philosophical understanding. Paul's warning shows that the Church was not in danger of totally disappearing. Rather, those antichrists, who would replace Christ's gospel with the doctrines of men, mingled with scripture, would assume control. Even so, Christianity would continue, albeit in attenuated and distorted forms.

At the time John wrote Revelation, a power struggle raged within the Christian community. John wrote his work for those who yet clung to the truth. He warned against false prophets and their source of inspiration and emphasized that God would not allow them to continue without consequence. If the churches chose to reject God's officers, he would come out in judgment by abandoning the churches and allowing the false leaders to take over. However, this condition would last only for a time. Eventually, the apostate church would be consumed and disappear under a blaze of truth and light associated with the coming of Christ (see D&C 101:32–34).

But what of that nation that was the political seat of persecution, whose authority even the least of the Christians feared? The Revelator had an answer: God would move against Rome and every other recreant nation that followed. His authority would prevail over even these seemingly omnipotent masters. And the powers of hell, which undergirded and supported these corrupt governments and institutions (and from which they drew both their strength and inspiration), would also incur the terrible wrath of God. Driven into war lust, they would fight against themselves until the time God would intervene and stop all fighting and render them eternally impotent.

Thus the focus of Revelation—the core around which everything revolves—is the issue of authority. Who really controls the world? Is it the political institutions, the powers of evil, or God? To the faithful few, struggling against external pressure and growing persecutions and being buffeted by the alternate voices of the apostates, the message of Revelation, with its

omnipotent and avenging, yet caring, God, must have brought comfort and hope with its promise of final victory.

Major Themes in Revelation

The best way to teach the most important messages of Revelation in a short time is to highlight its two major themes. Because the first is so important, it is treated with some depth below.

The revelation of Jesus Christ. The most important theme that runs through John's masterwork is the "Revelation of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:1). An important reason the earliest Christians loved the book was because it showed Jesus in a new light, thus rounding out their understanding of him as found in the Gospels and other writings. Indeed, in Revelation, they found neither the suffering servant of Mark nor the new Moses of Matthew. In this work they found the divine and glorified Christ working out God's purposes for the salvation of his people in the last days and then ushering in the grand millennial era when all would know God. They rejoiced in his Second Coming, which would bring with it judgment—reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked. In Revelation they met Jesus the vindicator, the one who would avenge them before their enemies. It is important to note that their desire was not for revenge but for vindication (see 6:9–11). The former carries the strong implication of vindictiveness while the later looks for recompense for injuries unjustly sustained. Those of John's readers who were converted from Judaism and paganism and suffering for their decision reached to their Lord for strength and exoneration. They believed that punishment for wrongdoing was not a spontaneous or unilateral decision by God alone. Rather, it was God's direct response to their appeal. This thought motivated them to raise their voice to him in supplication.⁵ Within the pages of Revelation, they came to understand that the Lord was very aware of their plight and that the day would come when he would respond not only to their desires but also to those of all the other Saints who would be mauled and persecuted through the last days.

In the book, Jesus refers to himself as the *pantokrator*, translated in the King James Version as "the Almighty" (Revelation 1:8). The Greek word is not just a synonym for omnipotence but carries the nuance of one who engineers, regulates, or orchestrates. The title emphasizes one important point: Jesus rules history and governs its outcome. By analogy, the great Elohim wrote the score for the symphony of *Terra Firma* before the foundations of

the earth were even formed,⁶ and he ordained and empowered Jesus to be the conductor. As Savior, he was to prepare the hall, assemble the musicians, and see that the score was played out exactly as his Father designed so that the world's history would end in a great crescendo exactly as God had planned.

The revelation of the Savior in the first vision (Revelation 1:13–16). In his first appearance in the book, the Savior comes as the Second Comforter to fulfill, in part, his promise to his people before his death (see John 14:18–23). In this vision he appears in the vestments of both king and priest, revealing that he is the holder of the fullness of priesthood authority (see Revelation 1:13).⁷ The most jarring aspect of the imagery found in this vision is the sharp two-edged sword that continually issues from the Savior's mouth (see v. 16).⁸ Though somewhat grating, the symbol very accurately teaches a very important point. According to Doctrine and Covenants 33:1, the Savior's word "is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, soul and spirit; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The imagery in Revelation emphasizes that the Lord continually exercises this power. There is nothing—no deed, no feeling, no thought—that escapes him, and he will execute judgment over all (see Alma 12:13–15).

He also holds another power, that of "the keys of hell and of death" (Revelation 1:18). He is Lord not only of the living but also of the dead. Therefore, hell is under his rule, and it works toward his objectives. There are some souls who are so recalcitrant that the only way they will accept even a modicum of divine grace is to be relieved of the torture of conscience described so graphically as "hellfire." Thus the fire is not so much a tool of punishment as it is a tool of redemption. The fire softens those hearts too hardened to break allowing them to be reshaped anew. Thus most will respond to the fire, accept the Lord's grace, and be saved as celestial, happy souls. Those whose hearts resist even this fire will become sons of perdition.

The message of the first vision. Jesus is immediate, intimate, and cognizant. "I know thy works," he tells every one of the seven churches (see Revelation 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15). Indeed, as he told Enoch, his eye can pierce all the creations he has made (see Moses 7:36), and therefore he knows everything that happens anywhere all the time. His sword is ever active, and it works not only on the earth but in heaven and hell as well. He is *the* Savior of both the living and the dead but also of those in paradise and spirit prison.

