

THE APOCALYPTIC WITNESS OF THE MESSIAH

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The book of Revelation is not easy reading. As one New Testament authority observed, the book either finds a man mad or leaves him that way.¹ I must admit that I can sympathize with that sentiment, even though it is overstated. Anyone who has spent time trying to decode John's message knows the difficulties involved in extracting its meaning. One major problem is that some passages can be understood on more than one level or in more than one way. Consider the first line of the first verse: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." What does the phrase mean? Does the revelation belong to Jesus, or does the revelation disclose Him? The context suggests the first idea is correct. John expressly states that "God gave [it] unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass" (Revelation 1:1). Still, as we look at the book's prophetic message, we cannot doubt that the great revelation emphasizes the work of the Savior in its full cosmic scale. So, though Revelation belongs to Jesus, it is also the revelation that discloses Him.

THE REVELATION OF THE SAVIOR IN THE FIRST VISION (REVELATION 1)

In the very first chapter of the book of Revelation, John records the Savior's testimony of Himself: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (v. 8). That the Lord introduced Himself with these

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elements suggests that they form the framework of what He wants to disclose about Himself. The Lord begins that disclosure by identifying Himself with the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. In doing so He stresses His overarching role in the process of salvation. The Lord begins as “Alpha” by giving people the “light of Christ” (Moroni 7:19; see also D&C 88:7–13) by which they are able to discern and live the way of God. As they respond to their new understanding—by entering into and keeping covenants with Him—He is able to finish their perfection as “Omega” by bringing them to the Father (see Moroni 10:31–32; D&C 84:46–47). Thus, salvation begins and ends in Him.²

Jesus describes Himself further as “the Lord, who is, and who was, and who is to come” (JST, Revelation 1:8). The descriptive title is a paraphrase of the name of God given to Moses in Exodus 3:14–15 as translated in the Septuagint (the Hebrew Bible translated into Greek sometime between 300 and 100 BC).³ The Greek phrase, as written by John, begins with *apo*, “from,” which takes the genitive case but here is followed by three nominative phrases linked by the connective *kai*, “and.” By keeping the form in the nominative, John emphasizes the idea that the Savior is always the subject. He holds the initiative. From the beginning, “He ordered all things according to the council of His own will.”⁴ Men do not force His hand. Everything they do, even in their rebellion, works according to His plan.⁵ We can understand the phrase as an indeclinable noun, a rephrase of the tetragrammaton, *YHWH*, “he who is.”⁶ This rephrase of Jehovah’s name reminds the reader that Jehovah is eternally existent. As He said to Moses, “Endless is my name; for I am without beginning of days or end of years; and is not this endless?” (Moses 1:3).⁷

The title “Endless” does more. It brings the Endless One onto the stage of history. He alone stands as the Lord of the past, the present, and the future. He “contemplated the whole of the events connected with the earth, pertaining to the plan of salvation, before it rolled into existence, or ever ‘the morning stars sang together’ for joy; the past, the present, and the future were and are, with Him, one eternal ‘now.’”⁸ Jesus, by virtue of His eternal existence, exercises power and fulfills His purposes throughout the course of history.

The last title the Lord uses to describe Himself is “the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8). The appellation emphasizes His power over and throughout history. The Greek word used here, *pantokrator*, is not a synonym for the omnipotent: those who have power to do all things. Rather, it

designates one who holds together and regulates all things.⁹ In this title, “Almighty,” we see the central message of Revelation, which is reiterated in modern scripture: He “ascended up on high, as also he descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth” (D&C 88:6). It is this “light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed” (D&C 88:13). Thus the Savior oversees the sun, the moon, and even the stars with all their world systems. He rules world history and determines humankind’s destiny. As will be shown, nothing goes beyond the limits He sets. He is indeed God, the Almighty.

This auditory witness was the beginning of John’s understanding of the nature of the Lord. Within moments the Savior parted the veil and appeared to His beloved disciple. With powerful imagery, John records his encounter with Christ, the Second Comforter. As the vision opened, the prophet saw in the midst of seven lampstands “one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle” (Revelation 1:12–13).¹⁰ The phrase “Son of man,” found in all the standard works, usually refers to the Savior, though in the Old Testament it is used to distinguish mortals from Gods—especially in the context of judgment (see Numbers 23:19; Psalm 8:4; Isaiah 51:12). The book of Moses gives another dimension to the title. There the name is capitalized, “Son of Man,” making it a proper name or title. According to that passage, “in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness” is the name of God, “and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ, a righteous Judge” (Moses 6:57). In this context, the name designates Him who is the Son of the Man of Holiness.

