



# REVELATION 1–5

## CHRIST'S COVENANT FULFILLED

---

LYNNE HILTON WILSON

### **Introduction to Revelation**

#### *Title*

The title of the book of Revelation comes from its opening phrase (“a Revelation from Jesus Christ”), but the Greek word (*apokalupsis*, “apocalypses”) describes a specific type of revelation: “an unveiling, uncovering, revealing.”<sup>1</sup> Among Latter-day Saints, the word *revelation* is used to refer to all divine inspiration in various forms. Yet here, *apokalupsis* has the limited meaning of uncovering the end times.

#### *Author: John the Beloved*

John the Beloved writes Revelation, or Apocalypse (*apokalupsis*), from the island of Patmos (Rev 1:9 NIV). We date the text to the end of the first century because Irenaeus (AD 120–203), the bishop of Lyon, recorded that John wrote his Apocalypse “toward the end of Domitian’s reign,” which ended in AD 96. As

*Table 1. Outline of Revelation*

<b>Vision</b>	<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Total verses</b>
Throne of God	1, 4–5	36
Seven churches	2–3	51
BC 4000–1000	6:1–11	11
AD 1000– AD 2000	6:12–7:3	14
AD 2000—Second Coming	8:1–19:2	201
Millennium	20:1–6	6
Final scenes	20:7–15	9
Celestialized earth	21:2–22:6	33

a second historical witness, Tertullian (AD 155–240) said John was “plunged, unhurt into boiling oil”; since the oil did not kill him, he was exiled to the island of Patmos.<sup>2</sup> When the cult of emperor worship was enforced, Christians found themselves banished or killed. But because Caesar Domitian was unable to kill John, he had the Apostle exiled to the prison island of Patmos. Patmos lies sixty miles off the coast of Ephesus (the western coast of modern Turkey) and is a small rocky island measuring ten miles by six miles. In the fourth century, the historian Eusebius recorded that John returned to Ephesus after his exile. The other Apostles had all been killed by this time.<sup>3</sup> This was the darkest period of early Christian history. John’s revelation was a great comfort and encouragement to the remaining Christians, assuring them that Christ’s covenant would be fulfilled.

### *Audience*

The author John directs his writings specifically to seven Christian churches near Ephesus (see Rev 2–3). These Christians knew the ordinances, and John was their ecclesiastical leader. Beyond these immediate seven churches, the revelation was written to testify to the world that Jesus is the Creator and Redeemer.

### *Synopsis*

The Apocalypse of John describes a series of visions that symbolically depict the history of the world. It is filled with strange images and ideas that require the reader to deeply study under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This is the only scripture available that outlines the whole scope of the Lord’s plan for this planet, yet it is not yet complete. We have not received John’s complete record yet. The Lord promised the Saints, “If you are faithful you shall receive [it]” (D&C 93:18).

We have a record of many prophets who received visions of the history of the world, including Adam, Enoch, the brother of Jared, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Nephi. Yet God gave John the responsibility of writing the record that would be known to the world.<sup>4</sup>

## *Historical understanding*

From approximately AD 300 to 1000, the book of Revelation was interpreted as an allegory of good and evil, with evil being destroyed when Satan is bound. During the Reformation, Reformers felt missionary work would commence for one thousand years and then Christ would come.

It was not until the Restoration that the Lord revealed, through the Prophet Joseph Smith, that the book is the chronological history of the earth (D&C 77:6–7). Each seal is a period of approximately one thousand years of history. The Prophet Joseph also taught many keys to help understand Revelation’s symbolism.<sup>5</sup> Knowledge of the ancient Israelite temple rites or the modern temple endowment also help one understand the symbols and events described in John’s Apocalypse. With these important keys, the book is more accessible than it has ever been, but we have the responsibility of reading and understanding it to prepare for the last days. The book still requires readers to commit time and thought in order to understand it.

## *Summary of restored keys to interpretation*

The Lord revealed to Joseph Smith keys to understanding the symbolism of the book of Revelation:

- D&C 77 is God’s “explanation of the Revelation of St. John” (follow footnotes and Topical Guide parallels).<sup>6</sup>
- Look for the plan of salvation and pray for the spirit of revelation.
- Read with perspective of the ancient Near East and of biblical and modern temple symbolism.
- Approach it as an apocalyptic puzzle of the future that God wants us to understand.

These keys help unlock the door, but once inside, readers must prayerfully explore the text. The vision was recorded for instruction and learning. Most of the text is dedicated to the time shortly before the Lord’s Second Coming—the time that we live in.

## *Organization*

John’s Revelation is mainly organized into a chronological history of the earth with four flashbacks or interludes to give context and help explain the text.