The revelation of Jesus in the second vision (Revelation 5). In the second vision of Jesus, John saw a book at the right hand of God (see 5:1). This book contained “the revealed will, mysteries, and the works of God” dealing with earth’s history and which must be executed in order for the planet to be saved (see D&C 77:6). The problem was that there was no one on earth, in heaven, or in the spirit world who was worthy to open the book. As a result, God’s will and humankind’s salvation were in jeopardy (see Revelation 5:3). This momentarily upset John, but an angel reassured him someone was found (see vv. 4–5). The Seer turned and saw the Savior, albeit cast in dual symbolic forms: the “Root of David” and a “Lamb as it had been slain,” or better, sacrificed (vv. 5–6).⁹ Both are messianic symbols, one tied to kingship and the other to self-sacrifice. The Lamb had seven eyes and seven horns, which symbolize his omniscience and omnipotence (see v. 6). Joseph Smith changed the number to twelve, thus tying the image to the power of priesthood, the means by which the Lord does, indeed, operate in the world.

The message of the second vision. Though the Lamb bears the terrible mark of sacrifice, the wound does not dominate the scene; the horns and eyes do. Still, the importance of the sacrifice cannot be overlooked. It is because of that act that the Lord is “worthy to open the book” and fulfill the will of his Father. In this way, John forces on us a new definition of omnipotence. No longer can it be defined as the power of unlimited coercion. Rather, it is the power of infinite persuasion through the invincible might of self-sacrificing love. Thus the vision tacitly focuses on the greatest of all the Lord’s powers, that of love (see John 15:13).

Joseph Smith’s change points out one important fact: the Lamb works through priesthood and auxiliaries. Until he comes, the Saints are his eyes and his hands, carrying out his work. That idea is important because it shows that our labors are not ancillary or nonessential to the Lord. What we do is critical to his success in overcoming evil and saving the world.

The revelation of Jesus Christ in the third vision (Revelation 14). As the third vision of the Savior opens, the Lord stands with the 144,000 on Mount Zion. In this chapter, the number symbolizes the righteous members of the Church¹⁰ and shows that they are ensconced with the Savior in Zion communities of safety before the wrath of God descends upon a hardened and recalcitrant world (see 14:1; compare D&C 45:66–71; 115:5–6). The Lord wears a golden wreath (see Revelation 14:14).¹¹ In the Greco-Roman world, such were given to competitors for superior athletic performance or to Roman

generals for outstanding military accomplishment. In this case, it is the latter that is in mind; the imagery depicts the Savior as a triumphant general.

The vision also shows that the Lord will personally direct the ingathering of the righteous symbolized by the reaping of the earth (see vv. 15–16). It is not he, however, who presides over the destruction of the wicked, symbolized by the reaping of the vine (see vv. 18–20). That gruesome task is assigned to another.

The message of the third vision. Here we meet the Son as victor, dwelling, at least part of the time, with his Saints before the end comes. Among the righteous there is great celebration (see vv. 7–11). But such celebration seems premature; the enemy is still strong, arrogant, and eager for the challenge. Why such faith on the part of Saints? There are two reasons. The first is that the Lord is with them. Christ has now stepped back onto the stage of history and is personally directing its affairs. He has also brought his terror with him, which frightens the wicked to the point they will not attack Zion (see D&C 45:66–67). The second is their absolute faith that he will prevail. They understand what he is about. He is acting to “destroy them which destroy the earth” (Revelation 11:18). In short, they understand that he saves the earth by destroying those who would destroy it. In the meantime, he has prepared a way for his people to escape the latter-day horrors. He will place them in Zion.

The revelation of Jesus Christ in the fourth vision (19:11–16). This vision opens with the heavens, making way for the coming of the King. The vision shows that he is the one both “Faithful and True” (v. 11). These titles signify, according to Elder Bruce R. McConkie, “that he is the embodiment and personification of these godly attributes. . . . Above all his fellows, he was obedient to the will of the Father and true to every trust imposed upon him.”¹² It is important to note that he comes to make war. His war, however, unlike so many, is totally just.

What is unique about the revelation of Christ presented here is that he wears many crowns (see v. 12). This is the first time he is pictured with these. In the past, only his enemies have worn them (see 9:7; 12:3; 13:1). The symbol, however, is very important in this revelation because it shows that Christ has come as King of kings and Lord of lords (19:16) with the purpose of wresting back from Satan his kingdom. The vision shows this is the time of judgment, and thus his vestments are bloodred (v. 13; compare to D&C 133:46–47, 49–51).

The message of the fourth vision. When the Lord comes to the world, it will be with regal and marshal authority. He will come as the warrior king to make the earth holy. The vision stresses that the Lord's judgments are true and righteous, and that includes the destruction he brings: the Lord is perfectly prepared to allow his destroying angels (see 7:1–2; 9:15) and the beasts of Satan (see 9:16–19; 16:12–16) a certain destructive power over millions. Some may have trouble with this idea, but Revelation forces upon us a very realistic understanding about death. From the Lord's perspective, all must die. The question is not when and how, because ultimately destiny is not determined by the moment or manner of death; it is determined by the manner of life. Keep in mind that those who are destroyed are not annihilated. They have further existence. For the present, they refuse to play the game by God's rules. They have become mean and violent, and so they are thrown into the penalty box, so to speak, for unnecessary roughness while the hockey game goes on. We must fight against the current idea that mortality is "so infallibly precious that," as G. B. Caird puts it, "the death which robs us of it must be the ultimate tragedy." Such an idea, he says, "is precisely the idolatry that John is trying here to combat. We have already seen that John calls the enemies of the church 'the inhabitants of the earth,' because they have made themselves utterly at home in this transient world order. If all men must die, and if, at the end, heaven and earth must vanish along with those whose lives are irredeemably bounded by their worldly horizons, then it is surely in accord with the mercy of God that he should send men from time to time forceful reminders of the insecurity of their tenure."¹³ The point is that Jesus is always *the* Savior and he intervenes to save the world by destroying its enemies.

