

THE MESSAGE BEHIND THE PASSIVE VOICE IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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Just how bad are things going to get in the last days? John knew. In solemn testimony, he declared, "I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God" (Revelation 15:1). Those angels then pour out those plagues upon the earth (see 15:7). By the plagues "was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone" (9:18). John saw blood flowing "even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs" (14:20), that is, 184 miles.¹

Some who read Revelation argue that these images of horror are merely figurative, meant to express the spiritual anguish that will afflict those souls who rebel against God.

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1. The Greek word *stadion*, used by John and translated as "furlong," denotes a measure of 607 feet. The definitions of all Greek words used in this study come from Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

Others insist that the imagery expresses what the seer and other Christians hoped would happen to their Roman oppressors. The book's plagues, these writers assure us, have nothing to do with our day.²

It would be comforting to believe either of those two theories, but latter-day scripture proves them both false. Consider just two of many examples that could be cited. "And thus, with the sword and by bloodshed the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn; and with famine, and plague, and earthquake, and the thunder of the heaven, and the fierce and vivid lightning also, shall the inhabitants of the earth be made to feel the wrath, and indignation, and chastening hand of an Almighty God, until the consumption decreed hath made a full end of all nations" (D&C 87:6). "Behold, vengeance cometh speedily upon the inhabitants of the earth, a day of wrath, a day of burning, a day of desolation, of weeping, of mourning, and of lamentation; and as a whirlwind it shall come upon all the face of the earth, saith the Lord" (D&C 112:24).

These verses underscore the fact that the plagues found in Revelation are not limited to John's time, nor are they wholly symbolic. The earth will be wracked not only with widespread natural disasters but also with terrible man-made destruction. Indeed, John saw plagues that will strike major portions of the farmlands and orchards, rivers and freshwater systems, mountains, and range lands. He saw that even the atmosphere would become charged with dread, that the moon would hang blood red, and that the sun would pale (see Revelation 8).

Even as bad as these things are, John saw that they were only the beginning of sorrows that God would inflict upon the

2. For various views on how to understand Revelation, see R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 1:clxxxiii-clxxxvii.

godless. He heard an eagle³ as it flew high in the heavens lament, "Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other" plagues that are yet to come (Revelation 8:13). John then saw the mounting of great armies,⁴ symbolized as locusts, seemingly irresistible in their strength and fire-power. "And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men" (9:9-10). John, changing the imagery slightly, numbered the army at two hundred million,⁵ and describes them as having "breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone" through which millions, if not billions, will die (9:16-17).

Revelation gives no hope that the world can avoid these massive destructions. Nothing individuals or groups do can prevent it. Faced with the inevitable nature and cosmic breadth of these coming disasters, the reader of Revelation may be inclined to surrender to despair or nihilism, desire to run and hide, or seek a corner in which to cower. This is not surprising.

3. A few old manuscripts have the word *angel* (*angelos*), but most have the word *eagle* (*aetos*). The eagle imagery is arresting in that it suggests the sharp-eyed predator able to see what is coming along the horizon.

4. John uses the word *troops* or *armies* here (*strateumatôn*), suggesting not one army but many and not one attack but multiple. See Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, n.d.), 211.

5. The number of horsemen John describes need not be taken literally. The number he cites is twice ten thousand. Taking the number ten in its qualitative rather than quantitative sense, it points to that portion of humankind that follow after Satan and his earthly henchmen. See Richard D. Draper, *Opening the Seven Seals: The Visions of John the Revelator* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 123-24.

Compared to the immense scope of the destructions, any effort we put forth would be so ineffectual as to be pointless.

However, if we come away with such a point of view, we have misread the book. Revelation testifies of a power that operates behind the scenes, setting limits on all destroyers and their destructions. John shows that this power controls, orchestrates, and regulates all that happens on this earth. The book keeps the identity, though not the work, of this over-arching power hidden through the use of the passive voice. Simply put, Revelation testifies that a Limiter governs history, not just the present but the future as well, making sure that all destructions are kept within bounds and serve a single end.