## **Revelation 1**

### *Prologue—Rev 1:1–3*

**Rev 1:1 (JST).** “*The Revelation of ~~Jesus Christ~~ John, a servant of God, which ~~God gave~~ was given unto him of Jesus Christ, to shew show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass.*” Joseph Smith felt inspired to make many changes to the first eight verses of Rev 1. The text barely touches on the past and gives most space to the last days before the Second Coming. The text

Table 2. Events of Revelation by chapter

Chapter	Events
1	Intro and vision of the Christ 24 elders 4 beasts
2–3	Message to Seven churches Description of Christ Condemnation Challenge Promise
4–5	Throne theophany—Vision of Heavenly Father in His temple and Christ accepting His call
6	Opening of first through sixth seals: Unfolding history of the earth depicted as: 6,000 years divided into six seals of the book 4 horses, one for each of the thousand years from Adam to Jesus’s birth
7	<i>Interlude</i> for a glimpse of the purified and exalted state of the 144,000 noble saints
8–9	Opening of seventh seal, including: 6 of the 7 angels or servants sound their trumpets First woe
10	<i>Interlude</i> of John’s call
11	Continued seventh seal: 2 witnesses in Jerusalem 2nd woe finished 7th angel sounds trumpet
12–14	Kingdom of God versus kingdom of Satan Woman (the Church of God) appears Premortal war with Lucifer continued on earth with him portrayed as a dragon or serpent Christ harvests His righteous
15	<i>Interlude</i> of heavenly temple with 7 angels with 7 last plagues
16	Final scenes of the world 7 angels pour out plagues Battle of Armageddon
17–18	<i>Interlude</i> of great and abominable organizations followed by the fall of wickedness, or Babylon



Chapter	Events
19	Marriage supper of God and His Saints The conquering Christ returns to judge on a white horse Satan and his devils are cast out
20	Millennium and the final scenes of the world Battle of God and Magog Final Judgment
21–22	New heaven and new earth

was written for future readers living in a time when the Lord revealed keys to unlock its meaning. The Lord wants His servants to receive this information to help them prepare for the Second Coming. In that sense, the book is written for us. It will “shortly come to pass” in the sense that “all is as one day with God.”<sup>7</sup>

In the last phrase of this verse, John used the plural “servants.” The BSB capitalizes “His servants” to clarify whose servants he means. We are the Lord’s servants when we do what the Master and His Spirit ask.

**Rev 1:1.** “*He sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.*” The word “signified” here means John learned these things when an angel “gave a sign” (*sémainó*, or “to make known”).<sup>8</sup> This allows John to trust the angel as a servant of God because he recognized a divine sign. The Prophet Joseph Smith also warned that if we receive a spiritual visitor, we should ask them to shake hands to determine whether they are from God or the devil (D&C 129:5 explains that if they are resurrected, they will shake hands with us). In this manner, the angel gave John some sort of sign to identify himself as a divine messenger.

**Rev 1:3 (JST).** “*Blessed ~~is he that are they who readeth~~, and they ~~that who hear and understand~~ . . . and keep those things which are written.*” John charges the Saints with receiving this Apocalypse and seeking to understand it as a gift from God to prepare for His Coming. Christians read their sacred texts in worship services, a practice they had taken from the synagogue practice. Joseph Smith changed the text from “he who reads” to “they who read,” which expands the audience beyond the ancient audience.

### *Greeting to the seven churches—Rev 1:4–8*

**Rev 1:4–5 (JST).** “*Now this is the testimony of John to the seven servants who are over the seven churches ~~which are in Asia~~ . . . who hath sent forth his angel from before his throne, . . . ~~And from Jesus Christ, who is Therefore, I, John, the faithful witness, and bear record of the things which were delivered me of the angel, and from Jesus Christ.~~*” John testifies that he accurately conveys the divine message he received. The number seven is used fifty-five times in

