

Revelation 17–22

“Chapter 56: Revelation 17–22,” **New Testament Student Manual (2014)**

Introduction and Timeline for Revelation 17–22

The final chapters of Revelation gave hope to Christians facing persecution from outside the Church and from factions within the Church that were dissenting from accepted beliefs. Revelation 17–22 also describes the crescendo of final earthly events fulfilling Heavenly Father’s plan for the redemption of His children. John heard heavenly servants rejoice in praise for the salvation made possible through the Lamb’s triumph over evil. John saw the fall of wicked Babylon contrasted with the glories of the Second Coming and the blessings of exaltation for all those who follow God’s commands. John further saw that the righteous inhabitants of the earth and those who will come forth in the First Resurrection will enjoy a thousand years of millennial peace with Christ. The earth will then receive celestial glory and become the eternal home for all righteous Saints.

lesson 56 timeline

Commentary for Revelation 17–22

Revelation 17–18. The Fall of Babylon

In Revelation 16:17, the seventh angel poured out his vial, signaling the final destructive events that will precede the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. These concluding events include the fall of Babylon, described in Revelation 17–18. Ancient Babylon had destroyed Jerusalem in 587 B.C., a traumatic and defining event in Israel’s history. Israelite prophets in turn wrote about the eventual destruction of Babylon (see Isaiah 13:19–22; 21:9; Jeremiah 50:35–36, 40; 51:6–8), and John drew upon their language as he described the ultimate destruction of the spiritual enemies of God’s people.

“In Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21, Babylon probably denotes Rome, the great antagonist of Messiah’s kingdom” (Bible Dictionary, “Babylon or Babel”). It is likely that Babylon also represents all that is wicked in the world (see D&C 1:16; 133:14). Chapters 17–18 depict Babylon as a “whore” holding a cup “full of abominations and filthiness” and as the “mother of harlots” (Revelation 17:1, 4, 5). In this sense, Babylon is the antitype of the righteous bride that represents the Church (see Revelation 19:7–8) and the antithesis of Zion as “the pure in heart” (D&C 97:21). John’s vision of Babylon parallels much of Nephi’s vision of the great and abominable church (see 1 Nephi 13:4–9, 26–29; 14:3–17; 22:13–16, 18).

Isaiah’s Vision of the Destruction of Babylon

Isaiah’s Vision of the Destruction of Babylon, by Paul Gustave Doré. Isaiah, John, and other biblical prophets foresaw the destruction of Babylon.

Revelation 17. The Woman and the Beast

Scholars have historically interpreted the beast with seven heads as an allusion to the city of Rome because Rome was founded upon seven hills, as well as a reference to a number of Roman emperors in the first century A.D. Though these are possible meanings, a broader interpretation may be that Rome represented a seat of corruption in John's day. As such, this worldly city may be likened to similar centers of corruption in all eras.

The terms used to describe the woman who rode upon the beast attest to the great political and destructive power she will have over nations and kingdoms and people. John described the woman as "the great whore that sitteth upon many waters" (Revelation 17:1; see also 1 Nephi 14:10–13); she commits fornication with kings and inhabitants of the earth (see verse 2); her clothing depicts power and wealth (see verse 4); she is the "mother of harlots," which indicates that she gives birth to other prostitutions—organizations, governments, and ideologies that spew forth wickedness (verse 5). John recorded that he was astonished at the greatness of the woman's wickedness (see verse 6, footnote c). Nevertheless, in the end she will be overthrown by those she formerly ruled over (see verse 16; 1 Nephi 22:13).

Revelation 17:2–6. The Culture of Babylon Permeates the World

In Revelation 17:2–6, John described Babylon as a harlot clothed in fine, jeweled apparel and drunken with blood. One possible meaning of John's description in these verses is that in the last days, a lifestyle of sexual immorality, wealth, and violence would permeate the world (see also 1 Nephi 13:5–9). Institutions, governments, and people who embrace this lifestyle can be seen as part of Babylon. While serving in the Seventy, Elder David R. Stone spoke of this pervasive corruption:

"There is no particular city today which personifies Babylon. Babylon was, in the time of ancient Israel, a city which had become sensual, decadent, and corrupt. ...