This paper explores the identification and work of the Limiter by looking at specific passages that use the passive voice. By doing so, we can identify the Limiter and explore how and why He operates behind the scenes for the present and why the time will come when He will, forcefully and fully, move openly onto the stage of history.

Before moving into our study, a word about the passive voice. The New Testament authors, like those of the classic Attic, use this form to make the direct object the subject of the verb.⁶ Unlike the active voice, the passive does not name the agent of an action. Instead, the subject of the verb expresses the goal of the action or shows the subject as acted upon. For example, rather than saying, "Fire burned the book," the passive voice says, "The book was burned by fire," or more simply, "The book was burned." In the latter case, and fitting the pattern used very often in Revelation, the actual agent is unidentified.

6. See Herbert W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), 394-98; James H. Moulton, *Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963).

As some writers do today, ancient authors sometimes abused the use of the passive voice. In any age, it can be the accomplice of those who, as one authority put it, "confuse authority and objectivity with polysyllabic abstraction and remote impersonality."⁷ But sometimes, for reasons of his own, an author may not want to name the active agent.⁸ Revelation certainly keeps the Limiter hidden by that usage and in doing so puts the operating agent, as it were, behind the scenes, hidden from general view. John may have used the form to emphasize that this is the place from which the Limiter chooses to operate during much of the history John recorded.

I became conscious of how often the text used the passive voice while translating it some years ago. The frequency of its use surprised me because the book details so many actions accomplished by so many agents. However, Revelation contains nearly 175 instances of this verbal form. Chapter 20 wins for the most uses with fourteen passive forms, while chapters 8 and 18 tie for second with thirteen each. There is not a chapter that contains fewer than two uses. What is interesting is that those chapters that describe destructions use the passive voice 1.72 times more frequently than those which do not.⁹

7. See Joseph M. Williams, *Style* (n.p.: HarperCollins, 1989), 23-24.

8. See Williams, *Style*, 24.

9. Revelation averages 9.8 occurrences per chapter in those that deal with destruction and 5.7 average occurrences in those that do not. Breaking down the use of the passive voice by chapter from least to greatest yields: chapter 4 = 2 uses, 1 = 3, 3 = 4, 7 = 4, 10 = 4, 22 = 4, 2 = 5, 5 = 6, 15 = 6, 16 = 6, 21 = 6, 9 = 10, 17 = 7, 11 = 9, 6 = 11, 12 = 11, 14 = 11, 13 = 12, 19 = 12, 8 = 13, 18 = 13, 20 = 14. Breaking them down in chronological order by yields: chapter 1 = 3 uses, 2 = 5, 3 = 4, 4 = 2, 5 = 6, 6 = 11, 7 = 4, 8 = 13, 9 = 10, 10 = 4, 11 = 9, 12 = 11, 13 = 12, 14 = 11, 15 = 6, 16 = 6, 17 = 7, 18 = 13, 19 = 12, 20 = 14, 21 = 6, 22 = 4.

The increased use suggests that John is deliberately keeping the force directing the devastations anonymous.

We see this clearly in chapters 8 and 9, where John records tremendous destruction. These are associated with the opening of the seventh seal, or the time when the Savior prepares and finishes His work, "in the beginning of the seventh thousand years—the preparing of the way before the time of his [second] coming" (D&C 77:12). In this chapter, four angels sound their trumpets and herald in one calamity after another.

These four angels unleash their forces against an earth that is yet reeling from the damages that signaled the close of the sixth seal. Already, the earth has suffered an earthquake that moves islands and mountains. The skies are full of dread with falling stars, a blood-red moon, and an ashen sun (see Revelation 6:12–14). These do not prevent an angel, John tells us, from taking fiery coals off the altar in heaven and casting them to the earth, bringing great noise,¹⁰ thunder, lightning, and another earthquake (see 8:5). With that, the other angels sound their trumpets. The first signals the destruction of orchards, grasslands, and grainfields.¹¹ The second brings death to the sea creatures and destruction to shipping lanes. The third strikes at the freshwater systems and brings the death of many people. Finally, the fourth angel sounds, and the heavens become charged with dread as the sun and moon glow with weakened light (see 8:7–12).