John’s culture gives the title a further dimension. The term can be found in a number of writings during the first century after Christ.¹¹ Though scholars are still unsure about its full meaning, the term designated a supernatural figure who was to act as the vice-regent of God at the close of the age.¹² It is noteworthy that Jesus first applied the term to Himself when His dual power to heal physical and spiritual illness proved His divinity (see Luke 5:18–26). The ancient definition of supernatural being and God’s vice-regent seems to fit much of the profile of the Savior.¹³ The implications of the title would have been obvious to John’s readers.

The imagery John uses to describe the Lord reveals much. His appearance, along with the lampstands, ties the vision to the temple. The words John uses to describe the Lord’s robes are the same as those used in the

Septuagint for the vestments of the high priest (see Exodus 28:4; 29:5; Daniel 10:5). The golden girdle, or clasp, worn at breast level, marked royalty.¹⁴ Thus, the Lord presents Himself as both king and priest, offices associated with the temple and the fulness of the priesthood. The revelation foreshadows His standing at the head of the patriarchal order, presiding as Eternal Father, king, and priest.

John goes on to describe the Lord's countenance as that of the sun shining in its strength; His hair, "white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes . . . as a flame of fire." Fire also surrounded His feet and legs, "as if they burned in a furnace" (Revelation 1:14–15). John's vision mirrors that of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. When they saw the Lord, "His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah" (D&C 110:3). Both visions emphasize the celestial, almost overwhelming glory associated with the Lord.¹⁵

There is a dramatic difference between the two visions, however. In John's, "a sharp two-edged sword" issues from the Lord's mouth (Revelation 1:16). The image is a bit startling, but like much in John's visions, the symbolism is meant not for the eye but for the mind. In other words, John means to teach us something through his imagery, not to have us draw it. The King James Version translates two Greek words as "sword": *machaira* and *rhomphaia*. Both terms refer to swords in general, but a *machaira* also described a butcher's knife and a surgeon's scalpel. The *rhomphaia*, the word John used, specifically designated a Thracian broadsword but was sometimes used to denote a lance or spear with a broad, double-edged head.¹⁶

The symbolism echoes Isaiah 11:4: "He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth" (the Septuagint replaces *rod* with *word*), and 49:2: "He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword." The sword makes an excellent symbol for the executive and judicial powers of the Lord: that which severs, cuts, opens, and reveals. It stands as a perfect symbol of the word of the Lord, which is "quick and powerful, . . . to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, soul and spirit; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (D&C 33:1).

Before giving John his commission, the Lord revealed one more fact about Himself: "[I] have the keys of hell and of death" (Revelation 1:18). Many find that phrase surprising, feeling that Satan possesses those keys.

Revelation, however, has it right. Keys give access or control; they symbolize authority. The Greek word translated “hell” (*hades*) denoted, in its Christian context, the world of spirits where the rebellious await the Day of Judgment in torment. The Lord holds power over spirit prison as well as paradise. The wicked, consigned to hell, feel “a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the [Lord’s] adversaries” (Hebrews 10:27). Alma testified that “this is the state of the souls of the wicked, yea, in darkness, and a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them” (Alma 40:14). The Lord’s judgment places the wicked in torment so they will repent, be purged, and be prepared through the fire for a kingdom of glory and happiness.

The Lord’s power over death and hell comes through the Atonement and the Resurrection. Peter testified that the Lord’s descent into the spirit world made it possible for the souls in spirit prison to be taught the gospel that they might be judged with the same judgment as men in the flesh (see 1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:6). The Savior’s descent was that of a conquering hero come to liberate the prisoners. His ministers declared “liberty to the captives who were bound, even unto all who would repent of their sins and receive the gospel” (D&C 138:31). It was, however, through the power of the Resurrection that the Lord fully demonstrated His complete authority. Indeed, one day, through the twin keys that belong to Him alone, all hell and every tomb will stand empty.

The Message of the First Vision

From the very first vision, Revelation shows Jesus not only as king and priest but as caretaker and director as well—a God immediate, intimate, and cognizant. “I know your doings,” He assured the servants of the seven churches (see Revelation 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15; the KJV “works” translates the Greek quite well, but “doings” is somewhat better).

John’s Lord stood not outside history but at its very core. He was the mover and shaker. “I can stretch forth mine hands and hold all the creations which I have made; and mine eye can pierce them also,” He assured Moses (Moses 7:36). He warned the seven churches to mend their ways or He would take away their candlesticks. The Lord reveals Himself as caring and compassionate, yet exacting and unyielding.

THE REVELATION OF THE SAVIOR IN THE SECOND VISION (REVELATION 5)

As a prelude to the second appearance of the Lord in Revelation, John was invited to see the celestial kingdom with God sitting upon His throne surrounded by cherubim and elders. In the Father's hand was a scroll. It was the book of destiny, for in it was recorded "the revealed will, mysteries, and the works of God; the hidden things of his economy concerning this earth during the seven thousand years of its continuance, or its temporal existence" (D&C 77:6). John understood that someone had to execute God's will. John also recognized a problem: the heavens could find no one worthy to do the job. Indeed, no one "was able to open the book, neither to look thereon" (Revelation 5:3). The earth stood in danger of not having the will of God executed because no one "was able." The Greek word (*dunamai*) suggests that no one had the power or ability in or of himself to do the task, not even the angels of heaven.