Table 3. Symbols in the book of Revelation<sup>26</sup>

Category	Symbol	Symbolism
God	Eyes	Light and knowledge—multiple eyes is omniscience
	Cloud	Shekinah, God's glory, and protection in the wilderness
	White raiment of priests and priestesses	Robes of the high priest (Ex 29:5; Dan 10:5)
	Sword	God's word: command, judgment
	Bridegroom	Jesus the Messiah, or Christ
Heavenly things	Angels	Heavenly servants (JST)
	Horns	Power and strength, both good and bad
	Wings	Power to act
	Incense	Ascending prayers of the righteous
	Sun	Celestial glory, the Son of God, daily reminder of God's Resurrection and the Second Coming
	Mountains	Temples, patterned after the heavenly temple, and separation from the world
	Sea of glass	Omniscience of heaven or celestialized earth
Humans	Kings and priests / queens and priestesses	Heirs of God (Rev 1:6; D&C 84:38)
	Name	Personal character, authority, or new name for the initiated
	Crown	Conqueror (laurel wreath in John's time)
	Candlestick	Church (source of light is Christ)
	Golden sash and bow	Clothing for kings and priests, respectively
	Stars	Servants or angels of God (that is, Church leaders)
	Forehead	Desire, thoughts (also associated with heart)
	Sealing on forehead	Anointed with calling and election
	Book eaten by John	Mission call internalized
	Bride or woman	God's Church members, or covenant Israel
Animals	4 Beasts	Individual animals representing their classes in heaven
	Lamb and sheep	Christ and His disciples; gentleness, meekness, humility, submissiveness
	Serpent or snake	Originally a symbol of Christ that was usurped by Satan's temptations
	Horses	War animal
	Dragon	Evil, destruction (in Greek, <i>snake</i> and <i>dragon</i> are interchangeable)

Category	Symbol	Symbolism
Numbers	7 seals	7,000-year history of Adam's posterity on the earth
	1/3	Portion, limited, bounds have been set
	2	In Hebrew the life force, creative power, male and female, witnesses
	3	Godhead, divine involvement related to Atonement (3 hours, 3 days, 3 crosses)
	3 1/2	Arrested midway
	4	Geographic fullness, totality, four quarters (not corners) of the earth
	6	Not complete, imperfect
	7	Creation, complete, whole, fullness, perfection, eternal life (Egyptian)
	8	Christian Sabbath, rebirth, covenant of circumcision, and baptism
	12	Divine order, priesthood, heavenly order (12 months)
	24	Fullness of priesthood, exaltation or one's calling and election made sure
	40	Period of purification, trial, testing, probation, mourning
	144	Priesthood power perfected (any multiple of 12 speaks of God's order)
	666	Less than complete (7 is complete), imperfection, Satan, the great and abominable antichrist
	1000	Large number, period of time, magnified number, length of seal
Colors	White	Victory, purity, righteousness, Spirit, light, revelation
	Black	Sorrow, grief, mourning, sin, judgment, darkness, destruction
	Red or scarlet	Atonement, mortality, blood, bloodshed, sin, violence
	Brass	Judgment, stability, strength, endurance, permanence
	Gold	Divine, wealth, celestial, or worldliness (depending on the context)
	Pale	Impending death, cadaver
	Green	Vegetation, life

the Apocalypse and represents wholeness, completion, or perfection. In his Gospel, John included seven miracles and seven sermons.

**Rev 1:5–6 (JST).** “**And Unto him that who loved us, be glory; and who washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God.**” John highlights the Redeemer’s atoning sacrifice to purify the repentant, helping them become servants of God as priests and priestesses. He also provides an anointing for them to become kings and priests and queens and priestesses.

**Rev 1:7 (JST).** “**he cometh with in the clouds; with ten thousands of his saints in the kingdom, clothed with the glory of his Father. aAnd every eye shall see him; . . . Amen.**” Christ’s

triumphal entrance to earth in clouds of God's glory gives added meaning to the children of Israel's "cloud by day" (Num 14:14). When the Savior comes again, He will be the pillar of light.

*John's vision of the Son of Man: A throne theophany—Rev 1:9–1*

**Rev 1:9–11 (NIV).** *"I, John, your brother . . . in the suffering . . . and patient endurance . . . was on the island of Patmos . . . on the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: 'Write on a scroll.'"* John had suffered for his testimony of Jesus Christ. God changed or translated his body to lengthen his life, and we learn in the Book of Mormon that translated beings, like John, "shall not have pain while ye shall dwell in the flesh, neither sorrow save it be for the sins of the world."<sup>9</sup>

**Rev 1:12–13 (BYUNR).** *"I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, dressed in a robe reaching to his feet, and he wore a gold sash around His chest."*<sup>10</sup> John sees the heavenly temple with the glorified Savior. The seven-branched candlestick, or menorah, stood near the veil in all Israelite temples. It represented the tree of life from the Garden of Eden and the way back to the presence of God.<sup>11</sup> Jesus identified Himself thus: "I am the light which ye shall hold up" (Jn 8:12; 3 Ne 16:24). Seven candlesticks, a complete amount of light, surround the Son of Man of Holiness (Mose 6:57). They each represent one of John's seven churches (Rev 1:20).

**Rev 1:14–15 (BLB).** *"His hairs are white like wool, . . . eyes are like a flame of fire; . . . feet are like fine bronze, . . . voice is like the voice of many waters."* John's throne theophany is similar to those found in Isa 1:18, 6:1–8, Dan 7:9, 1 Ne 1:8, Alm 36:22, and elsewhere in scripture.