10. The KJV translates the Greek word *phōnē* with the English "voice." Though that is a viable translation, the context here suggests the preferred translation would be "noises," "sounds," or "tones"—the cacophony that nature or people make during upheaval.

11. The *dendron* of Jude 1:12 and Matthew 7:17 is a fruit bearing tree. *Xortos* usually means grass of the pasture or meadow, or hay. However, it can also refer to wheat or other grains in their preripened grasslike stages. The *Baba Metzia* 59b states that when God smote the world, a third of the olive, wheat, and barley crops were destroyed.

These calamities do not result from natural phenomena such as tornadoes, volcanoes, or hurricanes. They represent eschatological judgments of supernatural power reaching far beyond what nature, even at its worst, offers.¹² These echo, but eclipse both in scope and power, those that Moses called down upon Pharaoh and his people. However, unlike the plagues of Egypt, they do not seem to follow one another with distinct breaks between but flow together.

The earth, not humankind, takes the major blow from the initial destructions. However, what hurts the earth necessarily hurts her inhabitants. Even so, humankind seems to be, at least for the moment, an indirect target. That changes in chapter 9.

In it, John sees a star having fallen from heaven.¹³ It has a key with which it opens the pit in the abyss.¹⁴ The star does not escalate the attack on nature; it turns the force against humans. As smoke roils from the pit and darkens the already dimmed sun, the star's destroyers swarm out of the pall, like locust hordes. They are well armored, swift, and nasty. Their mission, at least initially, is not to destroy but to torture. Due to their unrelenting torment, many will wish to die, but death will flee from them (see Revelation 9:4-5).

As fierce and pernicious as the locust armies are, something even more deadly awaits to add strength and direction

12. Jewish apocalyptic, including that found in the Old Testament, has no equivalent of the mass destructions John records. See Charles, *Commentary*, 1:234.

13. The perfect active participle (*peptō kota* from *pipō*) John uses emphasizes that the star is already down.

14. The Greek word *abyssos* comes from an alpha privative plus *bathos*, meaning "depth." Thus it carries the idea of something without depth, that is, bottomless. In Romans 10:7 it is the holding tank for the dead, i.e., Hades. However, there is a depth even lower, according to Luke 8:31, where the demons dwell. It is the latter abyss to which Revelation 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3 have reference. See Archibald T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Nashville: Broadman, 1933), 1:361.

to the destruction. A voice speaks from the altar, ordering the angel with the sixth trumpet to unleash four destroyers from the pit in the abyss which the star has opened.¹⁵ Using the locust army, now metamorphosed in John's vision into horsemen, they redirect the purpose of the army: no longer to torture but to kill.

Stressing the almost invincible power of the army, John describes their armor as fiery, dusky red, and sulfurous. From their steeds issue the actual engines of destruction: fire, smoke, and brimstone, and by "these three was the third part of men killed" (Revelation 9:18). John's use of sulfur, translated as brimstone in the Bible, is arresting. The word is associated with hellfire.¹⁶ Thus, John sees more than mere human slaughter by scientific methods. Combined with these, and driving them, are the destructive forces of the pit in the abyss loosed against humankind. In other words, the fire, smoke, and brimstone execute the judgment and inflict the judicial power of Satan. They do not represent the quick and clean death of the sword but the agonizing misery upon which Hades feeds.

In chapter 8, though cataclysm after cataclysm strikes the earth, Revelation mentions no agent directing the force. Fire and hail are cast to the earth, a burning mountain is thrown against it, and the sun and moon are smitten. But who does the throwing, casting, and smiting? Though John does not name an agent, he knows that a power is operating and keeps his readers apprised of the fact.

