

KEY TO END TIMES SUPER EVENTS

THE SEVENTH SEAL



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Paperback ISBN 13: 978-1-4621-4920-9

eBook ISBN 13: 978-1-4621-4921-6

Published by CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc.

2373 W. 700 S., Suite 100, Springville, UT 84663

Distributed by Cedar Fort, Inc., www.cedarfort.com

Library of Congress Cataloging Number: 2024951754

Cover design by Shawnda Craig

Cover design © 2025 Cedar Fort, Inc.

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed on acid-free paper

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The Divine Commission

John had the curtains of heaven withdrawn, and by vision looked through the dark vista of future ages, and contemplated events that should transpire throughout every subsequent period of time, until the final winding up scene.⁷⁷

—JOSEPH SMITH

The Call Vision⁷⁸

John opens the account of his marvelous vision by telling us that he is acting under divine direction and taking responsibility for the vision and its dissemination. The first verse in the Joseph Smith Translation records:

The Revelation of John, a servant of God, which was given unto him of Jesus Christ, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass, that he sent and signified by his angel⁷⁹ unto his servant John.⁸⁰

After informing us in this first verse that the Lord “sent and signified⁸¹ [the message] by his angel,” John recounts in verse 10 that he heard “a great voice as of a trumpet” and he “turned” to behold the Lord and received his commission to “write” directly and in person from the Savior Jesus Christ. Revelation chapters 2 and 3 record instructions given to the seven churches John was responsible for in Asia Minor. The tense of these instructions, made known in the first verse, is the “things which must shortly come to pass.” Scholars Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes confirm the meaning of these words:

The stated purpose of the revelation . . . is to make known events that would soon overtake the Church. . . Only in that light did they have meaning to these people. . . However, not all the book deals with the then present Church.⁸²

Chapter 4 records a vision in which John sees God enthroned in heaven, as well as the celestialized earth. The opening verse has John hearing another “voice . . . as it were a

trumpet” telling him to “come up hither.” Following this, we have a change in tense. Whereas in the first and opening verse of the chapter 1 he was told the vision concerned “things which must shortly come to pass,” now he is told in the first verse of chapter 4 that the remainder of the vision will concern “things which must be hereafter.” ⁸³ This change in tense is important.

In chapter 4 “John sees the celestial earth, the throne of God, and all created things worshipping the Lord.”⁸⁴ It is in chapter 5 that we are introduced to John’s vision of a heavenly book or scroll with seven seals. He records: “And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.” This scroll and its seals become the focus of almost the entire remaining book of Revelation. Accordingly, the scroll and its seals, especially the sixth and seventh seals, will receive the bulk of our attention.

We have already noted that from the earliest pages of the visionary experience and throughout its transcendent narrative, the book of Revelation presents many strange and even startling images. These images include personages looking like jasper and a sardine stone, a throne from which proceeded lightnings and thunderings, a sea of glass, beasts with six wings and full of eyes, locusts like unto horses with crowns on their heads and hair like women, a red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and others. The frequent appearance of these figures has been both a compelling lure to those seeking dramatic movie effects and at the same time a barrier to understanding for many students of the gospel. We learn that decoding symbols, though challenging, is a necessary part of our journey of understanding. Even with the help of scholarly and authoritative commentary, we can still feel overwhelmed by the plethora of strange images. Prominent in the visionary narrative are the images of angels, trumpets, and seals. These images are key to unlocking the power and potential of the book of Revelation to comfort, guide, and bless us in the tumultuous end-times in which we live.

Three points are crucial to understand angels, trumpets and seals:

- They have the common theme of authority and power in the execution of God’s will.
- This is pre-determined by the omniscience and omnipotence of God. It *will* happen.
- God’s omniscience and omnipotence do not cancel the free-will of human beings.⁸⁵

End-times super events are heralded in John’s vision by the appearance of angels, trumpets, and seals. Recognizing this may help keep us in a state of readiness and alertness for the Lord to gift us with personal revelation. We deliberately seek divine guidance for the end-times. To the extent possible we want to qualify for personal revelation and precise guidance and the protection these gifts bring to ourselves and our loved ones. Since John opens his marvelous account with holy personages (angels), we will begin by expanding our understanding of angels.

Angels among Us

Many people may be inclined to believe that angels are unknowable and mysterious beings, thinking only that they come from heaven, which they lack experience with. This is

understandable but not inevitable. We take our cue from the Prophet Joseph Smith, who informed us that “there are no angels who minister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it.”⁸⁶ We aim to “de-mystify” the subject matter, not to diminish the significance of these heavenly ministrants. As we seek understanding of the role angels play in end-times events, we want to elevate our views and prepare ourselves to receive the blessings the Lord intended in providing us with the book of Revelation. *We want to do all we can to keep ourselves both spiritually and temporally prepared for the Great Day of the Lord.* Having some understanding of the ministry of angels is part of that preparation.