John's reaction was instant and heartfelt: "I wept much" (Revelation 5:4). His sorrow, however, was short-lived, for one of the elders assured him that "the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed" and could, therefore, open the scroll (Revelation 5:5). Both titles come from Jewish messianism. The first echoes Genesis 49:9–10, in which Judah is called a "lion's whelp" and is promised that the scepter would not depart from him "until Shiloh [that is, the Messiah] come." The second title suggests Isaiah 11:1, which refers to the root of Jesse, the future ideal king of David's line, who was to usher in the millennial era of peace. Both combine to reveal the Savior as the true king of Israel, the sovereign of heaven and earth ready to bring in His millennial reign. John turned to look, but he did not see the majestic figure of a regal lion. Instead, he saw a lamb "in the midst of the throne" (JST, Revelation 4:4). The phrase gives the lamb a position nearest the throne, sharing, as it were, the central place. In this way, the Father symbolized a principal reality. The Lamb is the center of all things, preeminent over all His creations.

The Lamb, though living, bore the marks of a violent death. The Greek verb used to describe the wound, *sphazo*, meaning "slaughter," refers to the act of sacrificing. John could have had the paschal lamb in mind. If so, his imagery echoed the celebration of the Passover with its ritual slaughtering of a lamb. That would have reminded his Jewish readers of the ultimate victory and freedom from death they gained through Jehovah, the Lamb of God. This powerful symbol also emphasized a central biblical theme:

victory through sacrifice.¹⁷ The Lamb prevails not by sovereign might but by sacrifice grounded in love (see John 16:33). He derives His worthiness by purchasing God's people with His own blood (see Ephesians 1:7; Titus 2:14). The metaphor of John the Seer emphasizes both the high value of those the Redeemer purchased, costing Him His blood and His life, and the universality of the Lord's action in redeeming all the faithful from death and hell.¹⁸

John described the Lamb as having seven eyes and seven horns. Again, the image created suggests symbolic interpretation rather than visual reconstruction. The eyes depict knowledge, the horns represent power, and the number seven suggests fulness or completeness.¹⁹ Christ possesses with His Father the powers of omnipotence and omniscience; He has "the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). To these the Seer adds, through the symbolism of the "seven Spirits of God," the fulness of administrative authority. Each image shows the Lord's connection to earthly government, which He is about to assume in His redemptive role as "slain."

Through "the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth" (Revelation 5:6), John represents the omnipresent nature of the Lamb. The Joseph Smith Translation provides an additional insight. There the Lamb has twelve horns and twelve eyes, "which are the twelve servants of God, sent forth into all the earth" (JST, Revelation 5:6). The text defines the nature of the power of the Lamb. Twelve symbolizes the priesthood, and the Joseph Smith Translation seems to be teaching that all priesthood centers in and flows from the Lamb. The Doctrine and Covenants notes that at one time "it was called *the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God*. But out of respect or reverence to the name of the Supreme Being, to avoid the too frequent repetition of his name, they, the church, in ancient days, called that priesthood after Melchizedek, or the Melchizedek Priesthood" (D&C 107:3–4; italics in original). Further, "The Melchizedek Priesthood holds the right of presidency, and has power and authority over all the offices in the church in all ages of the world, to administer in spiritual things" (D&C 107:8). All this power centers in the Lamb and flows from Him to His leaders, especially His Apostles. By its authority the Savior acted to bring about the Atonement and continues to minister its saving power in the world. This is the central deed in the scroll of destiny, for all history pivots on this one act. It alone allowed for the complete fulfillment of the Father's will.

The Message of the Second Vision

The imagery in which God chose to clothe the revelation of His Son in this vision manifests the Redeemer's role as the slain or sacrificed Lamb. But though the wound is horrible, it does not dominate the metaphor. The Lamb's horns and the eyes stand out. The image draws the reader's mind to those elements that explain why the Lamb prevailed to open the scroll and why He could act when no one else "was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon" (Revelation 5:4). Remember that John could clearly see the scroll from where he was standing, but he could not "look" on it. The Greek word John chose (*blepo*) suggests not just viewing but reading, understanding, or comprehending. This he could not do. It took more power and knowledge than he had to comprehend the will, economy, and mystery of God as it played out in the world's history. The Lamb possessed those powers. He received them, we must remember, because of the wound. It was the sacrifice that made the Lamb "worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof" (Revelation 5:2). The imagery of the vision brings the reader's mind to an even higher understanding. The horns and eyes do indeed invest the Savior with the attributes of deity, but, more importantly, the whole image—the Lamb, the eyes, the horns, and especially the wound—force a new definition of omnipotence. Often used to describe God's power of unlimited coercion, John the Seer reveals its true nature as the power of infinite persuasion, the invincible strength of self-sacrificing love.²⁰