He does reveal who in fact begins the devastations. It is not

15. The JST changes the text of the KJV, having the destroying angels come not from the Euphrates River but from the pit. In this way, the JST ties the destroying angels to Satan and his cause.

16. The word *theion* appears only in Revelation and in Luke 17:29. Defining the term from context suggests it connotes a total destruction via divine judgment.

the angels with the trumpets, for they merely signal the onslaught. It is the angel at the altar in heaven who throws the first blow and may direct all others. However, we cannot be sure. We can be sure that the plagues come under heaven's direction and therefore serve its purposes. It is for this reason that the plagues have their limits. All destructions throughout the book of Revelation have a set limit in time, scope, and target beyond which none can pass. In chapters 8 and 9, Revelation usually uses the fraction "one-third" for those affected.

The Old Testament provides a key to the meaning of one-third. There we meet what has been called the "remnant theology," the remnant being the portion that survives the destruction. Ezekiel 5:1-5 provides an example. The prophet chose to use the prophetic *ot*, a dramatic enactment, as the means to put over his point. He shaved his head and beard, burned one-third of the hair, cleaved one-third with the sword, and scattered the remainder to the wind. The latter portion is the remnant, which, though affected, remained alive.

Zechariah's vision also demonstrates remnant theology. In his vision, two-thirds of the people died, but the remaining third, though they had to pass through fire, stayed alive (see Zechariah 13:8-9). Though John reversed the percentages, the Old Testament connection seems to hold. Limits, whether one-third or two-thirds, show that a remnant will remain. That seems to be John's point. The plagues do not destroy the earth or all her inhabitants. Rather, they are God's last attempt to turn people to Him.¹⁷ In Doctrine & Covenants 43:21-26, the Lord tells His servants to preach repentance, promising that stronger witnesses will follow if people reject the command. He asks the wicked,

17. See Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977), 184.

What will ye say when the day cometh when the thunders shall utter their voices from the ends of the earth, speaking to the ears of all that live, saying—Repent, and prepare for the great day of the Lord?

Yea, and again, when the lightnings shall streak forth from the east unto the west, and shall utter forth their voices unto all that live, and make the ears of all tingle that hear, saying these words—Repent ye, for the great day of the Lord is come?

And again, the Lord shall utter his voice out of 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.

In these verses, the Lord lists all the methods through which He tried to get the people to repent.

Because all these are attempts at getting through to a hardened world, it would seem that God is the controlling agent behind the plagues and the unnamed power behind the passive voice. But is He? Actually, until chapter 21, God does nothing. He does come into view from time to time, but He

never moves. He is indeed a passive agent. Something else must, therefore, direct all that is going on.

John reveals precisely what it is. In chapter 5, he sees in the hand of God a scroll written within and without and sealed with seven seals. It contains "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). The seer understands that God's will must be executed to make salvation possible. However, though a search was made, "no man in heaven, nor in the earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon" (Revelation 5:3).

John's statement points up the twofold difficulty in finding the right agent. So potent is the content of the scroll that no one could even look upon it, let alone open it. To look, as used in Revelation, means more than just to view. John could clearly see the scroll from where he was. To open and look meant to comprehend, disclose, and execute the content of the document.¹⁸ The heavens could find no one because no one "was able." The Greek word *dynamai* suggests that none had the power or ability in or of themselves to do the task.¹⁹ The reason that none was able was that none was worthy. The Greek word *axios* carries less the idea of strong moral character and more of the idea being equivalent, fit, or proper for a task.²⁰ In other words, the need required more than moral quality alone. Additional power was necessary. Thus, God's will was in danger

18. John does not use the verb *horaō* ("to see," "to catch sight of," "to notice," or "to look at"), but a synonym, *blepō* ("to see," "to consider," "to perceive," "to feel," "to discover," or "to find"). John's word choice puts the stress on one's ability to comprehend the will of God rather than simply to view the scroll.

19. See Draper, *Seven Seals*, 53-54.

20. See Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), s.v. *axios*.

of not being executed, and thus the purpose of creation in danger of coming to naught.