His coming will mark the end of the period of evil. Indeed, during the period symbolized as 1,260 days (or three and a half years), evil will dominate the world. It will also prove its self-destructive nature. "But, God cannot allow such self-destruction to act as an impersonal nemesis; an independent, self-operating moral law sweeping away all in its path," reports Caird. "To do so would allow the power of evil to carry all the inhabitants of the earth down with them to utter ruin. God would be left with a hollow, Pyrrhic victory. Because God's victory must also be the Saints' victory, it must be won through righteous human agents exercising faith in God." He goes on to note that evil must be allowed to combine its forces against the Savior's people and then fall back in utter defeat through the faith and trust coupled with the glory of those who will come with the Savior (see 19:14). In short, the Lord's victory is

our victory.¹⁴ The point is that his work cannot go on unless we assist. Indeed, it is the prayers of the Saints that act as the trigger for his coming (see 8:3–4). The result of being a righteous participant in the war that is now raging is that we will share in his full victory and gain both temporal and eternal reward (see 20:4).

The revelation of the great enemy of God's kingdom in the last days. The second theme that runs through much of Revelation is the identity and work of the great enemy who opposes God and works to destroy his people. This enemy is introduced in chapter 9 as the star that fell from heaven (v. 1) and as the angel from the bottomless pit who is the organizer and leader of the great destroying army to be unleashed in the last days (v. 11). This role is one of the reasons that he carries the Hebrew title of Abaddon and the Greek title Apollyon, both referring to one who ruins or destroys (v. 11).

In chapter 12 he reappears as the great red dragon (v. 3) who opposed God in the premortal world and was cast down with his minions to the earth (v. 9), where he rages against righteousness and works to bring misery "because he knoweth that he hath but a short time" (vv. 12–13).

He does not work alone. In chapter 13 John introduces his readers to Satan's two assistants. The first is a beast from the sea (vv. 1–2), and the second is a beast from the land (v. 11). In chapter 17, the latter transforms into Babylon the great harlot, who drives the beast to do Satan's bidding. The land beast/Babylon represents those philosophies and false theologies that push forward Satan's agenda, and the beast from the sea represents those kingdoms, governments, and institutions that live by and promote that philosophy and give the system its muscle.¹⁵

The book clearly reveals the seductive nature of the great whore. She is able to win souls for the dragon by promoting acute materialism and immorality. Note chapter 18, verses 12–13, which shows all she has to sell. People become so addicted to her ways that nothing, not even the horrors of war, can drive them from her (see 9:20–21 and 16:10–11). Thus Satan is able to bind and seal them his.

The dragon and his earthly minions will gather during these last days to make war against the Savior and his people (see 19:19; compare 1 Nephi 13:14–17). The latter will be destroyed, but the former will be incarcerated for a thousand years (see Revelation 20:1–2, 7). The purpose of Satan's binding is not yet punitive but precautionary.¹⁶ The Savior and his people must have time to prepare the earth for celestial glory. Satanic delusions are not to

get in the way for a season until all is done. When that season ends, Satan will be loosed for a short time. He will use his freedom once more to make war, but that war will end in his eternal punishment and incarceration in the “lake of fire and brimstone” (20:10).

The warning that this section carries to all Latter-day Saints is to avoid materialism and immorality. Both of these are hooks that Satan uses to catch and bind people to him. All holy people must avoid the appeal of Babylon. Indeed, a voice from heaven warns, “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (18:4).

The Book of Revelation within Its Genre

John did not choose the form of the vision; God did. The form is now called “apocalyptic.” This genre of literature received its name from the first word in the Greek text of the Book of Revelation, *apocalypsis*, and from this the English word *apocalypse* is derived.¹⁷ The Greek word denotes a revelation or disclosure. This title is quite fitting for this kind of literature because one of its main signatures is that it reveals or discloses heavenly secrets to its readers. Apocalypses were first written by the Jews but later picked up by the Christians.¹⁸

Most apocalypses contain a vision or dream the writer had. This dream is often narrated by a guide who shows the writer around the celestial realm. These dreams are often eschatological, meaning that they deal with the future and portray earthly conditions that God’s people must pass through. Both God and Satan have agents that work for them and strive to forward their objectives. Apocalypses show that during the final evil age, righteousness will battle wickedness and win due to divine intervention that will bring in a glorious future.

A major characteristic of this kind of literature is its use of symbolism which the reader is expected to interpret. The general message is that God is in control of all that goes on; he has foreseen everything that will happen and has prepared a way of escape for his people.¹⁹

The basic theological foundation of apocalyptic literature. A basic theological foundation gives apocalyptic literature a unique religious perspective.²⁰ This foundation is composed of three elements. First, it is nearly always eschatological. That is, it focuses on a period of time yet future when God will disrupt the flow of history to bring about the end of wickedness and institute a new order of righteousness and peace. “It is God’s breaking into the

flow of history and altering it that distinguishes the apocalyptic panorama from its counterpart, prophecy,” states one observant scholar. “Prophecy, like apocalyptic, is predictive, but concentrates on a future which arises out of the present such that historical flow is not interrupted. Apocalyptic looks to the end time when God will discontinue the course of history, turn it to his own purposes, and bring about a new beginning. Therefore, apocalyptic ignores, and in this way denies, man’s capacity to create a peaceful future by overcoming wickedness. The united witness of apocalyptic literature is that the consummation will come from outside the flow of history and thereby disrupt it to bring about God’s own ends.”²¹

Second, apocalyptic literature is dualistic. That is, apocalyptic reality consists of two irreducible elements or opposing principles: good and evil. This dualism is not metaphysical but works on the historical and temporal plane. The present age is subject to the powers of evil. Satan and his hosts reign, but Christ and his people will overthrow them and propel the world into a new timeless age of perfect righteousness under the authority of ultimate goodness.