THE REVELATION OF THE SAVIOR IN THE THIRD VISION (REVELATION 14)

As the next vision opened, John saw the Savior standing with 144,000 of the Saints of God. These represent those whom the Savior has sealed unto eternal life. We do not need to take the number literally. The Doctrine and Covenants states "that those who are sealed are high priests, ordained unto the holy order of God, to administer the everlasting gospel; for they are they who are ordained out of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, by the angels to whom is given power over the nations of the earth, to bring as many as will come to the church of the Firstborn" (D&C 77:11). Note that this scripture does not specify a number. Instead, it says that they are high priests who have a special calling "to administer the everlasting gospel" and "to bring as many as will come to the church of the Firstborn."

Joseph Smith associated the 144,000 with the temple.²¹ The symbolic meaning of the number supports this association. Twelve represents the priesthood. Biblical people squared numbers to amplify their symbolic meaning. Thus 144 suggests a fulness of priesthood authority. But the Lord was not satisfied with that. He gives the image a superlative quality by multiplying 144 by a thousand, representing completeness. In this way He shows the strength and breadth of the priesthood in the latter days, in this dispensation, which is, indeed, the dispensation of the fulness of times. During this period, complete priesthood authority will operate. It is little wonder that as the world spurns this authority, it will be condemned.

It is these people who have built the New Jerusalem and established the foundation of Zion. It is here, John understands, where the Lord will dwell before the great and dreadful day overtakes the rest of the earth. The presence of the Lord prepares the Saints against the judgments He is about to unleash on the rest of the world.

The momentum of John's vision up to this point has prepared the reader for the onset of a great battle, but, as usual, God throws in a twist. He does not disclose the figure standing on Mount Zion as a terrible warrior-king garbed in battle array but instead as a lamb, the symbol of meekness and peace. Further, harmony and joy reign over the entire scene. These people do not know worry or distress; they seem unconcerned about the war clouds gathering over the whole earth. The harmony of sweet music fills the region and reaches from earth to heaven, where it ignites a rhapsody expressing itself as a new song—new not only because it has never been sung before but because it could never have been sung before. It signals a total victory which only now becomes possible. For this reason, only the 144,000—representing the sealed, those who have won the battle—are able to sing it. The Doctrine and Covenants provides the setting for the song and its content. In it the Lord states:

For I, the Almighty, have laid my hands upon the nations, to scourge them for their wickedness.

And plagues shall go forth, and they shall not be taken from the earth until I have completed my work, which shall be cut short in righteousness—

Until all shall know me, who remain, even from the least unto the greatest, and shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, and shall see eye to eye, and shall lift up their voice, and with the voice together sing this new song, saying:

The Lord hath brought again Zion;
 The Lord hath redeemed his people, Israel,
 According to the election of grace,
 Which was brought to pass by the faith
 And covenant of their fathers.
 The Lord hath redeemed his people;
 And Satan is bound and time is no longer.
 The Lord hath gathered all things in one.
 The Lord hath brought down Zion from above.
 The Lord hath brought up Zion from beneath.
 The earth hath travailed and brought forth her strength;
 And truth is established in her bowels;
 And the heavens have smiled upon her;
 And she is clothed with the glory of her God;
 For he stands in the midst of his people.
 Glory, and honor, and power, and might,
 Be ascribed to our God; for he is full of mercy,
 Justice, grace and truth, and peace,
 Forever and ever, Amen. (D&C 84:96–102)

In these verses, the Lord reveals the triumphant nature of the song. It celebrates the time when the plagues of judgment will cleanse the earth. Only the redeemed will remain. God and His Saints will win the day, and Zion will stand supreme.

Chapter 14 explains the underpinnings of the song, allowing us to understand why it can be sung. In the dramatic closing scene, John beholds “one like unto the Son of man” (v. 14) seated upon a white cloud. The imagery is taken from Daniel 7:13–14 and appears to be a reference to the resurrected Lord coming in the fulness of His power. On his head sits a golden wreath. The King James Version describes it as a “crown,” but the Greek word *stephenos* does not refer to a diadem, the mark of civil rule, but rather to a wreath, a sign of the highest athletic achievement or of a great military victory. In His hand, He readies the sickle of judgment and begins to harvest the wheat fields. The day of judgment has fully come, “for the harvest of the earth is ripe” (v. 15). It is the ripeness that determines the timing of the reaping. The Lord expresses this idea in a parable of harvest: “But behold, in the last days, even now while the Lord is beginning to bring forth the word, and the blade is springing up and is yet tender—behold, verily I say unto you, the angels are crying unto the Lord day and

night, who are ready and waiting to be sent forth to reap down the fields; but the Lord saith unto them, pluck not up the tares while the blade is yet tender (for verily your faith is weak), lest you destroy the wheat also. Therefore, let the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest is fully ripe; then ye shall first gather out the wheat from among the tares, and after the gathering of the wheat, behold and lo, the tares are bound in bundles, and the field remaineth to be burned" (D&C 86:4–7).