The failure brought an instant and sorrowful response from John. He wept much.²¹ His distress, however, is short-lived. One of the heavenly elders assured him that one had been found who has "prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof" (Revelation 5:5). He is described as being "the Lion of the tribe of Juda" and "the Root of David" (5:5). Both of these titles come directly from Jewish messianism. The first echoes Genesis 49:9-10, in which Judah is called the "lion's whelp" and promised that the scepter would not depart from him "until Shilo [i.e., the Messiah] come."²² The second title suggests Isaiah 11:1, which refers to the root (translated "stem" in the KJV) of Jesse, the future ideal king of David's line, who was to usher in the period of peace.

When John turns to see the majestic figure, however, he finds instead a lamb bearing the marks of violent death. The Greek word John uses when mentioning the wound (*sphazō*) shows that it is the result of a sacrificial act. Indeed, this is the Lamb that was sacrificed from the foundation of the world. Yet, in spite of the wound, the Lamb lived—and more, it stood "in the midst of the throne" (Revelation 5:6). The phrase suggests that the Lamb was at the position nearest the throne, sharing, as it were, the central place. In this way, the seer symbolizes the principal reality. The Lamb is the center of all things, having the preeminence over all God's creations.²³

The wound explains much about the fitness of the Lamb to do the Father's will. The praises of the heavenly beings

21. The Greek word *klaio*, literally "wailing," denotes deep mourning. Its biblical use frequently refers to the wailing of professional mourners hired for the purpose.

22. The figure of the Messiah as a lion is seen in 2 Esdras 12:31 and elsewhere.

23. See Draper, *Seven Seals*, 55.

show they recognized His fitness. They sang, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain" (Revelation 5:9). The Lamb prevailed (see John 16:33) not by sovereign might but by sacrifice grounded in love. He was worthy because He purchased the people with His own blood. In other words, He was fit to carry out the will of God throughout the temporal history of the earth's existence because of the atonement He alone could make.

John describes the Lamb as having seven eyes and seven horns. The image suggests symbolic interpretation rather than visual re-creation. The eyes depict knowledge, the horns represent power. The possession of seven eyes echoes Zechariah 4:10, where they are symbols of God's omniscience. The horn is the Old Testament symbol of power and was the mark of kingly dignity (see Numbers 23:22; Deuteronomy 33:17; Psalms 112:9; 148:14; Daniel 7:17, 20; 8:3; Zechariah 1:18). Thus, the symbols combine to show that the Lamb is both omniscient and omnipotent. Little wonder then that He is fit to execute the will of God.²⁴

Out of His worthiness grows one of His titles: the Almighty. The Greek word *pantokrator* is not a synonym for omnipotence but rather suggests omnicausality.²⁵ It stresses the Lord's supremacy over all things.²⁶ He is the one who organizes and orchestrates the seven thousand years of earth's temporal history. It is in this light that the praise of the angels should be understood as they say, "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty" (Revelation 15:3) and "We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, . . . because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned" (11:17).

24. See Draper, *Seven Seals*, 56.

25. See Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 3:915.

26. See Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 3:914-15.

The Lamb executes His power so that nothing goes beyond the bounds God has set. We see this especially in chapter 9, where John records the most horrible and widespread destructions ever leveled against humankind. As we have seen, he describes the engines of destruction as locusts, but unlike their natural counterparts they are not left free. In spite of their frenzy, they are commanded not to "hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God upon their foreheads" (Revelation 9:4). This gives us a feel for who the one-third of men are who fall to the plagues: those who do not have the seal of God but wear another mark, even the mark of the beast. As John records in chapter 16, "There fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and [upon] them which worshiped his image" (16:2). These verses again reveal the Lamb's restraining hand. To the locusts, "it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months" (9:5). At this point, the Lamb is reaching out through the torment of the locusts to the more wicked of the earth, still trying to bring them to Him.