"... That sensuality, corruption, and decadence, and the worshipping of false gods are to be seen in many cities, great and small, scattered across the globe. As the Lord has said: 'They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world' (D&C 1:16). ...

"What an insidious thing is this culture amidst which we live. It permeates our environment" ("Zion in the Midst of Babylon," *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2006, 90–91).

Revelation 17:6. "Drunken with the Blood of the Saints"

Revelation 17:6 describes the woman being “drunken with the blood of the saints,” which suggests that throughout the ages, many righteous people have been slain by the wicked. The scriptural language suggests that the slaying of the righteous had an intoxicating effect on those who carried out the slaughter.

Revelation 17:8–11. Temporary Nature of the Beast

John saw that the beast “was, and is not” (Revelation 17:8). He also saw a vision of “seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space” (Revelation 17:10). John’s language suggests that the wickedness of the world will be temporary.

Revelation 17:12-20:4:22:5; ;

How long will the followers of the beast exercise power, compared to those who follow Christ? What do these verses teach about the duration of worldly and heavenly rewards? How should this guide your choices?

Revelation 17:14. “War with the Lamb, and the Lamb Shall Overcome”

Though the scenes John saw in Revelation 17 can seem frightening, he also saw that “the Lamb shall overcome” the wickedness of the world (Revelation 17:14). President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) affirmed that the Lord and His people will prevail in the war against evil:

video icon “In the October conference of 1896, President Wilford Woodruff ... said:

“There are two powers on the earth and in the midst of the inhabitants of the earth—the power of God and the power of the devil. ... When God has had a people on the earth, it matters not in what age, Lucifer, the son of the morning, and the millions of fallen spirits that were cast out of heaven have warred against God, against Christ, against the work of God, and against the people of God.’ [Deseret Evening News, Oct. 17, 1896.] ...

“The war goes on. It is waged across the world over the issues of agency and compulsion. It is waged by an army of missionaries over the issues of truth and error. It is waged in our own lives, day in and day out, in our homes, in our work, in our school associations; it is waged over questions of love and respect, of loyalty and fidelity, of obedience and integrity. We are all involved in it. ... We are winning, and the future never looked brighter” (“The War We Are Winning,” Ensign, Nov. 1986, 43, 45).

Revelation 18:3–4. Choosing Righteousness Despite the Prevalence of Modern Wickedness

Revelation 18 proclaims the fall of wicked Babylon and describes the lamentation of all who associated with her. In all ages, the Lord has commanded His people to “come out of [Babylon]” and “be not partakers of her sins” (Revelation 18:4; see D&C 133:5, 7, 14). Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles testified that it is possible to follow the Lord’s teachings and avoid being contaminated by the world’s wickedness:

“Much of the world is being engulfed in a rising river of degenerate filth, with the abandonment of virtue, righteousness, personal integrity, traditional marriage, and family life. ...

“... Despite pockets of evil, the world overall is majestically beautiful, filled with many good and sincere people. God has provided a way to live in this world and not be contaminated by the degrading pressures evil agents spread throughout it. You can live a virtuous, productive, righteous life by following the plan of protection created by your Father in Heaven: His plan of happiness” (“How to Live Well amid Increasing Evil,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2004, 100).

Revelation 18:3, 7–16. The Wealth and Materialism of Babylon

John used phrases such as “waxed rich” and “lived deliciously” (Revelation 18:3, 7, 9) to highlight the lust for wealth and lavish possessions that define Babylon. These riches will be destroyed, and those who have placed their hearts upon them will lament (see Revelation 18:8–19; 2 Nephi 9:30; D&C 56:16). President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) warned that with prosperity often comes the temptation to embrace the materialism of Babylon: “We are tested, we are tried, we are going through some of the severest tests today and we don’t realize perhaps the severity of the tests that we’re going through. ... Today we are basking in the lap of luxury, the like of which we’ve never seen before in the history of the world. It would seem that probably this is the most severe test of any test that we’ve ever had in the history of the Church” (“First Presidency Devotional” [unpublished Christmas devotional for Church employees, Dec. 13, 1973], 4–5; see Jacob 2:18–19).