**Rev 1:16 (BLB).** *"He is holding in His right hand seven stars."* The Lord's right hand (also known as the covenant hand) held "complete" light, which may include healing and omniscience. Just as Jesus did with His parables, He explains the meaning to John. The stars represent the seven angels or servants over the seven churches (JST, Rev 1:20). Both symbols represent messengers of the Lord.

**Rev 1:16 (BLB).** *"and a sharp two-edged sword is going forth out of His mouth; and His face is like the sun shining."* God's piercing words are described as the strongest sword known (Heb 4:12). By the power of His word, God created the earth (Jac 4:9; Morm 9:17). The sun represents celestial things. We are encouraged to wield the sword of His word in our ministry among God's children.

**Rev 1:17–18 (BLB).** *"when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead. And He placed His right hand upon me, saying, 'Fear not. . . . I have the keys of Death and of Hades.'"* John is overwhelmed by the Lord's grandeur. Jesus extends His covenant hand as assurance that he has nothing to fear, not even hell.

**Rev 1:19–20.** *"Write . . . the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; The mystery . . ."* We realize John wrote what he saw when Jesus must explain the images. The strange figures and ideas require the reader to be invested and prayerfully study to solve the mystery.



## Revelation 2–3

### *Instruction to the seven churches—Rev 2–3*

Each of the seven churches receives a pattern of counsel.<sup>12</sup> The following table shows an abbreviated version of each message.

*Table 4. Counsel to the seven churches in Rev 2–3*

Church	Jesus's title	Condemnation	Promises
Ephesus (Rev 2:1–7)	These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.	Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent.	To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.
Smyrna (Rev 2:8–11)	These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.	I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not.	He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.
Pergamos (Rev 2:12–17)	These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.	But I have a few things against thee, . . . to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou . . . the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent.	To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it
Thyatira (Rev 2:18–29)	These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.	Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee . . . that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.	And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them . . . even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star.
Sardis (Rev 3:1–6)	These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.	I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief.	He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and . . . angels.

Church	Jesus's title	Condemnation	Promises
Philadelphia (Rev 3:7–13)	These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth. . . . I have set before thee an open door.	Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.	Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, . . . and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, . . . and I will write upon him my new name.
Laodicea (Rev 3:14–21)	These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.	Because thou sayest, I am rich . . . and have need of nothing . . . knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.	To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne

### *Understanding the seven cities*<sup>13</sup>

#### **Rev 2:1–7. Ephesus**

- Port city, largest city in Asia Minor (population 250,000), and fourth largest city in the Roman Empire.
- Its beautiful temple to Diana was claimed as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.
- Paul served in Ephesus for three years on his third mission (Act 19–20).
- Christians received God's love: "I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary" (Rev 2:2–3 NIV).

#### **Rev 2:8–11. Smyrna**

- Alexander the Great planned a new big city with the region's great natural resources (the seacoast to the west and rich farmland to the east).
- As a port city, it flourished in trade, commerce, and the arts.
- Earthquakes plagued the area.

- It was the western end of a major east-west Roman road.
- It was one of the earliest centers of emperor worship.
- Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, was martyred there in about AD 155.
- Christians there received only God's praise: "I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich [spiritually]!" (Rev 2:9 NIV).

### ***Rev 2:12–17. Pergamos***

- Beautiful, wealthy city with the second largest library in the ancient world (200,000 volumes).
- A center for emperor worship in the region (with three temples dedicated to Caesar).
- Had temples to Zeus (Jupiter), Athena, Apollo, and others, including the Greek god of healing (Asclepius) and natural springs for additional healing.
- Manufacturing center for parchment in Asia Minor; *parchment* comes from the name of this city.
- Known for its silver mines, school of sculpture, woolen textiles, and agricultural abundance.
- The Lord told the Christians there, "You remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith" (Rev 2:13 NIV).

### ***Rev 2:18–29. Thyatira***

- Famous for its many commercial and industrial guilds.
- Well known for its wool dying industry (see Act 16:14).
- Worshipped a sun god, Tyrimnos (also known as Helios and Apollo).
- Paul's convert Lydia, the seller of purple, was from Thyatira (Act 16:14–15).
- Smallest and least significant of the seven cities mentioned here (but John wrote the longest message to this church).
- Christians there received the Lord's praise: "I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first" (Rev 2:19 NIV).

### ***Rev 3:1–6. Sardis***

- Regional capital of the province of Lydia, a fertile agricultural crossroads of major highways.
- A center of emperor worship.
- Locals dressed in soft leather boots and turbans and developed a seven-stringed lyre.
- The city was built on cliffs, so the people did not need night guards, but foreigners took the city.

- God warned the Christians there: “Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God” (Rev 3:2 NIV).