The point is that both the plagues and the tortures John describes in chapters 8 and 9 reveal not so much the wrath of God as the lengths to which the Lamb will go to redeem His people. That he would have to use such drastic means in His attempt to awaken them from sin acts as a window through which we see the depth of iniquity to which these souls have fallen.

Over and over, Revelation shows the degree of control the Lamb has over the forces of history. Even Satan has limits set, for "to him was given the key of the bottomless pit" (Revelation 9:1). Note that Satan does not initially possess the key to the pit but must get it from someone else. The message behind the passive voice is clear: Satan can unleash his army

only when the Lamb allows it. Thus, the Lord alone sets the timing of the onslaught. Little wonder then that eight times in Revelation the various parties refer to the Lord as "the Almighty." The Lamb reigns over all things because of His ability to arrange events, people, and even demons to bring about the purposes of His Father.

John further reveals the power of the Lamb as the Almighty as he describes the sixth angel, acting under orders from heaven, unleashing four destroying angels "which are bound in the great river Euphrates" (Revelation 9:14). "And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men" (Revelation 9:15). The Greek participle John used here is a reflexive perfect passive. The use of the perfect tense heightens the idea of the purpose of the angels: "They have been kept ready." God has readied them for an exact moment and for an exact task. Not until that moment has come, and not a second before, will He permit Satan to use the demonic tetrad. Let me stress, the Lamb, not Satan, chooses the moment.

Revelation shows us that even Satan and his minions assist the Lamb in fulfilling the will of God. Three unclean spirits, the devil's henchmen described as frogs, go forth working miracles. The miracles convince "the kings of the earth and the whole world to gather . . . to the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (Revelation 16:14). Satan, in his demonic madness, may think that he instigates the battle, but it actually serves the purposes of the Lamb. The Doctrine and Covenants testifies that "the works, and the designs, and purposes of God cannot be frustrated, neither can they come to naught. . . . Remember, remember that it is not the work of God that is frustrated, but the work of men" (D&C 3:1, 3); Revelation would add, "and even devils."

During the period covered by chapters 8 and 9, the Lord works behind the scenes so that only those with the eye of faith will see His hand. John's use of the passive voice emphasizes the point, for it leaves the Lamb exactly where He chooses to operate during the sixth seal and the opening of the seventh. The position allows Him to make a show of tremendous force, but not to the point of destroying agency.

John testifies of the lengths to which the Lamb will go to win recalcitrant souls, but His purposes disallow the use of the irresistible and the incontestable. C. S. Lewis was right: God does desire to fill the universe with replicas of Himself whose lives will be qualitatively like His own, not because He has forced them or overridden their wills but because they freely conform their wills to His. The Lamb's desire is to have oneness with His children yet still allow them to be distinct, to be themselves (see John 17:20-23). That means He can neither cancel their wills nor override them.²⁷ As Revelation shows, He is willing to do all He can short of destroying agency. He must therefore leave His children to choose for themselves. He wants them to come to Him, but He must stay behind the scenes until they have chosen, on their own, to be one with Him.²⁸ Once they make an irrevocable choice, He can openly bless those who have freely chosen Him and punish those who have freely rejected Him.

The testimony of the passive voice is that the Lamb is neither indifferent nor inactive during this period. His hand is truly over all, and as the Almighty He orchestrates the will of His Father, bringing about His Father's ends.

This brings up a point that the Saints need to understand.

27. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, rev. ed. (New York: Collier Books, Macmillan, 1961), 37-39.

28. See Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, 38-39.

It is during the period of the passive voice that the Lord twice states, "Here is the patience . . . of the saints" (Revelation 13:10; 14:12). In chapter 13, He explains why. "If anyone is to be taken captive, into captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, by the sword he shall be slain" (13:10, author's translation). The first phrase of the couplet gives bleak hope to the Saints. The Lamb requires them to endure what God has ordained. He will not come into the open too soon, not even to rescue them. The second echoes the Lord's instruction in Matthew 26:52: "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Clearly, the Saints are not to take the offense in any war against the fallen star. But why not?