The first harvest, the harvest of the Lord, is the gathering in of the wheat. That time is now, and the time is urgent. To His Saints, the Lord declared: "For verily, verily, I say unto you that ye are called to lift up your voices as with the sound of a trump, to declare my gospel unto a crooked and perverse generation. For behold, the field is white already to harvest; and it is the eleventh hour, and the last time that I shall call laborers into my vineyard" (D&C 33:2–3).

It is in this light that the Lord admonishes, "Whoso desireth to reap let him thrust in his sickle with his might, and reap while the day lasts, that he may treasure up for his soul everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God" (D&C 11:3). Now is the time when the wheat must be gathered in. Those who participate are the Lord's sickle. The Lord will reward the effort of His laborers with the security and peace of Zion.

Through the efforts of the laborers, the world will hear the gospel. But when the world openly rejects goodness and turns against God's people, then another sickle will begin to do its terrible work.²² That will be the day when the voice of God will utter

out of the heaven, saying: Hearken, O ye nations of the earth, and hear the words of that God, who made you.

O, ye nations of the earth, how often would I have gathered you together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not!

How oft have I called upon you by the mouth of my servants, and by the ministering of angels, and by mine own voice, and by the voice of thunderings, and by the voice of lightnings, and by the voice of tempests, and by the voice of earthquakes, and great hailstorms, and by the voice of famines and pestilences of every kind, and by the great sound of a trump, and by the voice of judgment, and by the voice of mercy all the day long, and by the voice of glory and honor and the riches of eternal life, and would have saved you with an everlasting salvation, but ye would not!

Behold, the day has come, when the cup of the wrath of mine indignation is full. (D&C 43:23–26)

The period of the second sickle begins when all peaceful attempts to redeem the world have failed. At that point, the warning of the Book of Mormon may again find fulfillment: “For behold, there is a curse upon all this land, that destruction shall come upon all those workers of darkness, according to the power of God, when they are fully ripe” (Alma 37:28). The warning applies not only to the Americas but also to the world at large.

The harvest of ruin will be carried out not by the Lord but by an angel of destruction. His target is not the fields but the vineyards.²³ He is to “gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe” (Revelation 14:18). Further, he is to cast the fruit “into the great winepress of the wrath of God” (Revelation 14:19). The destruction will be tremendous and bitter.

The Message of the Third Vision

In the third vision, the Father reveals His Son as the victor, the great general who has met His foe and won. It is out of this victory that the 144,000 sing their song and celebrate both security and peace. But the celebration, in the context of Revelation, seems premature. The actual battle has not commenced, and the enemy still stands strong, arrogant, and undefeated. How then can the Saints celebrate with such surety? There are two reasons: the first is grounded in their absolute faith in the ability of the Lord to overcome. Part of this is based on the redemption He has already won for them. Their absolute confidence echoes the same faith they exhibited during the great War in Heaven when “they overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony” (Revelation 12:11). The second stems from the fact that the Lord is personally with them, directing affairs and attending to the Saints’ needs and assuring their safety. The Lord promised the Saints of America that here “shall be a New Jerusalem. And the powers of heaven shall be in the midst of this people; yea, even I will be in the midst of you” (3 Nephi 20:22). He assured them further that His shall be “a land of peace, a city of refuge, a place of safety for the saints of the Most High God; and the glory of the Lord shall be there, and the terror of the Lord also shall be there, insomuch that the wicked will not come unto it, and it shall be called Zion” (D&C 45:66–67). It is not the Saints who need to fear, but the enemy.

The Lord directs the work of the harvest from Zion. The 144,000 act as the sickle of the Lord moving among the nations to gather out all who will come to Zion. John emphasizes the Lord's saving ministry. Neither he nor any of his people work to destroy the world or its enemies. It was another angel whom John saw that "came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle" (Revelation 14:17). It is this one to whom the angel of the altar commands: "Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe" (Revelation 14:18). John's point seems to be that, at least at this juncture, the Lord does not come to destroy the earth or its people. He comes to save it. Revelation gives credit for destruction to the five angels of the Lord (the four in chapter 7 and the one in chapter 14) on one side and to Satan on the other. The actual work is done by the army described as horsemen with "breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone" (Revelation 9:17) and led by one "whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon," and in English, the Destroyer, or Perdition (see Revelation 9:11; D&C 76:26).²⁴ Out of the horsemen's mouths come fire and smoke and brimstone, and "by these three was the third part of men killed" (Revelation 9:18). So what does the Lord do at His coming? John understood perfectly. The Lord comes to "destroy them which destroy the earth" (Revelation 11:18).