### ***Rev 3:7–13. Philadelphia***

- The Greek name means “City of Brotherly Love”; it was also called the Gateway to the East.
- Known for its agriculture, especially its grapes and wine production. It became the center for the worship of Bacchus, a god of wine.
- Famous for its production of leather goods and textiles.
- Christians there received God’s empathy and praise: “I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown” (Rev 3:8, 10–11 NIV).

### ***Rev 3:14–21. Laodicea***

- Prosperous city of commerce and banking on the Lycus River Valley plateau in Asia Minor.
- Center of learning—art, culture, a famous medical school and known for its arrogance.
- Known for self-sufficiency, even refused Rome’s help to repair it after the AD 60 earthquake.
- Had no water supply of its own, but an aqueduct brought water from the natural spring four miles away. By the time it got to the city the water was lukewarm. It was used in their textile mill.
- God warned the Christians there, “I know your works. . . . So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. . . . I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent” (Rev 3:15–16, 18–19 NKJV).

### ***Summary of temple images—Rev 1–3***

The text includes symbols from Israelite temples, which were patterned after God’s heavenly temple. For example, in the first three chapters, John includes at least eight references to the Edenic and Creation themes from the temple sanctuary and ritual. Temple symbols continues throughout John’s Apocalypse.

Table 5. Temple references in Rev 1–3

Text	Temple reference
“Made us kings and priests unto God and to his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever” (Rev 1:6)	Initiation rites of Aaron and priests. King’s coronation took place at the temple.
“Golden candlesticks” (Rev 1:12)	Represented the tree of life, close to the veil
“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life” (Rev 2:7)	In Eden, Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat the fruit of the tree of immortality because they were in a sinful state. But with Jesus’s Atonement and repentance in place, all may now partake and return to His presence as the high priest demonstrated (1 Ne 11).
“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and [I] will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” (Rev 2:17)	Hidden manna was in the original ark of the covenant (which represented the throne of God). The Messiah was to restore manna, which Jesus did by feeding thousands. He also introduced Himself as the Bread of Life. At Passover, He did not hide the broken bread (or <i>afikomen</i> ) but said, “This is my body” (Mt 26:26).
“Not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.” (Rev 3:4–5)	Priests washed and dressed in sacred white linen clothes before their temple work to represent purity. God recorded the names of the righteous who were sealed to eternal life in the book of life (see Ps 69:28, Ecc 9:8; Ezk 10:7).
“Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Rev 3:11)	Kings’ coronations took place at the temple (2 Kng 11:12; Mosi 2:30).
“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and <i>that</i> the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.” (Rev 3:18)	Adam and Eve were covered from their nakedness by skins, and Christ’s Atonement. Baptism by fire purifies one to receive God’s gold or celestial blessings. All priests and holy things in the temple were anointed.
“I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him” (Rev 3:20)	On the Day of Atonement, the high priest prepared and then approached the veil before the Holy of Holies to enter God’s presence (Lev 16). The door was a wide, inviting opening. Jesus taught, “Knock and the door will be opened to you” (Mt 7:7).



## Revelation 4—Vision of God’s Throne

**Rev 4:1 (NIV).** *“I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard . . . said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.’”* After God gave John messages for his ecclesiastical responsibilities over the seven churches, John saw a vision of a welcoming open door to the heavenly temple and throne of God. Our temples are patterned after God’s heavenly temple near Kolob (Abr 3:9). John, like Nephi in his dream of the tree of life, had a guide in his vision. The guide’s clear and inviting voice was like a beautiful, penetrating, trumpet.

**Rev 4:2.** *“I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.”* In the second part of the vision, John saw into the heavenly throne of God. These visions are called throne theophanies and are recorded by Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Lehi, Nephi, Alma, Abraham, and Joseph Smith, to name a few.<sup>14</sup> Seeing God’s throne may be a rite of passage for prophets and other anointed ones.

**Rev 4:3 (NIV).** *“the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.”* The stones mentioned are more than just lovely gems and are specific stones in the high priest’s breastplate.<sup>15</sup> The colors (red and green) were significant—the red of blood and the green of life. They speak of the gifts of God to humanity. There was also one rainbow color around the throne and green for life and creation. Noah was told that the rainbow would be a sign of God’s covenant with humankind. Symbols can have many meanings, but here the rainbow may symbolize that the covenant is still intact.

**Rev 4:4 (JST).** *“And **round about in the midst of the throne were . . . four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns.**”* When special numbers, like twelve, are doubled or squared, their importance is amplified or symbolically perfected. The JST change to “in the midst” references the Genesis Creation account. Also in the Creation, God organized the rotation of the earth around twelve moons, or months; He organized His people into twelve tribes and ordained twelve Apostles. In the latter days, boys are ordained to the priesthood in their twelfth year. Twelve pairs, or twenty-four elders, wore white robes with golden crowns, referring to their roles and positions. The Lord explained to Joseph Smith that these specific twenty-four elders were faithful deceased members of the seven churches who are now with God (D&C 77:5).