Third, a rigid determinism marks the whole. Apocalyptic literature testifies that all things move in concert toward a divinely predetermined end. Everything is inevitable; nothing is left to chance. The problem of human agency, or free will, within the context of God’s omniscience never surfaces. But there is a tacit insistence that God’s ultimate victory is worked out within the frame work of human freedom. Yet apocalyptic writers in general, and John in particular, are very pessimistic about humankind’s being able to combat evil and rise out of the present wicked world on its own.²² God alone has that power. Therefore, central to the apocalyptic framework is faith in God and in his power to control the future and turn all things to the blessing of the righteous.²³

Though John’s Revelation shares these elements with other Jewish and Christian apocalypses, it is unique. No other piece has the sweep, power, organization, and grandeur of this masterwork, to say nothing of authentic inspiration. In its light, the nonbiblical apocalypses found in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha²⁴ appear crude, confused, and strange. They seem the product of unbridled fancy, written to titillate and mystify rather than edify. In contrast, the Revelation stands orderly, dignified, serious, and purposeful. Further, it bears the apostolic stamp of John the Apostle.²⁵

John is the earliest known Christian writer to produce an original apocalypse using this genre as a kind of divine code. And it worked well. Though there are more variant manuscript readings of the text of Revelation than that of any other New Testament book, these are not sufficient to cause uncertainty on the meaning of a single paragraph taken as a whole.²⁶

Consideration 2: General Challenges to Teaching the Book of Revelation

The primary challenge. The book was written in a code that uses powerful symbols to illustrate cosmic and earthly realities. It is seeing beyond the symbols to those realities that presents the biggest challenge to both teacher and student. Often readers have a tendency to take the images too literally and try to match them with modern people or events. It is best to see the symbols as showing the general flow of history and the peoples and institutions that are a part of it. The best guide is to allow modern revelation to inform Revelation. (This idea is developed more fully below).

The secondary challenge. The book does not move in a smooth chronological way. After chapter 3, it contains flash-forwards and flashbacks and interlude after interlude. It also retells the same story but from a different perspective. Chapters 12–13 and 17–18 give the background to and explain the reason behind the horrible destructions chronicled in chapters 8–9 and 16. The chaotic organization prevents casual readers from seeing the structure and, therefore, following the historical flow of the work. At the end of this paper is a simplified chart designed to show how the parts fit together.

A book to be understood. In spite of these challenges, the book can be understood. The Revelator received his visions by the power of prophecy, and that is the best means by which one can understand them. It was in this vein that Joseph Smith declared that the book “is one of the plainest books God ever caused to be written.”²⁷ To those who live in these days when prophets of God walk the earth, who have access through the prophets to eternal truths, and thus to the gift of prophecy, the central message of the book is clear.

In response to the question “Are we expected to understand the book of Revelation?” Elder Bruce R. McConkie stated:

Certainly. Why else did the Lord reveal it? The common notion that it deals with beasts and plagues and mysterious symbolisms that cannot be understood is just not true. It is so far overstated that it gives an entirely erroneous feeling about this portion of revealed truth. Most of the book—and it is no problem to count the verses

so included—is clear and plain and should be understood by the Lord’s people. Certain parts are not clear and are not understood by us—which, however, does not mean that we could not understand them if we would grow in faith as we should.

The Lord expects us to seek wisdom, to ponder his revealed truths, and to gain a knowledge of them by the power of his Spirit.²⁸

The truth is that Latter-day Saints are in an excellent position to understand the Apocalypse. To us the Lord has stated, “Unto you it shall be given to know the signs of the times, and the signs of the coming of the Son of Man” (D&C 68:11). And again:

For thus saith the Lord—I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end.

Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory.

And to them will I reveal all the mysteries, yea, all the hidden mysteries of my kingdom from days of old, and for ages to come, will I make known unto them the good pleasure of my will concerning all things pertaining to my kingdom.

Yea, even the wonders of eternity shall they know, and things to come will I show them, even the things of many generations. (D&C 76:5–8)

He has told us further that “the coming of the Lord draweth nigh, and it overtaketh the world as a thief in the night—Therefore, gird up your loins, that you may be the children of light, and that day shall not overtake you as a thief” (D&C 106:4–5). These scriptures show that the Lord has no intention of hiding the future from his Saints.²⁹ The book of Revelation proves this fact.

Consideration 3: The Exegesis of the Book of Revelation

The book as an extended allegory. In doing the exegesis of this masterwork, one must keep in mind that Revelation is an extended allegory, a genre in which symbols are used to represent reality. Each image always explains and illuminates some aspect of its historical subject. For example, in chapter 17, Babylon is compared to a richly decked out courtesan. The image carries the idea of one who promotes lust for money and willingly uses others to his or her own advantage. But Babylon is itself a symbol. The ancient city was the center of extravagant wealth and also the seat of corruption and slavery. Thus the depiction is an excellent symbol for those degenerate and depraved governments, institutions, businesses, and churches that exist in the last days, all of which, for wealth, fame, or power, misuse and corrupt those under their control or influence.

In Revelation, we meet one symbol after another, all begging to be interpreted. Sometimes the book itself identifies what the symbol means. For example, the great whore mentioned above sits “upon many waters” (17:1), which John learns represents “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues” (v. 15). Thus the imagery of “many waters” shows the extent of the great harlot’s reach.

What is helpful is that when a figure is defined in one place, that meaning can almost always be applied when that image shows up elsewhere. For example, the image of the dragon is defined as Satan (see Revelation 12:9), and therefore, when that image shows up again (see 13:4; 20:2), we can safely assume it still references him.

When the book does not give the meaning of an object or motif, it is best to use both the immediate and broad contexts in which the image is found to determine the image’s meaning. Then the probable identification made at the image’s initial appearance can reasonably be applied to its later ones. For example, in chapter 12, we meet the beast from the sea that represents those human institutions and powers that Satan has under his control and to which he gives assistance. When the beast shows up again in chapter 17, we can assume it denotes those same institutions.