The point is that the Savior does just what His name says: He saves. The paradox is that the Lord's destruction becomes His tool of salvation. He uses that tool, however, only when all others have failed. Still, it is a tool of salvation, and for that reason the angels can say, "Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments" (Revelation 16:7). The Lord is perfectly prepared to allow His destroying angels and the beasts of Satan to have 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 only when and how. Ultimate destiny is not determined by the moment or manner of death: it is 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 game goes on. We must fight against the current idea that mortality is so infallibly precious that, as one scholar put 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 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 life is irremediably bounded by 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.”²⁵

Besides, John shows us clearly that the purpose of the plagues is to drive those who would not do so otherwise to repentance and thus into the protective arms of God. Those who will not repent must be accountable to the fire. What happens to those who refuse to repent leads us to God’s next revelation of His Son.

THE REVELATION OF THE SAVIOR IN THE FOURTH VISION (REVELATION 19)

At the beginning of his heavenly revelations, John saw “a door . . . opened in heaven” through which he was able to see the throne of God (Revelation 4:1). Later “the temple of God was opened in heaven,” such that the Seer could behold the ark of the testimony (Revelation 11:19). Then the whole temple opened so that the seven angels with the seven bowls could come out (see Revelation 15:5). Now John sees the entire expanse of heaven unfold to make way for the warrior-king and His army prepared to battle the hosts of darkness.²⁶ The rider, terrible in majesty upon His white horse, is the Savior, “called Faithful and True” (Revelation 19:11; compare D&C 45:74–75). These names of Christ, as Elder Bruce R. McConkie points out, “signify 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.”²⁷ John clearly states the rider’s purpose: “In righteousness he doth judge and make war” (Revelation 19:11). War results from His just judgment. Evil must be put down even by force when necessary.

John sees the Lord coming with crowns upon His head. These are not wreaths but diadems, the symbol of political rule. The king comes to take back His domain. John deliberately contrasts the King with the dragon and the sea beast met in Revelation 12. Whereas the former two possess seven and ten diadems respectively, the warrior has “many” diadems (Revelation 19:12). The king’s true royalty far surpasses the false sovereignty of Satan

and his minion. He now rides as “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:16)—and He has acquired His crowns since John last saw Him. Although John had seen Him in regal authority early in the revelation (see Revelation 3:21; compare 1:5), John mentions no diadem. Here they are prominently displayed. They signify that the “kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).²⁸

The rider bore a name “that no man knew, but he himself” (Revelation 19:12). Again Elder McConkie gives insight: “As with all glorified beings, our Lord has a new name in celestial exaltation, a name known to and comprehended by those only who know God in the sense that they have become as he is and have eternal life. See Rev. 2:12–17. Thus, Christ’s ‘new name’ shall be written upon all those who are joint-heirs with him (Rev. 3:12), and shall signify that they have become even as he is.”²⁹

But the warrior does have a known name: “The Word of God” (Revelation 19:13). John calls Him by this same title at the beginning of his Gospel (see John 1:1–3). In Revelation the name emphasizes that He judges the kings of the world.³⁰ Among many ancient peoples, a word was not simply a lifeless sound but an active agent bringing into being the intent of the one who spoke.³¹ The Savior is the active agent who executes the word (that is, the will) of God. That word is now judgment. Thus the rider’s vestments are blood red, for the judgment is one of death (compare Isaiah 63:1–6). According to the Doctrine and Covenants, His appearance will cause consternation among the nations. Many will ask:

Who is this that cometh down from God in heaven with dyed garments; yea, from the regions which are not known, clothed in his glorious apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength?

And he shall say: I am he who spake in righteousness, mighty to save. . . .

And so great shall be the glory of his presence that the sun shall hide his face in shame, and the moon shall withhold its light, and the stars shall be hurled from their places.

And his voice shall be heard: I have trodden the wine-press alone, and have brought judgment upon all people; and none were with me;

And I have trampled them in my fury, and I did tread upon them in mine anger, and their blood have I sprinkled upon my garments,

and stained all my raiment; for this was the day of vengeance which was in my heart. (D&C 133:46–47, 49–51)

Clearly John depicts the moment of vengeance when the Lord will destroy all wickedness by the brightness of His coming (see D&C 5:19). But He does not come alone. With Him comes His army “upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean” (Revelation 19:14). Against these “the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war” (Revelation 19:19), but they will be “slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh” (Revelation 19:21). At this moment, all nations will come under His authority, “and he shall rule them with a rod of iron” (Revelation 19:15).