hands holding stack of money

Revelation 18:5–6. “Her Sins Have Reached unto Heaven”

John heard a voice from heaven proclaiming that Babylon’s “sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities” (Revelation 18:5). Some people might think their iniquities are hidden, but these verses are a reminder that sins do not go undetected by God, though their consequences may not all come immediately. The voice also declared that Babylon would receive the consequences of her works and would be punished doubly, reminiscent of terminology used in the law of Moses (see Revelation 18:6; see also Exodus 22:4, 7, 9).

Revelation 18:8, 10, 17, 19

What is said in these verses about how quickly Babylon would fall? What message do you learn from these verses about worldly wealth and power?

Revelation 18:11–13. Merchandise and “Souls of Men”

The list of merchandise sold in Babylon reveals a startling truth: people sell not only gold, precious stones, fine textiles, and many other luxury items, but even “slaves, and souls of men” (Revelation 18:13). This refers primarily to the abominable practice of human trafficking but can also be seen as a reference to the spiritually enslaving consequences of materialism and other evils (see 2 Nephi 26:10). It may also describe corrupt religious practitioners who present themselves as ministering to people’s souls while seeking above all to profit financially; in this sense, they traffic in the “souls of men.” Moroni recorded that in the last days “there shall be churches built up that shall say: Come unto me, and for your money you shall be forgiven of your sins” (Mormon 8:32). In contrast, the gospel of Jesus Christ offers spiritual nourishment “without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1; 2 Nephi 26:25; Alma 1:20).

Revelation 18:24. “The Blood of Prophets, and of Saints”

John recorded that in Babylon “was found the blood of prophets, and of saints” (Revelation 18:24), meaning that those who uphold Babylon are to blame for the martyrdom of prophets and Saints throughout earth’s history. At the Second Coming, Babylon and its inhabitants will be recompensed for their evil works (see Revelation 18:6; D&C 1:10), for the blood of the martyrs will stand as a testimony against those who have slain them (see Revelation 6:10; 16:6; 18:24; D&C 109:49). A similar time of judgment was recorded in 3 Nephi 8–9, when whole cities were destroyed “that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come any more unto me against them” (3 Nephi 9:5; see also verses 7–9, 11; Alma 14:11; Revelation 19:2; the commentary for Revelation 16:6).

Revelation 19:1–6. Praising the Lord for His Judgment

John heard the inhabitants of heaven crying out “Alleluia” (Revelation 19:1, 3–4, 6), which means “Praise the Lord!” This praise was in response to God’s righteous judgment upon Babylon. Knowing that God is a God of judgment enables Saints to endure in faith: “No sooner is the idea of the existence of [God’s judgment] planted in the minds of men, than it gives power to the mind for the exercise of faith and confidence in God, and they are enabled by faith to lay hold on the promises which are set before them, and wade through all the tribulations and afflictions to which they are subjected by reason of the persecution from those who know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, believing that in due time the Lord will come out in swift judgment against their enemies” (Lectures on Faith, [1985], 53). Knowing that God will one day judge the enemies of His people can help Saints in the last days to endure in “patience and ... faith” (Revelation 13:10; see also 14:12).

Revelation 19:7, 11, 13, 16

What do the names and titles in these verses reveal about the eternal mission of Jesus Christ? What thoughts and feelings do you have as you consider these names and titles?

Revelation 19:7–9. “The Marriage Supper of the Lamb”

Immediately before seeing in vision the Lord’s Second Coming, John heard a voice proclaim, “The marriage of the lamb is come” and “Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:7, 9). Israel’s covenant relationship with God is symbolically portrayed in the scriptures as a marriage covenant (for example, see Isaiah 54; Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 16; 23; Hosea 2; Matthew 23). Marriage is the relationship that requires the most fidelity, sacrifice, commitment, and long-suffering of all relationships. The “marriage supper of the Lamb” is a symbolic reference to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained: “In this dispensation the Bridegroom, who is the Lamb of God, shall come to claim his bride, which is the Church composed of the faithful saints who have watched for his return. As he taught in the parable of the marriage of the king’s son, the great marriage supper of the Lamb shall then be celebrated. (Matt. 22:1–14.)” (Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, 3 vols. [1966–73], 3:563).