Also very helpful in determining the meaning of various depictions are the commonplace associations, coming mainly from the Old Testament but also from certain cultural elements, of John’s audience. Thus, the Hebrew and Greek scriptures, Jewish writings (including apocryphal and pseudepigraphical materials), early Christian sources, and pagan items help illuminate the text. For example: in chapter 4, John sees a scroll with writing on both the front and back. Normally a scroll had writing only on one side. From ancient sources we learn that one that had writing on both was called *opisthographon*, which is the basis of the modern technical term “opisthograph.”³⁰ Ezekiel’s scroll was such an instrument (see Ezekiel 2:9–10).³¹ And one more example for illustration: in Revelation 6:4, John sees a rider with a “great sword.” Greek speakers used the term *machaira* for such things as a scalpel, a butcher knife, and even the dreaded Roman short sword. The word thus denoted any edged piece that was used for a specific purpose, including the saber used by the cavalry.³² That John used the adjective *great* suggests he had the latter in mind. It is likely (and this is where ancient sources are helpful) that he wanted to convey an additional meaning—that of the sword bearer’s power over life and death. During Rome’s Republican period, only the highest military officials

were permitted to wear a sword.³³ That changed during the Imperial period. The Roman emperors wore either a dagger or a sword as a badge of office.³⁴ The *ius gladii*, “right of the sword,” was the sign of the imperium or power of the Caesars to execute capital punishment. This authority could be delegated to the provincial governors when the emperor saw fit, but only he held it by right.³⁵ Therefore, the sword given to the horsemen suggested their divinely delegated authority, the passive voice again masking the workings of God.³⁶

Another important point: when trying to decipher John’s work, sometimes images can be easily pictured, but at other times they cannot. A number of depictions have jarring elements and impossible combinations with some characters doing impossible activities. For example, when John first sees the Savior in chapter 1, as noted above, he has a sword continually issuing from his mouth (v. 16). This is difficult to picture because, historically, such a thing never has and never will happen. Further, the Seer describes the beast in Revelation 13:1 as having seven heads but ten horns. For easy visualization, there are either not enough or too many horns. Also, the four living creatures met in chapter 4, verse 6, are located simultaneously at the corners of God’s throne and at the exterior of his dais. Thus, they occupy two places at the same time. In all cases, it is important to remember that the images are not to be drawn or even imagined; they are, however, to be interpreted. John’s masterwork was never intended for the canvas and brush, but for the mind. As with the images found in Ezekiel, the depictions are riddles demanding to be solved.³⁷ Often these jarring and unreal images bring in a dynamic and interactive quality meant to engage the mind and to teach the thoughtful reader.

Multiple meanings. Each image can have multiple points of comparison and therefore meanings. The concern is, of course, not to be carried away by these and to use only those that best apply. Also, it is important to note that not every detail described by John has deep significance. Some of the vision’s particulars reflect what John saw and round out the image giving vividness and power to his presentation. Flaming eyes, feet burning as brass, or various colored stones are all means by which John catches and holds the mind’s eye. Their individual meaning must never be taken out of the context of which they are a part.

The importance of understanding that the book is symbolic. From its beginning, the book relies heavily on symbols. This becomes particularly evident from chapter 4 on, where the Lord continually uses images as symbolic portrayals of hidden realities. This point is significant because it underscores how

the text should be treated. Quite a number of works on the book take the stance that since the text clearly explains the meaning of some of the images, those it does not explain must be taken literally.³⁸ Many of those who take the visions factually see such depictions as those recorded in chapter 9 (of a huge army of armored horsemen with their deadly steeds) as descriptions of modern armies and weaponry. Though it is true that the last days will be filled with war, taking these images too literally causes us to miss the point.³⁹ Indeed, taking any of the images literally, based on John’s own words, would be an incorrect interpretation.

That being the case, we can detect four levels in which the story communicates with the reader: “the linguistic level, which is composed of the record of the text itself to be read and heard; a visionary level, which consists of John’s actual visionary experience; the referential level, which consists of the particular historical identification of the objects seen in the vision; and the symbolic level, which consists of what the symbols in the vision connote about their historical referents.”⁴⁰

Let us use as an example the four living creatures met in chapter 4. On the linguistic level, we have the report and description of the four “beasts” (see vv. 7–8). On the visionary level, John tells us how he was taken to heaven and saw the celestial throne room including these animals (see vv. 2–6). On the referential level, we learn that these “beasts” are “figurative expressions, used by the Revelator, John” to reveal the happiness of those beings who become part of the celestial realm (D&C 77:2). On the historical level we learn that these creatures are four actual beasts saved from other worlds which God used to represent “the glory of the classes of beings in their destined order” (D&C 77:3). The message is that God saves not only humans but also animals that fulfill the measure of their creation.⁴¹

One final example seems in order to show how this works. In chapter 10, we read of John’s recommissioning. On the linguistic level, the text reports the descent of an angel with a small scroll which John eats (see vv. 1–10). On the visionary level, John records how he sees this angel descending and how a heavenly voice commands him to take the scroll out of the angel’s hand and eat it. He tells us as he does so, “it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter” (Revelation 10:10). On the referential level, the scroll was actually “a mission, and an ordinance, for him to gather the tribes of Israel” (D&C 77:14). On the symbolical level, it depicts John’s latter-day work, beginning with his assistance in restoring the

Simplified chart showing the contents of the book of Revelation in conjunction with D&C 77:6–7

Ch*	Before Christ				After Christ			
	1 st Seal	2 nd Seal	3 rd Seal	4 th Seal	5 th Seal†	6 th Seal	7 th Seal	
1					█			
2								
3					█			
4								▶
5								
6	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	
7								
8								
9								
10					█			
11								
12					█	█	█	
13					█	█	█	
14					█	█	█	
15					█	█	█	
16					█	█	█	
17					█	█	█	
18					█	█	█	
19					█	█	█	
20					█	█	█	▶
21					█	█	█	▶
22					█	█	█	

Brent Nordgren

* Chapters in the book of Revelation

† The fifth seal is considered to be John’s day

Melchizedek Priesthood on the earth and his work in assisting in the gathering of the ten tribes (see D&C 77:14).