**Rev 4:5 (NKJV).** *“from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.”* John mentions that he observed the throne by sight and sound, hearing a voice. The seven fiery lamps represent seven servants of God. Similarly, Jesus asked His disciples to “let their light so shine” (Mt 5:16). The symbol of a fiery light speaks of the children of Israel’s pillar of fire, later referred to as the *shekhinah*, “dwelling.” The image was repeated in the Restoration in the hymn “The Spirit of God.” Servants of God are directed by and work according to the Spirit of God. Also, the sanctifying work of the Spirit is the baptism by fire.

**Rev 4:6 (NIV).** *“In front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.”* This is the first verse that Joseph asked about in D&C 77:1: “What is the sea of glass?” (see also D&C 130:6–9). The crystal’s transparency may allow one to see, like a Urim and Thummim. Later Joseph Smith taught, “Angels do not reside on a planet like this earth. But they reside in the presence of God on a globe like a sea of glass and fire where all things are manifest past, present, and future, . . . the place where God resides is a great Urim and Thummim.”<sup>16</sup>

**Rev 4:6 (NIV).** *“In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back.”* The Prophet asked what the four beasts represent in D&C 77:2. He learned that they were a higher form of each animal classification (not like in the book of Daniel, where they are figures of things on earth). Another symbol in this verse is the eyes that cover the four creatures. The Lord explained that they represent knowledge. The beasts may thus have some degree of omniscience, or power to see things “before and behind” (KJV).

**Rev 4:7 (NIV).** *“The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.”* John describes animals familiar to our planet. Yet, in their celestialized state they can speak and sing. Other visions of the throne of God include animals as well (for example, the four creatures in Ezk 1:5, 13–15). Later the Prophet Joseph added, “John heard the words of the beasts giving glory to God and understood them. God who made the beasts could understand every language spoken by them.”<sup>17</sup>

**Rev 4:8 (BYUNR).** *“The four animals each had six wings, and were filled with eyes all around on the inside. And day and night they never ceased saying, ‘Holy, holy holy, Lord God Almighty.’”* In Greco-Roman traditions, a few gods (Hermes, Mercury, and Cupid) had wings, adding speed to their travel. But John describes creatures with six wings, or three pairs. When the Lord explained this to the Prophet Joseph, we learned that wings symbolize the power to move and act (compare Isa 6:2). The heavenly creatures praised God as He “who was and who is and who is coming.”

**Rev 4:9–11 (BSB).** *“whenever the living creatures give glory, . . . the twenty-four elders fall down before the One seated on the throne, and they worship Him. . . . They cast their crowns before the throne, saying: ‘Worthy are You, our Lord and God.’”* The twenty-four elders join the creatures in worshipping God. They humbly cast their crowns before the throne of God and acknowledge Him as their Creator. God’s glory is to “bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Mose 1:39).

## Revelation 5

*The lion and the scroll of destiny with seven seals—Rev 5:1–5*

**Rev 5:1 (BYUNR).** *“I saw in the right hand of him who sits on the throne a scroll with writing on the inside and outside, sealed with seven seals.”* It appears that Elohim sits on the throne

(see Rev 5:7 for Jehovah's location). Most books or scrolls had writing on one side, but this double-sided scroll may represent that nothing was left out. Legal documents were sealed to prove authenticity. Documents were written in duplicate, and one copy was closed and sealed to be opened only by a judge "if anyone challenged the content." The witness wrapped string around the scroll, embedding it in clay or wax that was used to personalize the seal. Seven seals assured the document's safety.<sup>18</sup> The Lord explained that each seal represents a thousand years (D&C 77:6; 88:108–110).

**Rev 5:2 (BYUNR).** *"I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll by breaking its seals?'"* Many angels have specific assignments in the book of Revelation. John hears this "mighty" or "strong" (KJV) angel calling for someone who has authority to open the seals. The strong angel may represent one with authority or "one of the noble and great ones" (Abr 3:22–23). The phrase "loud voice" (repeated eleven times) signifies the importance of the message.

**Rev 5:4 (BYUNR).** *"I wept bitterly, because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or to look into it."* In the Roman Empire, only a judge with the correct authority—or someone worthy and qualified—could open a seal. In John's vision the mighty angel could not find anyone qualified until he searched beyond the inhabitants of earth into the heavens. John sensed the significance of this, as if he knew the importance of the role of the judge of the world, and he cried.