Sometimes in my weakness, I am impatient for the period of the passive voice to end. I want God to make a show of strength. I want Him to part, as it were, the Red Sea, or show His might in a pillar of fire, or dry up the heavens, or send plagues upon the world through the direct ministration of the prophets. I want the Church leaders to march forward in a strong offensive condemning the nations as the prophets of old. Where is the equivalent of the burden of Babylon, Assyria, Moab, or Edom? Why do the leaders limit themselves to quietly doing the inner work of the kingdom? Even the missionaries are encouraged not to contend but to preach and to love.

Revelation supplies an answer. We are, so to speak, in the 1,260 days predicted by John²⁹—the period when evil is

29. The Revelator uses 1,260 days (see Revelation 11:3; 12:6) to symbolize the period in which evil dominates; see Max Zerwick, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, 3d ed., trans. Mary Grosvenor (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), 760. The same also translates to forty-two months, "time, times, and a half time" (12:14), and three-and-one-half-years based on a thirty-day lunar calendar. The Qumran sect and other Jews contemporary with John used a thirty-day solar calendar. During the time symbolized by these numbers, the Saints will suffer an onslaught from both the world and the spiritual powers of evil.

supposed to rule almost unopposed, I resisted for some time what Revelation was trying to tell me. I could not believe that evil is to have its day, but finally John persuaded me. For a brief period in the sixth and the opening of the seventh seal, the Lamb allows evil to do its work almost unhindered. However, there is a reason, and John gives it to us.

John shows us that the task of the Church is not to heal Babylon, nor to actively fight against her. She must grow fat and sassy, ever more arrogant and strong, more mean and abusive, all the while remaining ignorant that the day of her destruction comes swiftly. Our job is to flee Babylon, to gather Israel through preaching the gospel, to perfect the Saints, to redeem the dead, and to build Zion. The Church does not have the resources to be *against* principles, institutions, or groups. Every ounce of energy, finances, and human resources must be used *for* people, morality, and goodness. We can use little to actively oppose Babylon. Resisting the desire to fight may try the patience of many a Saint, but the Lord has assigned us to put our energies elsewhere.

Revelation teaches very clearly that neither the 144,000 specifically nor the Saints in general take part in any opposition against the antagonists of Revelation, described as Babylon, the dragon, the beast, and the false lamb. The Saints are absent from all battlefields. The 144,000 are engaged only in gathering out those who will come to the Church of the Firstborn.³⁰ The only task Revelation assigns to the Saints is to worship God (not the beast), to endure in faith, to maintain virtue, to withstand persecution, and to preach the gospel.

Evil really must have its day. Therefore, the Church, for the present, is in an isolationist mode—concerned mainly with itself and internal interests, strengthening its doctrinal

30. See D&C 77:11 on the duties of the 144,000.

foundations and theological ramparts, bringing into its fold all those who will come, and leaving the world to build the earthly counterpart of hell in which they will all too soon perish. During the period when the passive voice prevails, the Lamb will hide His activities from the wicked.

Nonetheless, He is there. It is for that reason that God's judgments are going to come to pass. These judgments grow out of one of God's attributes, an attribute so fearful that some have tried to strip it from God. The work began nearly two millennia ago, when the early church fathers created a God without body, parts, or passions. Some time ago, I became curious about the second- and third-century debates over godly fervor. After all, love—a fire God associates with Himself—if not itself a passion, at least undergirds and fuels many worthwhile passions. It seemed to me that getting rid of passion at best weakens the case for a loving God, and at worst destroys it. I wondered if the church fathers so feared a particular passion that getting rid of it made it worth enfeebling love. Given the mentality of some of them, I wondered if their terror of sexual desire did the job. During my investigation, which is still in the beginning stages, I did discover something that both surprised and amused me. It may not have been primarily sexual desire from which the early Christian leaders were trying to strip God but another passion that they may have feared even more.