John saw that the Lamb’s bride was clothed “in fine linen” made “clean and white” through the Atonement (Revelation 19:8; see also 7:14; 19:14). This imagery of a bride dressed in white presents a stark contrast to the harlot in extravagant apparel described earlier in Revelation, who symbolized spiritual Babylon (see 17:3–6; 18:16).

Only the righteous will be called to “the marriage supper.” The Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–44) taught: “Those who keep the commandments of the Lord and walk in His statutes to the end, are the only individuals permitted to sit at this glorious feast. ... Reflect for a moment, brethren [and sisters], and enquire, whether you would consider yourselves worthy [of] a seat at the marriage feast” (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith [2007], 165–66; see also Matthew 22:2–14; D&C 58:8–11; 65:3).

Revelation 19:10. “The Testimony of Jesus Is the Spirit of Prophecy”

young woman speaking into microphone

The angel who spoke to John said that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10). President Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the First Presidency taught that a testimony of Jesus Christ is a gift received through divine revelation:

video icon “We cannot depend on the testimonies of other people. We need to know for ourselves. ...

“The source of this sure knowledge and firm conviction is divine revelation, ‘for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’ (Revelation 19:10).

“We receive this testimony when the Holy Spirit speaks to the spirit within us. We will receive a calm and unwavering certainty that will be the source of our testimony and conviction irrespective of our culture, race, language, or socioeconomic background. These promptings of the Spirit, rather than human logic alone, will be the true foundation upon which our testimony will be built.

“The core of this testimony will always be the faith in and the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His divine mission” (“The Power of a Personal Testimony,” Ensign or Liahona, Nov. 2006, 38).

For more insight on how all members of the Church may enjoy the gift of prophecy by having “the testimony of Jesus,” see the commentary for 1 Corinthians 14:1–6.

Revelation 19:11, 13. “A White Horse” and “a Vesture Dipped in Blood”

Christ in red robes

Christ in red robes sitting upon a white horse

In his vision of the Second Coming, John saw the Savior riding “a white horse” (Revelation 19:11). The white horse is symbolic of conquest and victory, as horses were used almost exclusively for war in John’s time. John also saw that the Savior would return to earth wearing “a vesture dipped in blood,” meaning that His garments will be the color of blood. This color calls to mind the Savior’s suffering in Gethsemane, when His atoning blood was pressed from His body just as juice is pressed from grapes in a winepress.

Commenting on the Savior’s red robes, Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated:

“Having bled at every pore, how red His raiment must have been in Gethsemane, how crimson that cloak!

“No wonder, when Christ comes in power and glory, that He will come in reminding red attire (see D&C 133:48), signifying not only the winepress of wrath, but also to bring to our remembrance how He

suffered for each of us in Gethsemane and on Calvary!” (“Overcome ... Even as I Also Overcame,” Ensign, May 1987, 72).

The red apparel may also symbolize the destruction of the wicked at the Lord’s coming (see Isaiah 63:1–4; D&C 133:46–51). When Jesus comes again to the earth, He will bring justice against the wicked (see Revelation 19:11).

Revelation 19:15–16. “He Shall Rule Them with a Rod of Iron”

The Joseph Smith Translation of Revelation 19:15 clarifies how Jesus Christ will rule the earth: “And out of his mouth proceedeth the word of God, and with it he will smite the nations; and he will rule them with the word of his mouth; and he treadeth the winepress in the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God” (in Revelation 19:15, footnote a; see also 1 Nephi 11:25).

The titles of the Savior recorded in Revelation 19:16—“King of kings, and Lord of lords”—make clear that Jesus Christ will rule over the whole earth and over every earthly ruler. He will also reign over heavenly kings and lords.