The point is simply this: the book carries its message by way of symbols. John states that he saw a scroll in heaven sealed with seven seals (see Revelations 5:1–2). In reality, such a scroll does not and never has existed. The seals, on the referential level, represent seven thousand years of history (see D&C 77:7), but on the symbolic level they represent the full period of earth's history, no matter how long that is. In reality, history does not work itself into neat periods of precisely one thousand years. The seals' images are symbols showing a general outline of how history will flow, but the images should not be taken too literally. Taken together, they show the general downward trend of humankind resulting in the great battle of the last days (see Revelation 16:16). Chapter 8 tells of a "great mountain burning with fire [which] was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood," killing a third of sea life and destroying a third of all watercraft (vv. 8–9). The text also tells of another great star that fell "from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood" (vv. 10–11). The imagery does not predict that the earth is going to be struck by harmful meteors or asteroids that will hurt precisely a third of earth's water systems. The historical reality is that, by the "mouth of [his] servant John," God "cursed the waters. Wherefore, the days will come that no flesh shall be safe upon the waters. And it shall be said in days to come that no one is able to go up to the land of Zion upon the waters, but he that is upright in heart" (D&C 61:14–16).

In short, the imagery in chapter 8 is but a representation of the earthquakes, hailstorms, famines, and pestilences that will plague the earth in the last days (see D&C 43:25). The symbols point to "a desolating scourge [that] shall go forth among the inhabitants of the earth," which, as the Lord has said, "shall continue to be poured out from time to time, if they repent not, until the earth is empty, and the inhabitants thereof are consumed away and utterly destroyed by the brightness of my coming" (D&C 5:19). In very deed, "the Lord's scourge shall pass over by night and by day, and the report thereof shall vex all people; yea, it shall not be stayed until the Lord come" (D&C 97:23). The historical reality the images in chapter 8 depict is "the testimony of the voice of thunderings, and the voice of lightnings, and the voice of tempests, and the voice of the waves of the sea heaving themselves beyond their bounds"

(D&C 88:90). The symbolic reality is that of nature out of control, nature infused with supernatural powers that will bring ever-increasing destruction upon a wicked and unrepentant world.

Consideration 4: Difficult Passages and How to Teach Them

The material above addresses broadly how to approach the material in any of the difficult passages. It is important that we let modern scripture inform Revelation. Further, the book should be seen as showing general trends, personalities, and institutions that will be working from the time of the Restoration to the Lord's Day. It does not point to specific individuals or organizations.

One chapter is of particular note. This is chapter 13, where Satan's assistants are introduced and their work defined. To understand the text, it is important to identify and explain the role of the two beasts. The sea beast represents unspecified nations, institutions, and powers that Satan uses to his ends. These forces supply the muscle he needs to push forward and enforce his will (see vv. 1–2). The land beast represents the philosophy that drives these institutions (see vv. 11–12). This beast is able to deceive people due to its ability to do miracles, likely the modern scientific advancements in such things as medicine and industry.

Of great curiosity is the mark and number of the beast (see vv. 16–18). Various ingenious attempts have been used to solve the riddle.⁴² Every one of these has proven problematic. Given, therefore, that none of these proposals allow for any degree of verification and that each has legitimate difficulties and objections, the idea that the calculation was meant to point to a particular person or institution simply does not hold up. It seems, rather, that John is not calling for his readers to engage in a mathematical exercise as much as he is asking them to use moral discernment in order to avoid being entrapped by the beast.⁴³ The best solution seems to be to understand this number, as with all other numbers in John's work, as metaphorical and symbolic. The mark as a number stands for the beast.⁴⁴ In such a case the number six would stand in contrast to the number seven, God's number, one that denotes fullness and completeness. Six would then be that which comes closest to wholeness but misses the mark and falls short of its potential. The triple repetition of the number intensifies the idea of incompleteness and failure.⁴⁵ Thus, it is a fit number to represent the trinity of imperfection: the dragon, the sea beast, and the land beast.

The work of the triumvirate of evil is currently moving apace. Slowly, genuine humility and brotherliness have been suppressed under a vast and complex coercion of sophisticated and bewitching propaganda and the brutality of pragmatism and unrestrained egotism.⁴⁶ What is the result? As one scholar noted, “In such a society, morals decline to the lowest level; the family collapses, schools breed anarchy and rebellion, business ethics are forgotten, entertainment becomes base and sordid, and printing presses exude smut and filth, until the whole is strangled in its own death blood and suffocated by its own stench.”⁴⁷

Students must understand that we are living in that society. And the only reason that the beasts have gained ascendancy is the fallen and spiritually degenerate state of modern society. This condition has been carefully orchestrated by the dragon and the land and sea beasts over the ages, and it has now reached full flower. The result is that evil has been able to impose itself on the earth dwellers because of their growing indifference and ambivalence toward the good. They are willing victims of a growing normalization of aberrant behavior. They have been seduced by the ideological sophistry that the false lamb spews through all forms of media—the “image” the inhabitants of the earth willingly created for it (see 13:14). As a result, their love has waxed cold and, along with it, their ability to feel, to sympathize, and to empathize with that which is good. Being touched by nothing, they can be reached by nothing, and therefore saved by nothing, not even the terrible beating of “the army of the horsemen, . . . having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone,” who killed “the third part of men” (Revelation 9:16–18). No, they will not choose to repent, for they have been sealed Satan’s (see Revelation 9:20–21; compare Alma 34:35).