Listen to what the Lord says of himself: "For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Exodus 34:14).³¹ Moses confirmed, "For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God" (Deuteronomy 4:24). Joshua put it this way: "Ye cannot serve

31. JST makes a modification changing the name "Jealous" to "Jehovah." Nonetheless, Jehovah and jealousy seem to be interlinked.

the Lord [in sin]: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good" (Joshua 24:19-20).

All is not hopeless, however. Joel promised that when his people repent and cry, "Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them. . . . Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people. Yea, the Lord will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen" (Joel 2:17-19).

Nahum could not be clearer on this subject when he declared, "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies" (Nahum 1:2). Through Zechariah, the Lord promised, "I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction. Therefore thus saith the Lord; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the Lord of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem" (1:14-16).

The lesson is clear. Jehovah taught Israel from the beginning of the Exodus that He is a jealous God and that they must not forget that. But what exactly is God saying about Himself? The Hebrew word translated "jealousy," *qanah*, can also be translated as "intense zeal" and "strong ardor."³² It describes the

32. See Francis Brown et al., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (repr. 1978, Oxford: Clarendon, n.d.), s.v. *qn*?

emotion that causes one to act to safeguard a valued object or possession, God's judgments are a reflection of His jealousy; thus, they are not blind, impersonal, mechanically operative forces. They reflect neither *karma* nor fate. They are the judgments of the absolute and totally personal Creator whose judgment operates "within the context of His love and hate, His grace towards His people and His wrath toward his enemies."³³ God's jealousy is our assurance that no one is going to get away with anything.

Even given that fact, there is a period, as noted above, when evil will seem to be supreme. The Lamb has a reason for letting it go unchecked. Throughout the scriptures, we see the self-destructive nature of wickedness. However, 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 let the powers of evil carry all the inhabitants of the earth down with them to utter ruin. God would be left with a hollow, Pyrrhic success that resembles defeat far more than victory. Because God's victory must also be humankind's victory, it must be won through righteous agents exercising faith in God.³⁴ Evil must be allowed to combine its nefarious forces against the Savior's people and then, at the seeming moment of victory, destroy itself while helplessly watching the people of the Lamb rise to victory (see 1 Nephi 14:12-16; 22:16-18). Thus, the Saints win, not by fighting the beast or the false prophet but through faith, trust, and loyalty to the Lord's prophets and Apostles and through the *qanah* (the jealousy) of God.

To understand why the Saints are preserved, we must

33. Rousas John Rushdooney, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (n.p.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 24.

34. See G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1966), 145.

understand the first commandment and the promise that grows out of keeping it. The Father said that His children are to worship Him and Him only. In this way, the obedient preserve the relationship protected by the first commandment: the gift of Himself which God gave to Israel when He said, "I will be your God" (see Exodus 20:2). Israel could show acceptance of that gift by obedience. God loves His children. This forms the foundation of His justice. He acts favorably or justly toward those who know Him by heart and attend to His commandments. Since the presence of God is a gift, the commandments act as protectors of that gift. Loving and obeying God is not a case of earning divine favor but of living in accordance with it. What Israel is to give God—obedience—goes beyond negative duty to a positive attitude of loyalty to God and recognition of what He has given them in the love-gift of Himself.³⁵ Out of this, His jealousy flows to protect and care for them.

My studies thus far suggest that the early church fathers feared, if not hated, the jealousy of God because it undercut their advancing doctrine of salvation by grace—that is, salvation without effort and, in extreme cases, salvation without obedience. Only by removing God's jealousy could their doctrine stand.

In summary, God's justice does not move according to some self-operating principle but is the product of a very personal God who knows our works. As the passive voice suggests, at present He and the Lamb work behind the scenes. In doing so, He can send forth strong warnings and enticing promises in His effort to persuade humankind to follow Him yet allow them the freedom they need to choose for themselves. Thus, the period of the passive voice serves His

35. See Rushdooney, *Institutes*, 24–25.

purposes well. As for the Saints, the Lamb has assured us that if we endure the period during which patience and virtue are supreme necessities, He will step from behind the passive voice and "will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:3-4). And why? Because the Lamb is God Almighty.