**Rev 5:5 (BYUNR).** *"And one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. See, the Lion from the tribe of Judah, even the branch of David, has overcome so that he can open the scroll.'"* An elder comforts John with the wonderful news that the mighty angel found someone worthy and with qualifications of a judge to open the scroll and read it. Only Jesus has the power to judge the earth's history. The Lion references Jacob's father's blessing to Judah: "Judah is a lion's whelp. . . . The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come" (Gen 49:9). The Lion of Judah was Jesus of Nazareth.

The BYUNR translation describes Jesus as a "branch" of David, derived from *netser*. Jesus is the messianic branch of the house of David from Isa 11:1: "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (compare Mt 2:23). This also fulfills other Old Testament prophecies that describe a messianic branch of the house of David.<sup>19</sup>

### *The worthy Lamb slain—Rev 5:6–7*

**Rev 5:6** *"in the midst of the throne . . . stood a Lamb as it had been slain."* The symbols are powerful: the Lion is also the Lamb who was slain with the marks of fatal wounds. Jesus's names teach about His roles. The name Jesus (Yesshua) is a form of the word *save* or *savior*. It is the Lion who becomes the Lamb that provides salvation. When John the Baptist introduced his cousin Jesus, he said: "Behold the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29, 36). Interestingly, none of the other Gospels use this title, but Paul refers to Jesus as our Passover lamb (1 Cor 5:7 NIV; see Act 8:32). In the book of Revelation, John refers to Jesus as the Lamb twenty-eight times. Jesus is the Lamb taken to the slaughter, but in Revelation the Lamb lives.

**Rev 5:6 (JST).** “*having **seven twelve** horns and **seven twelve** eyes, which are the **seven Spirits twelve servants of God**, sent forth into all the earth.*” The JST changes the seven horns and eyes to twelve. Both numbers have symbolic messages—the Lamb is whole and perfect and also has God’s divine organization and priesthood power. Richard Draper and Michael Rhodes explain the twelve servants as Apostles:

This seems to be a specific reference to the Twelve Apostles since the verb . . . “sent forth,” is cognate with the noun . . . “apostle” (literally “one who is sent forth”). In John’s day, the word carried more than one nuance. For the Greeks, the one sent was the one empowered or commissioned to act for the one doing the sending. For the Jews and Christians, the term designated anyone commissioned and empowered by God, one who had authority to speak His word and administer His ordinances.<sup>20</sup>

Another symbol used here is the horns. On each corner of the temple’s sacrificial altar, a horn represented power and salvation or cleansing power. The eyes have extra power to see, possibly with omniscience. All these images may have multiple other meanings as well.

**Rev 5:7 (BYUNR).** “*he came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.*” Jesus, acting as the slain Lamb, took the sealed scroll from Elohim, who sits on the throne. Only our Savior had the preparation and power to implement all the terms of the Father’s plan. The heart or center of that plan in the history of the earth’s salvation is Jesus Christ.

#### *The new song—Rev 5:8–14*

**Rev 5:8 (BYUNR).** “*when he took the scroll, the four animals and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one having a harp and golden bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of the saints.*” When the Lord takes the book, those surrounding the throne prostrate themselves in worship. Their music has something to do with the Saints’ prayers—either transporting or delivering them to the throne. Incense also represents prayers in the Old Testament temple (Ps 141:2).

**Rev 5:9 (BYUNR).** “*And they sang a new song, changing, ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased people for God by your blood.’*” Those around the throne sang a new song.<sup>21</sup> Heavenly communication includes music. The lyrics praise the redemptive nature of the Atonement of Jesus Christ as He bought us back from Satan and slavery to sin.

**Rev 5:10. (BYUNR).** “*you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God.*” A priest is calling one to serve God. God’s valiant servants receive exaltation. The Prophet Joseph Smith also restored that exaltation, or living in God’s kingdom, is for both priests and priestesses.<sup>22</sup>

**Rev 5:12.** “*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.*” These two verses make up the lyrics of the new song mentioned above (and incidentally, Handel included them in his oratorio *The Messiah*). John’s crying is turned into rejoicing as One worthy and willing is found to open the scrolls. Ancient numbers go

up to one thousand and then are repeated. Literally, the vision describes a group of angels numbering ten with at least sixteen zeros, but it probably means a very large number of people all praising and honoring Jesus as the One slain for them.

**Rev 5:13.** “*every creature . . . heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.*” The third hymn of praise is sung by “every created thing” (ASV), both humans and animals (compare D&C 128:23).