The real issue in Revelation is one of worship. Taking on the beast’s mark (see Revelation 13:16) does not refer to tattoos or electronic implants. It connotes, rather, spiritual devotion to the beast. Insight into the significance of the mark comes from the fifth-century BC Greek playwright Sophocles, who warned of the *charagma echidnēs*, that is, “the serpent’s bite,” which was the means by which the snake secreted its poison into a person.⁴⁸

In John’s text, wearing the mark designates those who, throughout time, have been symbolically bitten by the serpent from the sea and therefore carry its spiritual venom in their veins.⁴⁹ This interpretation is strengthened by the layout of the text because in the very next vision, John sees the 144,000 who carry the seal of Christ on their foreheads (see Revelation 14:1). The

arrangement of the text certainly highlights the contrast between Satan’s mark and God’s seal. Since the latter is strictly spiritual, it seems likely the former is also. Therefore, 666 indicates a condition of deep spiritual wickedness in the souls of those who have been bitten by the beast and whose thoughts and deeds are dictated by its deadly venom (compare Moses 6:49).⁵⁰

Consideration 5: Influences on and from Latter-day Scriptures

As stated, the teacher should use latter-day scriptures to inform Revelation. One of the most helpful of these is Doctrine and Covenants 77, which interprets many of the symbols found in the first half of John’s work. This section is extremely helpful because, as two Latter-day Saint scholars have noted, “it provides a key by which the reader can search the meaning out for himself or herself. The brief interpretive example provided in the Doctrine and Covenant section 77 illustrates the method of prophetic composition that is subjective, figurative, and symbolic rather than strictly objective, literal and historical.” They go on to note that “in most apocalyptic scriptures the seer is caught up, or taken up, or caught away in the Spirit,” with the result that “perspective of the revelation that follows changes from a human perspective on earth to a divine perspective in the heavens. Consequently, the mortal limitations of time, space, and logic do not always apply, meanings are clothed in symbols, and a symbol can and often does have more than one correct meaning or interpretation.”⁵¹ By using both ancient and modern scriptures, the major messages of Revelation can be discerned. Some very helpful scriptures are 1 Nephi 13; 14; 22:12–19; Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 17:20–37; Joseph Smith—Matthew; Doctrine and Covenants 29:10–27; 43:19–26; 45:66–71; 63:32–34; 64:41–43; 90:9–11; 97:18–28; 101:17–35; 115:5–6; 121:28–32; 133:1–4, 9–59.

Section 88:87–116 shows the influence of Revelation on modern scripture. There we find some of the imagery of Revelation used to reveal latter-day events. However, it is important not to commingle the two revelations. The modern account expands on and depicts only a small portion of what is in John’s work and does not directly illuminate it. Still, the graphic images do help to carry and give force to the modern message.

Conclusion

As mysterious as the book of Revelation appears, it can be understood and taught with success. There are a number of good Latter-day Saint

commentaries that the teacher will find helpful.⁵² It is important that the book of Revelation not be skipped because John's work gives added details on three important subjects. The first and most important is the witness of the nature of our Savior and his work, especially dealing with his role in the last days. The second is the book's exposure of the great enemies of the last days and their objectives and work. Having this knowledge serves as a warning to the modern Saints and helps them know what to prepare for and what to avoid. The third is a general outline of how history will flow through the millennial era, but especially just before the Second Coming. Again, knowing how history will unfold helps the modern reader know how to prepare. The teacher could emphasize how that preparation, both spiritual and temporal, should be done.

Notes

1. There are a number of helpful titles for studying the book of Revelation. See, for example, Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal Commentary on the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973), 3:429–595; Richard D. Draper, *Opening the Seven Seals: The Visions of John the Revelator* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991); and Jay A. Parry and Donald W. Parry, *Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998). A couple of good non-LDS works are G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999); and the exhaustive David E. Aune, *Revelation*, Word Biblical Commentary 52 (n.p.: Nelson Reference & Electronics, 1997).
2. See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 32–33; Tertullian, *Apology*, 40–42; W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 108–10; Everett Ferguson, *Background of Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 480–84.
3. See Hugh Nibley, *When the Lights Went Out: Three Studies in Ancient Apostasy* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 1–94.
4. G. Kittle and others, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), s.v. “*aphistami*” (cited hereafter as *TDNT*); Stephen E. Robinson, “Warring against the Saints of God,” *Ensign*, January 1988, 34.
5. The idea was common also for Jews and Christians. See 1 Peter 2:23; Luke 18:3–7; 1 Enoch 46; 97:3–5; 104:3. See also W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 5:391–92.
6. See *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 597.
7. Joseph Smith taught that only those who were ordained as both king and priest held the fullness of the priesthood. See *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 245, 286n25.
8. The verb *ekporeuomai* is in the form of a present passive participle, showing the action is ongoing. That John describes it as a *rhomphaia* stresses its size as a javelin or Thracian broadsword designed to cut through armor. Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*

of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 907.

9. The Greek word *sphazō*, though denoting murder, was also a technical term describing the Mosaic sacrifice of a lamb. See *TDNT*, 7:925.

10. The number is first used in chapter 7 as a symbol for those latter-day missionaries who are “ordained out of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people . . . to bring as many as will come to the church of the Firstborn” (D&C 77:11). The grammar of the Greek in chapter 14 suggests, however, that the people noted there are not the same ones met in chapter 7, but rather a larger group of which the former are but a part.

11. Though translated as “crown” in the KJV, the Greek word *stephanos* denotes a wreath.

12. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal Commentary on the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973), 3:566.