The Message of the Fourth Vision

Revelation 19 gives us a clear view of the nature and purpose of the Second Coming. Unlike other accounts in which the glory and burning power of the Redeemer dominate, Revelation stresses the regal and martial authority of the Lord. He appears as the warrior-king at the head of His angelic host to take back His land from the dark lord and his legions. Actually, He does not need to take it back, for He has never lost it. His is more of a mopping-up exercise against those that have tried to take His world and failed.

Some may be concerned because the day of the Lord is filled with destruction. But it has its purpose. Nothing unclean (that is, unjustified) can enter into the Lord’s presence and survive (see John 6:46; Moses 7:35). Christ is about to sweep the earth with His glory so that the millennial era may be established. Therefore, evil must come to an end. By the time the Lord comes, there will be very little evil left to put to an end. Throughout Revelation, we have seen the self-destructive nature of wickedness. God cannot allow such self-destruction to act as an impersonal nemesis: an independent, self-operating moral law sweeping away all in its path. To do so would allow the powers 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. Evil must be allowed to combine its forces against the Savior’s people and then fall back in utter defeat through their faith and trust coupled with the glory of those who come with the Savior.³²

Because His victory is theirs, they reign with Him. As John declared, “I saw thrones, and they [who] sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them” (Revelation 20:4). These “lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4). His coming, then, results in a world over which He will preside with the faithful and without opposition from the dragon. The result will be that His people “shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6).

WHAT REVELATION REVEALS ABOUT THE LORD

The book of Revelation contains, as John clearly stated in his introduction, the revelation of Jesus Christ. God the Father chose the imagery and focus of that revelation. Three images eclipse all others. The first is that of Christ as the divine Lamb executing the will of His omnipotent Father. Revelation underscores the work of the Savior as the executor of the Father’s will. He is the active God in history. It is true that for much of earth’s history the Lamb has chosen to act behind the scenes. That has made it easy for the natural man or woman to attribute the course of history to political, social, and other causes. The naturalistic view, however, will soon prove untenable. Already the great Jehovah is beginning to direct more openly the course of history and manifest more directly His control over the destiny of humankind. An iron curtain has crumbled, the gospel is preached across many lands, and worthy men of all nations can hold the priesthood. Before long, all will see that the Lamb does indeed execute the will of God, whose grasp none can escape.

Tied closely to the image of the Lamb is that of the Almighty God—the one who directs, controls, and orchestrates. John reveals the power of God on two levels. One is through the active voice, by which the prophet attributes direct authority and movement to the Lamb. The other is through the passive voice, by which indirect credit is given to the Lamb. To understand, consider the subtle hope lying behind one of the most frightening chapters—Revelation 9. John records a vision in which he saw “a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit” (Revelation 9:1). God chose a star to represent His rebellious son Satan and the pit to symbolize the source from which powers of hell will be unleashed upon the world in the last days.

Notice, though, that Satan did not possess the key to the pit in the abyss. He had to receive it from someone. Further, John sees that the destructive beasts, described as “locusts,” will be “given power, as the

scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads" (Revelation 9:3–4). Something sets limits on these beasts. It gives them power, it tells them what and who they can and cannot hurt, and it dictates how long they shall act: "five months" (Revelation 9:5). Something even limits the angels of destruction. Their time is set for "an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year," and they can slay but "the third part of men" (Revelation 9:15).

John clearly reveals that something overmasters all that goes on, setting boundaries and establishing limits. What is the power behind history? It is Jehovah. Revelation gives more than a powerful testimony of the prophetic abilities of this God. It shows not only that He knew the end from the beginning and contemplated the whole of earth's history but also that He arranged and continuously orchestrates it. History has moved according to the script He has written, and all movements have stayed within the bounds He has set. He is indeed the Almighty.

The last image through which God reveals His Son is that of the warrior-king destroying evil with His victorious hosts and reigning with them for a thousand years. Along with the white horse of war, the myriad of diadems atop the king's head dominate the scene. In this way, God set the political aspect of the Lord's power center stage. The millennial era will see true theocracy established and flourishing in preparation for the time when this earth will enter the family of celestial planets. This is the time, as John saw, that "the holy city, new Jerusalem, [will come] down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2). Then "the tabernacle of God [will be] with men, and he will dwell with them, . . . and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Revelation 21:3).

It is Christ, the Lamb, the Almighty, the warrior-king, who shall bring all these things to pass. Little wonder that the angelic hosts will praise His name, singing "the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest" (Revelation 15:3–4).