**Rev 5:14.** “*Amen.*” This portion of the vision closes with all creation praising the authority of God the Father and His Son. The Greek word *amen* means “truly, verily, so let it be.”<sup>23</sup> Only in his Gospel does John repeat it (“verily, verily,” which we find in fifteen different verses). It is used as an epithet for the Lord Jesus Christ in Rev 3:14. Paul uses it as “all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us” (2 Cor 1:20). In the Old Testament, it is found singly and sometimes doubly at the end of prayers to confirm the words and invoke the fulfillment of them.<sup>24</sup> It is used in token of being bound by an oath.<sup>25</sup>

## Notes

1 “Apokalupsis,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/602.htm>.

2 Tertullian, *The Sacred Writings of Tertullian*, annotated ed. (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2017), chapter 36.

3 Peter was crucified upside down; Andrew, Philip, Thaddeus (Jude), and Simon the Canaanite were all crucified; Bartholomew was skinned; Thomas and Matthew were run through with spears; James son of Zebedee was executed with a sword; Judas took his own life after betraying Jesus; and Paul was beheaded.

4 See, for example, 1 Ne 14:24, 18–27; Eth 4:16.

5 See D&C 77; 88; 93:18; Eth 4:15–16; and the JST.

6 The information in D&C 77 was first published in the Nauvoo newspaper *Times and Seasons* under the title “A Key to Understanding the Revelations of St. John, in a Series of Questions and Answers.” From there it was later collected with the writings in the Pearl of Great Price and finally placed chronologically in the Doctrine and Covenants. See Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, *The Revelation of John the Apostle* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2016), 33.

7 Alm 40:8; also see D&C 63:53; 64:24.

8 “*Sémainó*,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/4591.htm>.

9 3 Ne 28:9; see Jn 21:20–23; D&C 7. For more on translated beings see Mark L. McConkie, “Translated Beings, in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1992): 4:1485–1486.



10 Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John the Apostle*, 104. This translation is abbreviated BYUNR.

11 John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies; Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1994), 427–428.

12 John W. Welch and John F. Hall, *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2004), 17–2. The seven areas include divine commission, recognition, criticism, admonition, descriptive statement about Jesus Christ, call to hear, and sacred promises. The chart above is adapted from this source.

13 Sources for this information came from the NIV; Paul J. Achtemeier, *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1996); and Alonzo Gaskill, “Commentary on Revelation” (unpublished manuscript).

14 Isa 6, Ezk 1:1–28; 1 Kng 22:19; Dan 7; 10; 1 Ne 1:6–14; D&C 76:21; 137:3. Look at the similarities between Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon’s record of the vision of the degrees of glory in D&C 76:20–21: “We beheld the glory of the Son, on the right hand of the Father, and received of his fulness; and saw the holy angels, and them who are sanctified before his throne, worshipping God, and the Lamb, who worship him forever and ever.”

15 The high priest wore one stone for each tribe of Israel. The “ruby” (NIV) is also translated as “sardine” (KJV) and “carnelian” (BSB). The high priest also wore two stones known as Urim and Thummim, or “lights and perfections” in Hebrew. See Ex 28:30; Lev 8:8; Num 27:21; Deu 33:8; 1 Sam 28:6; Ezr 2:63; Neh 7:65; JS—H 1:35.

16 “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p. 1510, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/153>; capitalization silently modernized. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 171. The quote continues, “This earth in its sanctified and immortal state will be a Urim and Thummim for all things below it in the scale of creation, but not above it.”

17 “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p. 1523, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/166>.

18 Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John the Apostle*, 225–226. “One such type of covenant was the Roman will that also bore seven seals. Such testaments could not be administered until all the seals were broken. Only a person of authority could legally break the seals and execute the will.”

19 In considering the messianic impact of *netser* (“branch”), we can reference many scriptures with the same idea. For example, in Jer 23:5 the Lord says, “I shall raise up a righteous shoot for David; as king he will reign and govern wisely.” The Suffering Servant Song of Isa 53:2 compares the servant to a sapling and a root. At the time of the New Testament, the Jews in Qumran used *netser* in an eschatological sense of God’s plan of salvation. The Dead Sea Scroll community described itself as “an everlasting planting” (Dead Sea Scrolls, 1QH vi 15, vii 19, vii 6, 8, 10). This is probably an echo of Isa 60:21: “A branch of His planting.” Thus a secondary connection of Nazorean comes from applying Jesus to the prophetic branch of David passages in Rev 5:6. For more, see Raymond E. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 211–212.

20 Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John the Apostle*, 232.

21 Other new songs are recorded in D&C 84:98; Ps 33:3; 40:3; and Rev 15:3–4.

22 “Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book,” p. 22, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book/19>.

23 “Amén,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/281.htm>.

24 Ps 41:13; 72:19; 89:52.

25 Num 5:22; Deu 27:15–26; Neh 5:13; 8:6; 1 Chr 16:36.

26 Adapted from Alonzo L. Gaskill, *The Lost Language of Symbolism* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003).