Revelation 19:17–18, 21. “The Supper of the Great God”

John saw the ultimate destruction of the wicked when their slain bodies would be eaten by carrion birds (Revelation 19:17–18, 21; see also D&C 29:18–20). Ezekiel prophesied of this same destruction (Ezekiel 39:17–22). This dreadful “supper of the great God” (Revelation 19:17) stands in stark contrast to the joyful “marriage supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:7–9), vividly highlighting that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will be a very different experience for the wicked than for the righteous. The Joseph Smith Translation of Revelation 19:18 clarifies that these verses describe the destruction of only “all who fight against the Lamb” (in Revelation 19:18, footnote a).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “Those with refined senses find it difficult to conceive of the desolation, destruction, and death that will prevail during the final great battles ushering in Christ’s reign of peace. So great shall be the slaughter and mass murder, the carnage and gore, the butchery and violent death of warring men, that their decaying bodies ‘shall stop the noses of the passengers’ [Ezekiel 39:11], and it shall be a task of mammoth proportions merely to dispose of them” (Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, 3:569).

Revelation 20:1–3. “The Bottomless Pit”

“The bottomless pit” is a term for the realm of Satan and those who follow him (Revelation 20:1, 3). Even there, God holds supreme authority, for it is God’s angel who has “the key of the bottomless pit” (Revelation 20:1; see Joseph Smith Translation, Revelation 9:1 [in Revelation 9:1, footnote a]).

Revelation 20:2–3. Satan Will Be Bound

lion and lamb

Without Any Ire, by Nancy Glazier-Koehler. The Millennium will be a time of great peace (see Isaiah 11:6; 65:25; 2 Nephi 30:10–18).

John saw that Satan would be bound at the beginning of the Millennium and that for a thousand years he would “deceive the nations no more” (Revelation 20:3) or, as a modern revelation states, “not have power to tempt any man” (D&C 101:28; see also 1 Nephi 22:26; D&C 43:31; 88:110–11). During this time, “children shall grow up without sin unto salvation” (D&C 45:58).

Concerning Satan’s binding, President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) stated: “As to whether the binding of Satan is a literal binding as with a chain or not, it matters not. I am inclined to believe that the chain spoken of in the Bible, with which Satan is to be bound, is more figurative than real. [Satan] will be bound both by the faith of the righteous and the decrees of the Almighty during the Millennial reign and will be cast down into hell” (From Prophet to Son: Advice of Joseph F. Smith to His Missionary Sons, comp. Hyrum M. Smith III and Scott G. Kenney [1981], 71). The prophet Nephi taught that because of the righteousness of the Saints, Satan will have no power (see 1 Nephi 22:26).

Revelation 20:3, 7–8. “Loosed a Little Season”

The scriptures do not entirely explain why Satan “must be loosed a little season” after having been bound for the thousand years following Christ’s Second Coming (Revelation 20:3; see D&C 43:31). However, the Lord has revealed that after the thousand years have ended, people would “again begin to deny their God” (D&C 29:22). The Book of Mormon also describes a time when people again turned their hearts toward Satan after an extended season of peace and righteousness because of the pride that followed prosperity (see 4 Nephi 1:22–46). Whatever the reason that Satan will be loosed, John saw that after the Millennium, Satan would “deceive the nations ... to gather them together” for a final battle against the Saints (Revelation 20:8; see D&C 88:110–11; the commentary for Revelation 20:7–10).

Revelation 20:4. “Judgment Was Given unto Them”

The enthroned beings John saw in Revelation 20:4 who were given power to judge may represent the Twelve Apostles Jesus called during His mortal ministry. Jesus said that these Apostles would sit on thrones and judge Israel (see Matthew 19:28; 1 Nephi 12:9–10; Mormon 3:19; D&C 29:12). Though the

Lord has indicated that some of His servants will assist Him as judges, the scriptures also affirm that Jesus Christ Himself will be the great and final Judge of all (see John 5:22; Acts 10:42; 2 Nephi 9:41).