In the final chapter of the book of Revelation, after John has seen so much and accepted his ordained role in its dissemination, he again sees another angel and records as follows:

And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for *I am thy fellow servant*, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which *keep* the sayings of this book: worship God.⁸⁷ (emphasis added)

It is appropriate that we familiarize ourselves with what has been revealed about these marvelous beings who assist human beings in their efforts to advance the work God in the salvation of His children. Angels do not restrict their appearances or communications to a particular age group, tribe, or nation; rather, angels operate among all humankind. Alma 32:23 states that God “imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only men but women also. Now this is not all; little children do have words given unto them many times, which confound the wise and the learned.” Joseph Smith’s promise to the women of the Relief Society—“If you live up to your privileges, the angels cannot be restrained from being your associates”⁸⁸—may also apply to men and children.

In facing the dangerous and frightening circumstances of the end-times, renewing and clarifying our understanding and testimony of angels may be a lifesaving decision. We should not make the mistake of going after signs in an unseemly way and inordinately seeking unusual experiences. On the other hand, we do want to discuss this doctrine and understand the sublime reality of divine assistance from angels in meeting our challenges. If the need arises, we can and will be ministered to by angels. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught: “Usually such beings are not seen. Sometimes they are. But seen or unseen they are always near. . . . I testify that angels are still sent to help us . . . that God never leaves us alone, never leaves us unaided in the challenges that we face.”⁸⁹ The doctrine of the ministering of angels needs to be taught, understood, and believed so that when the need arises and the Lord sees fit, the Spirit can prompt us (and we recognize the prompting) to pray in faith for divine assistance with a believing heart and focused mind.

Angels can be resurrected or translated personages or even spirits not yet with a body or those who have passed on to the spirit world and await resurrection. Regardless of these differences in their state, in general terms angels are messengers from God acting for the salvation of the human family under divine direction. In all cases they act to fulfill God’s will.⁹⁰ The term *angel* appears a great many times in the scriptures,⁹¹ and we are well advised to examine the context when the term is used, for thereby we become more aware of these marvelous personages and the pivotal roles they have in the end-times

circumstances. It is not unrealistic to consider that we ourselves and our families may be ministered to by angels as we strive to endure in righteousness in a fallen and wicked world. The Apostle Paul wrote thus of angels:

But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? ⁹² (emphasis added)

We also understand that when the resurrected Savior appeared to and ministered to the surviving Nephites, three of His twelve disciples asked for a greater opportunity to bring souls to Him and were granted the gift of being translated.⁹³ Of them the prophet Mormon wrote:

Behold, I was about to write the names of those who were never to taste of death, but the Lord forbade; therefore I write them not, for they are hid from the world. But behold, *I have seen them*, and they have ministered unto me. And behold *they will be among the Gentiles, and the Gentiles shall know them not*. They will also be among the Jews, and the Jews shall know them not. And it shall come to pass, when the Lord seeth fit in his wisdom that they shall minister unto all the scattered tribes of Israel, and unto all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, and *shall bring out of them unto Jesus many souls*, that their desire may be fulfilled, and also *because of the convincing power of God which is in them*. And *they are as the angels of God*, and if they shall pray unto the Father in the name of Jesus *they can show themselves unto whatsoever man it seemeth them good*. Therefore, great and marvelous works shall be wrought by them, before the great and coming day when all people must surely stand before the judgment-seat of Christ; *Yea even among the Gentiles* shall there be a great and marvelous work wrought by them, before that judgment day.⁹⁴ (emphasis added)

The times we are fated to live in can be threatening, even alarming, frightening, and discouraging. However, all these negative emotions can be tempered and increasingly set aside as we contemplate, pray about, and embrace the doctrine of the ministering of angels. We are not alone or forgotten in the Lord's agenda.

The Postmortal Ministry of John

To better understand angels, we can examine the Apostle John himself and his role in both its mortal and postmortal aspects.

John's preparation did not begin with receiving the vision and having it transcribed and disseminated to the early Church on the isle of Patmos, nor did it end there. We learn from latter-day scripture that during the mortal ministry of the Savior, John the Beloved asked of his Lord a special commission:

And the Lord said unto me: John, my beloved, what desirest thou? For if you shall ask what you will, it shall be granted unto you. And I said unto him: Lord, give unto me power over death, that I may live and bring souls unto thee. And the Lord said unto me: Verily, verily, I say unto thee, because thou desirest this thou shalt tarry until I come in my glory, and shalt prophecy before nations, kindreds, tongues and people.⁹⁵

The fulfillment of this stunning promise of the Lord to His beloved disciple is evident from a statement in Revelation 10:8–11:

And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth.

And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey.

And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.

And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.