NOTES

1. Northrop Frye, "Typology: Apocalypse," in *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), 71.
2. Elohim also uses these same elements as disclosure points. See Revelation 2:6, wherein He uses the phrase to introduce the reward He will give the faithful. Both the Father and the Son act together to bring eternal life to humankind.
3. Compare Jeremiah 1:6; 14:13; and 32:17 in the Septuagint (LXX).
4. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 220.
5. See Romans 9:15–18; John 10:18; Ezekiel 38:1–4, 14–22. One of the aspects of apocalyptic literature in general and Revelation in particular is predeterminism. Revelation 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 framework of human freedom.
6. Josephine Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, vol. 38 of *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 376. The Song of the Doves at Dondona speaks of "Zeus who was, Zeus who is, Zeus who will be" (Pausanias, *Asinaria*, 10.12.10). At Sais the shrine of Minerva boasted, "I am that hath been and is and shall be" (Plutarch, *Moralia, De hide et Osiride*, 9). See Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 68. For a technical study of the name/title, see R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 1:10.
7. Jesus may well have been speaking by divine investiture of authority as He uttered these words. In that case, it is Elohim who is "Endless" and "Eternal." Revelation 21:6 has Elohim declare that He is "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." Such titles seem to apply to both Father and Son because the perspective of the Father is shared by the Son through the power of the Holy Spirit. According to *Lectures on Faith* 5:1, the Son possesses the same fulness with the Father and "having overcome, received a fulness of the glory of the Father, possessing the same mind with the Father." By sharing the same mind, the Savior can speak from the perspective of the "Endless" and the "Eternal" (see Larry E. Dahl and Charles D. Tate Jr., eds., *The Lectures on Faith in Historical Perspective*, Religious Studies Center Monograph Series [Provo, UT: BYU, Religious Studies Center, 1990], 84).
8. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 220.
9. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–73), 3:439.

10. The phrase "like unto" seems to suggest that John did not actually see the Savior. Such is not the case. There are a number of scriptures where the phrase "like unto the Son of Man" refers to none other than the Savior (see Abraham 3:27; Revelation 14:14).
11. See James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Christianity and Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); for the concept of Messianism in earliest Judaism, see 79–115; on the term "son of man," see 130–44.
12. For discussion, see M. D. Hooker, *The Son of Man in Mark* (London: SPCK, 1967), 81–93.
13. Luke spoke previously of the Lord's power (*dunamis*) to heal. Here Luke focuses on his authority (*exousia*) to do so.
14. See Septuagint Exodus 28:4, 5, which indicates that the girdle is connected with the attire of the high priest. His girdle was made of fine-twined linen and embroidered with needlework (see Septuagint Exodus 28:36), while the clasp or girdle that gathered together the long robe of the Lord was of gold. Josephus, however, notes that during his time the high priest's girdle was interwoven with gold (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 3.7.2). The golden clasp, or *porpe*, was worn by the king and his associates (1 Maccabees 10:89; 11:58) and so served as a mark of an important office. For further discussion, see Charles, *Commentary*, 1:28; and Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 77–78.
15. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery may have been echoing the words of Revelation with which they were both acquainted. Even so, those words best described what they experienced.
16. G. Kittel and others, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromily, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), s.v. "*machaira*" and "*rhomphaia*."
17. Mounce, *Revelation*, 144.
18. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 73.
19. The possession of seven eyes echoes Zechariah 4:10, in which they are symbols of God's omniscience. The horn is the Old Testament symbol for power (see Numbers 23:22; Deuteronomy 33:17; 1 Samuel 2:1; 1 Kings 22:11; Psalms 75:4; 89:17). Thus it was the mark of kingly dignity (see Psalms 112:9; 148:14; Zechariah 1:18; Daniel 7:7, 20; 8:3). In 1 Enoch 90.9, the Maccabees are stylized as "horned lambs" (see Charles, *Commentary*, 1:141–43).
20. G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1966), 75.
21. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932–51), 6:365; Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon

- W. Cook, *The Words of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 368.
22. Compare 2 Nephi 28:15–20 with Alma 37:30–31, which teaches that the world is fully ripe when it both rejects and fights against goodness.
 23. The *drepanon* was an all-purpose blade used for pruning, cutting clusters of grapes, and harvesting grains. Its roughly foot-long curved blade made it easy to handle, with clean cutting power.
 24. The Greek word, a feminine noun, is *apoleia*, which carries the meaning of something that destroys or brings to utter ruin.
 25. Caird, *Revelation*, 113.
 26. Exodus 15:3 describes Jehovah as a man of war. The idea persists in 2 Maccabees 3:22–30 and in the Qumran scrolls 1QM 12.10–11; 19.2–4.
 27. McConkie, *Commentary*, 3:566.
 28. Caird, *Revelation*, 241.
 29. McConkie, *Commentary*, 3:567.
 30. Mounce, *Revelation*, 345–46.
 31. Mounce, *Revelation*, 345–46. See, for example, Genesis 1:3, 7, 9; Hebrews 4:12.
 32. Caird, *Revelation*, 145.