Revelation 20:5. “The First Resurrection” and “the Rest of the Dead”

John saw that many of the dead would be resurrected during what is called “the first resurrection” (Revelation 20:5–6). Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained the First Resurrection: “To those who lived before the resurrection of Christ, the day of his coming forth from the dead was known as the first resurrection. Abinadi and Alma, for instance, so considered it. (Mosiah 15:21–25; Alma 40.) To those who have lived since that day, the first resurrection is yet future and will take place at the time of the Second Coming. (D. & C. 88:96–102.) We have no knowledge that the resurrection is going on now or that any persons have been resurrected since the day in which Christ came forth excepting Peter, James, and Moroni, all of whom had special labors to perform in this day which necessitated tangible resurrected bodies” (Mormon Doctrine, 639). Those who will receive celestial and terrestrial bodies will come forth in the First Resurrection.

“The rest of the dead” who “lived not again until the thousand years were finished” (Revelation 20:5) are those of “the last resurrection” (D&C 76:85)—“the resurrection of the unjust” (D&C 76:17)—which occurs at the end of the Millennium (see D&C 88:100–101). This resurrection will include those who will inherit a telestial glory and those who will “remain filthy still” (D&C 88:102), meaning the sons of perdition who inherit no degree of glory but “go away into the lake of fire and brimstone, with the devil and his angels” (D&C 76:36; see Revelation 20:10). To read more about the order of the Resurrection, see the commentary for 1 Corinthians 15:23.

Revelation 20:7–10. A Final Battle

John saw that after the Millennium, Satan would be loosed, and he and his evil forces would again wage war against “the camp of the saints” and “the beloved city,” which is Zion, a place of safety and refuge (Revelation 20:8–9). John referred to Satan’s host by the symbolic names “Gog and Magog.” Ezekiel used these names to refer to foreign invaders who would attack Israel before the Lord’s coming (see Ezekiel 38–39), but in Revelation 20:7–9, “Gog and Magog” refer to the forces of Satan that will wage another battle at the end of the Millennium. Though the number of Satan’s forces will be “as the sand of the sea,” they will be “devoured” by “fire ... from God out of heaven,” and the devil and his followers will be eternally “cast into the lake of fire and brimstone” (Revelation 20:8–10; see 2 Nephi 9:16; D&C 43:31–33; 88:110–16). With this final cleansing of evil, the earth will be prepared to receive celestial glory.

Latter-day revelation adds the detail that Michael the archangel, who is Adam (see D&C 27:11), will play an important role in this final battle by gathering the armies of God together against Satan and his armies (see D&C 88:112).

Revelation 20:10. What Is “the Lake of Fire and Brimstone”?

The Old Testament describes the destruction of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire and brimstone from heaven (see Genesis 19:24). In the book of Revelation, fire and brimstone symbolize the destruction and ultimate abode of the wicked. President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained:

“The prophets speak of the ‘gall of bitterness’ [Acts 8:23; Alma 41:11] and often compare the pain of guilt to fire and brimstone. Brimstone is another name for sulfur. ...

“That lake of fire and brimstone, ever burning but never consumed, is the description in the scriptures for hell [see Revelation 19:20; 20:10; 21:8; D&C 63:17; 76:36]” (“The Touch of the Master’s Hand,” Ensign, May 2001, 23).

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught: “A man is his own tormentor and his own condemner. Hence the saying, They shall go into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone [see Revelation 21:8]. The torment of disappointment in the mind of man is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone” (Teachings: Joseph Smith, 224).

Revelation 20:12–15. Judged “According to Their Works”

scroll, gold plates, scriptures

The final judgment is part of God’s plan of salvation. John saw the day when all God’s children would stand before Christ to be “judged out of those things which were written in the books” (Revelation 20:12). These books include: (1) The book of life (see Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; Alma 5:58; D&C 128:6–7; the commentary for Revelation 13:8). (2) Church records that record the saving ordinances and perhaps other actions of faith and devotion (see D&C 127:6–7, 9; 128:6–7). (3) The scriptures, which contain the standards and commandments by which we are to live our lives and by which we will be judged (see 2 Nephi 29:11; 33:15). In addition to these, “the books” might also refer to other sources of light and knowledge that were available to people during their lives.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “God judges men according to the use they make of the light which He gives them” (Teachings: Joseph Smith, 405). He also explained, “[The Lord] will award judgment or mercy to all nations according to their several deserts, their means of obtaining intelligence, the laws by which they are governed, the facilities afforded them of obtaining correct information, and His inscrutable designs” (Teachings: Joseph Smith, 404).