13. G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1966), 113.

14. Caird, *Revelation*, 145.

15. See Robinson, “Warring against the Saints of God,” 33–35.

16. George Eldon Ladd, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 263.

17. In the Old Testament, Daniel 7–12; Isaiah 6, 24–27, 56–66; Ezekiel 1–3, 34–48; Zechariah 9–14; and parts of Joel and Amos are considered to be apocalyptic. In the New Testament we find the so-called “little apocalypses,” including Matthew 24; Mark 13; 1 Corinthians 15:12–20, 51–52; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; and others. In the Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi 8 and 11–14 are also thought of as apocalypses. Among the apocraphal and pseudepigraphical materials, there are such works as 1 and 2 Enoch, 2 Esdras, the Testament of the 12 Patriarchs, 2 Baruch, the Sibylline Oracles, Jubilees, the Ascension of Isaiah, the Apocalypse of Zephaniah, the Letters of Artisteas, 3 and 4 Maccabees, the Psalms of Solomon, the Apocryphon of James, and others. Eugene Boring has compiled an even more comprehensive list. M. Eugene Boring, *Sayings of the Risen Jesus: Christian Prophecy in the Synoptic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 35–42.

18. Although the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:282, suggests that it may be possible that there are traces of apocalypticism in Akkadian literature, apocalyptic literature begins showing up in earnest during the third century BC in Jewish writings. The majority of apocalypses were written between then and the first century AD, when it became a Christian phenomenon.

19. Very few scholars disagree that Revelation is an apocalypse. Most believe it to be Christian in origin while others like Josephine Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, The Anchor Bible 38 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 50–56, believe it is a Christian adaptation of a Jewish apocalypse.

20. The elements listed here pertain to Christian apocalyptic in general. It should be noted that a definition of apocalypticism and of the literature as a genre is problematic. Participants at the Uppsala Colloquium on Apocalypticism refrained from even suggesting a definition. For a discussion, see E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 1. It is not our purpose to enter into the debate. The elements chosen here are accepted by a wide range of conservative Christian scholars, they meet with our own observations, and they conform to Latter-day Saint theology. The outline followed is that of Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 19–21.

21. John R. May, "The Judaeo-Christian Apocalypse," in *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), 37.
22. Though individuals can and will repent, as John insists throughout his revelation, the world as a whole will not. Thus, only God will be able to overcome the power of Satan and wickedness which exist in it.
23. M. H. Abrams, "Apocalypse: Theme and Romantic Variations," in *Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 9; Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 5.
24. For collections, see Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha, Volume One: Gospels and Related Writings*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963); Hennecke, *Apocrypha*, 2:578–804; and James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983). Volume 1, pages 3–770, deals exclusively with apocalyptic literature.
25. Charles R. Erdman, *The Revelation of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 16–17; Ison T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (New York: Macmillan, 1919; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1967), vi.
26. In the 400 verses of Revelation, there are about 1,650 variant readings (these do not include different spellings of the same word) in the five available uncials. For comparison, the general epistles contain 432 verses and contain about 1,100 variants with considerably more manuscript sources and, therefore, the potential for an even greater number of discrepancies. See Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 411.
27. *History of the Church*, 5:342.
28. Bruce R. McConkie, "Understanding the Book of Revelation," *Ensign*, September 1975, 87. In his *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), Elder McConkie further stated, "We are in a much better position to understand those portions of Revelation which we are expected to understand than we generally realize. Thanks be to the interpretive material found in sections 29, 77, 88, and others of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, [and other latter-day scriptures], . . . we have a marvelously comprehensive and correct understanding of this otherwise hidden book" (3: 431).
29. Joseph Smith would be a latter-day example. He saw the entire history of the earth. Of the experience, he stated: "After I got through translating the Book of Mormon, I took up the Bible to read with the Urim and Thummim. I read the first chapter of Genesis and I saw the things as they were done. I turned over the next and the next, and the whole passed before me like a grand panorama; and so on chapter after chapter until I read the whole of it. *I saw it all!*" Cited in Robert J. Matthews, *"A Plainer Translation: Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: A History and Commentary"* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1985), 25.
30. See Pliny, *Epistles* 3.5.17; Lucian, *Vitarum auctio* 9; Ulpian, *Digest* 37.11.4; Beale, *Revelation*, 344–46.
31. Compare Juvenius 1.6.
32. See Aune, *Revelation*, 396.
33. Dio Cassius 42.27.2.
34. See Tacitus, *Histories* 3.6.8; Dio Cassius, 42.27; Ulpian, *Digest* 1.18.6.8; Suetonius, *Galba*, 11.
35. A. Berger, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953), 529.
36. Aune, *Revelation* 6–16, 396.

37. The Lord instructed the prophet to "put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel" (Ezekiel 17:2).
38. See particularly J. F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1966), 30.
39. For discussion, see V. S. Poythress, "Genre and Hermeneutics in Revelation 20:1–6," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36 (1993): 49–54. This point of view has been popularized in the sixteen-volume fictional work by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1995–2007).
40. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 52–53.
41. See *History of the Church*, 5:343–44.
42. For a broad spectrum of views on the subject, see Erdman, *Revelation of John*, 114; Homer Hailey, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 297–99; see also Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 264–65.
43. See Beale, *Revelation*, 721.
44. When the Greek word *thêrion*, "beast," is transliterated into the Hebrew *trywn*, the number value is indeed 666.
45. Beale, *Revelation*, 723.
46. Emil Bock, *The Apocalypse of St. John the Divine*, trans. Alfred Heidenreich (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1951), 106–7. Elder McConkie has noted that "the identity of these powers remains to be revealed." *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:523.
47. Hailey, *Revelation*, 327.
48. *Philoctetes*, 267.
49. The Greek word translated as "mark" is *charagma* and denotes that which is inscribed, incised, or impressed. It came to connote money. See Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1077.
50. Beale, *Revelation*, 721.
51. Stephen E. Robinson and H. Dean Garrett, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 2:334–35.
52. See note 1 for a list of resources.