Revelation 21:1–4

What are “the former things” listed in these verses that will pass away with the coming of “a new heaven and a new earth”? What details in these verses mean the most to you?

Revelation 21:1. “A New Heaven and a New Earth”

As part of the Fall of Adam, the earth fell from a terrestrial (paradisiacal) state to a telestial state. When Christ returns and wickedness is destroyed, “Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and ... the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory” (Articles of Faith 1:10). After the thousand years of Christ’s reign, the earth will be transformed yet again. The Prophet Joseph Smith described this change: “This earth will be rolled back into the presence of God and crowned with celestial glory” (Teachings of Joseph Smith, 258; see D&C 29:22–25; 88:18–20, 25–26).

Revelation 21:2–27; 22:1–5. “The Holy City, New Jerusalem”

John saw in vision “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down” to earth, symbolizing God’s presence among His people (Revelation 21:2). The city was depicted as an enormous cube (see Revelation 21:16), which recalls the Holy of Holies in Solomon’s temple (see 1 Kings 6:19–20), also representative of God’s dwelling place. The symbolic elements John saw that compose the city—clear glass, precious stones, pearls, and gold—share the traits of reflecting light; resisting decaying or tarnishing; and symbolizing purity, beauty, and refinement. The walls of the city were made with all manner of precious stones (see Revelation 21:18–21). Precious stones often represent the Lord’s followers who have been refined and made holy (see Exodus 28:9–10, 17–21; Isaiah 62:3; Malachi 3:17; D&C 60:4; 101:3).

arched city gate

The Holy City

The gates of the city were made of pearls and the streets of gold (see Revelation 21:21; D&C 137:1–4). Both pearls and gold can be seen as symbols of refinement: oysters produce pearls through pain and adversity, and gold requires fire to burn out impurities. The exalted will likewise have been refined through adversity (see Revelation 7:13–14).

There is no need of temples in the Holy City because all of the celestial kingdom will be as a temple; God Himself and Jesus Christ dwell there. There is no need of the sun there, for “the Lamb is the light thereof” (Revelation 21:23). John saw that a central feature of the Holy City was the tree of life, representative of the healing and eternal life found in the celestial kingdom (see Revelation 22:2). The tree of life in the Garden of Eden was guarded by cherubim after the Fall (see Genesis 3:24), but those who dwell in the Holy City have been redeemed from the Fall, and all there are free to partake of the everbearing tree of life in the celestial kingdom.

Revelation 21:4–5. No More Tears, Death, Sorrow, or Pain

Revelation 21:4 highlights the great restorative power of Christ's Atonement, which will ultimately make all things right. Through the Atonement, all of life's disadvantages, contradictions, injustices, and unfairness will be made right. Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles affirmed: "The Atonement will not only help us overcome our transgressions and mistakes, but in His time, it will resolve all inequities of life—those things that are unfair which are the consequences of circumstance or others' acts and not our own decisions" ("Jesus Christ, Our Redeemer," *Ensign*, May 1997, 54).

Revelation 21:7. "He That Overcometh"

Revelation 21:7 echoes the promises of exaltation found in Revelation 2–3 to those who overcome (see Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26–28; 3:5, 12, 21; see also D&C 76:58–60). In Revelation 21:7, the promise of inheriting "all things" does not mean that those who are exalted will no longer worship God; the relationship of God to each of His exalted children is still clear: "I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Revelation 21:7). For more information on worshipping Heavenly Father in the eternities, see the commentary for Revelation 4:8–11.

Revelation 21:8. "The Second Death"

For information about the second death, see the commentary for Revelation 2:11.

Revelation 22:4. "His Name Shall Be in Their Foreheads"

As in earlier passages in Revelation, to bear a name on one's forehead indicates allegiance (see Revelation 3:12; 7:3; 13:16; 14:1; the commentary for Revelation 3:12). Bearing the name also suggests taking on the characteristics of the one named. Bearing God's name on one's forehead may also be connected to images of priesthood and temple service (see Exodus 28:36–38; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 7:15). Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained how receiving this blessing is associated with temple worship:

video icon "In the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet Joseph Smith petitioned the Father 'that thy servants may go forth from this house armed with thy power, and that thy name may be upon them' (D&C 109:22). He also asked for a blessing 'over thy people upon whom thy name shall be put in this house' (v. 26). And as the Lord appeared in and accepted the Kirtland Temple as His house, He declared, 'For behold, I have accepted this house, and my name shall be here; and I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house' (D&C 110:7).

“These scriptures help us understand that the process of taking upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ that is commenced in the waters of baptism is continued and enlarged in the house of the Lord. ... In the ordinances of the holy temple we more completely and fully take upon us the name of Jesus Christ” (“Honorably Hold a Name and Standing,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2009, 98).

Revelation 22:7. “I Come Quickly”

Elder Bruce R. McConkie helps us understand what it means that the Lord will “come quickly” (Revelation 22:7): “Not soon, but in a quick manner; that is, with speed and suddenness after all of the promised conditions precedent have occurred” (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:590).

Revelation 22:8–9. “I Am Thy Fellowservant”

After all that John had seen and heard in his vision, he fell down to worship at the feet of the angel, but the angel replied, “See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant” (Revelation 22:9). From modern scripture we learn about the angels who minister to the inhabitants of this earth: “There are no angels who minister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it” (D&C 130:5). Hence, when messengers are sent to minister to the inhabitants of this earth, they are not strangers but are from the ranks of our kindred, friends, and fellow servants.

Revelation 22:18–19. “If Any Man Shall Add unto These Things”

The passage “If any man shall add unto these things” (Revelation 22:18) has been often misunderstood as a declaration that no scripture was to come forth after the writing of the book of Revelation. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles clarified that this statement refers only to the book of Revelation, not to the Bible as a whole:

“One of the arguments often used in any defense of a closed canon is the New Testament passage recorded in Revelation 22:18: ‘For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of ... this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.’ However, there is now overwhelming consensus among virtually all biblical scholars that this verse applies only to the book of Revelation, not the whole Bible. Those scholars of our day acknowledge a number of New Testament ‘books’ that were almost certainly written after John’s revelation on the Isle of Patmos was received. Included in this category are at least the books of Jude, the three Epistles of John, and probably the entire Gospel of John itself. Perhaps there are even more than these.

“But there is a simpler answer as to why that passage in the final book of the current New Testament cannot apply to the whole Bible. That is because the whole Bible as we know it—one collection of texts bound in a single volume—did not exist when that verse was written. For centuries after John produced his writing, the individual books of the New Testament were in circulation singly or perhaps in

combinations with a few other texts but almost never as a complete collection. Of the entire corpus of 5,366 known Greek New Testament manuscripts, only 35 contain the whole New Testament as we now know it, and 34 of those were compiled after A.D. 1000" ("My Words ... Never Cease," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2008, 91–92).

Points to Ponder

As you consider the description of Babylon found in Revelation 17:2–4; 18:3, 7, 9, 11–17, what attitudes toward wealth and material possessions do you notice? Do you have any similar attitudes that you may need to reexamine? (see Jacob 2:12–21).

Revelation 19:7 states that the Lord's "wife" (the Church and its members) made herself ready for the marriage "feast." What are you doing to make yourself ready for the coming of the Lord?

Why was it important for the Saints in John's day to know the end of the story? Why is it important for us? How can knowing of the eventual triumph of Christ help you in the struggles of your daily life?

Suggested Assignments

Take your journal and find a peaceful place where you can reflect on the splendor of the celestial kingdom as described in Revelation 21:1–22:5. Write a few of the thoughts you have as you consider the scriptural description of life with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Then share with someone what you are motivated to do in order to overcome the world and live forever with Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and all the righteous Saints.

Think of a passage in Revelation 17–22 that you feel is particularly meaningful or applicable to you. Why did you select this passage? How will the principles in this passage influence the way you live? Write down your thoughts in your journal.