We have further insight into what it means that he should “prophesy *again* before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings” from Latter-day revelation provided through Joseph Smith. The Prophet inquired of the Lord concerning this episode, and this question-and-answer exchange between the Prophet Joseph and the Lord is in Doctrine and Covenants 77:14:

Q. What are we to understand by the little book which was eaten by John, as mentioned in the 10th chapter of Revelation?

A. We are to understand that it was a mission, and an ordinance, for him to gather the tribes of Israel; behold, this is Elias, who, as it is written, must come and restore all things.

From this we deduce that the Apostle John operated in the role and office of Elias and as such was a key player in the Restoration. Elder McConkie enlightens us further concerning this high and holy assignment:

Be it noted, there is more to the labors of Elias of the Restoration than the works of one angel only. Continuing his inspired exegesis of the hidden truths in the Apocalypse, the Prophet [said] . . . John himself is another of these enigmatic Eliases, all of whose ministries combine to fulfill the ancient word that Elias shall come and restore all things in the times of restitution, which “times” began in the spring of 1820.⁹⁶

Returning to Doctrine and Covenants 77:9, we read the following:

Q. What are we to understand by the angel ascending from the east, Revelation 7th chapter and 2nd verse?

A. We are to understand that the angel ascending from the east is he to whom is given the seal of the living God over the twelve tribes of Israel; wherefore, he crieth unto the four angels having the everlasting gospel, saying: Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And, if you will receive it, this is Elias which was to come to gather together the tribes of Israel and restore all things.

From these two verses, we begin to get an idea of the grandeur of the character whose work we undertake to study and receive enlightenment from. The question naturally arises from these verses: Is the Apostle John the “angel ascending from the east”? We see that verse 9 tells us that the angel ascending from the east *is* Elias, and we see also from verse 14 that the Apostle John *is* or ministered in the office of Elias. We know that the translated Apostle John acted with Peter and James in restoring sacred priesthood keys.⁹⁷ We may wonder at the Prophet Joseph’s words “if you will receive it.” Was it the case that many of his listeners were schooled in protestant views of the Apostle John who they believe died in Ephesus after being released from banishment on Patmos?⁹⁸ Did some of the Prophet’s followers find it difficult to accord John the status and station of a translated personage—an angel—with a transcendently important ministry? Yet so he was and so he is!

We understand that the Apostle John did not die but received a divine commission to continue to minister to “peoples, and nations and tongue, and kings” “as flaming fire and a ministering angel,”⁹⁹ even as a translated personage to this day. With these marvelous truths in mind—of John’s identity and role in the office of Elias and his continuing ministry as a translated personage—we approach even a very partial study of the smallest segment of the book of Revelation, with a certain reverence and awe. As we continue our study, we want to keep in mind the personage whose work it is we are considering. It is none other than the faithful Apostle John, who continues to minister to the earth’s inhabitants as a translated personage, an angel, and who was so remarkably honored by the Son of God Himself, who in truth is the real author of the Apocalypse.¹⁰⁰

Of the three images we want to focus on—angels, trumpets, and seals—one is not symbolic but entirely real in the concrete sense. The angels are real. They are emissaries or agents of God possessing divine authority and power to execute the will of God. Their appearance in sacred history heralds the intervention of God in human affairs.¹⁰¹

The Role of the Beast-Cherubim-Angels

One of the figures or entities or angel-forms¹⁰² that appear in the book of Revelation is that of the beasts who act as guides to John as he undergoes his transcendent vision. We encounter these entities or angel-forms in chapter 6 as John sees in vision the seals of the heavenly scroll being opened and hears and sees the beast saying to him, “Come and see,” and then reveals events happening at the time the seal is opened. For example, in Revelation 6:1 we read, “And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.”

It is noteworthy that we encounter phrases similar to that of “noise of thunder” elsewhere in the revelation. These other instances of similar phrases appear in the following contexts:

- Great voice as it were a trumpet (Revelation 1:10).
- Voice . . . as it were of a trumpet (Revelation 4:1).
- Angel with a loud voice (see Revelation 5:2).
- I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven . . . and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth (Revelation 10:1).
- And when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices (Revelation 10:3).

Other examples could be given, but this suffices to establish the following facts concerning the beasts who act as John's guides:

1. They speak to him. They are not mere inert signposts pointing in a direction.
2. Their speaking is loud, a voice of thunder and trumpets (i.e., spiritual power is involved).
3. Their speaking is intimately associated with the appearance and actions of angels.

The Prophet Joseph Smith thought this topic was so important that he devoted a lengthy discourse to it titled "The Beasts of John's Revelation."¹⁰³ Under the heading of "John's Vision of Futurity," he says: "There is a grand difference and distinction between the visions and figures spoken of by the ancient prophets, and those spoken of in the revelations of John." He distinguishes between the figures John saw in his vision from "anything that had been on the earth previous to that time."¹⁰⁴ He notes that prophets prior to John did not see actual beasts in their visions but "they saw the image or figure of a beast. . . . But John saw the actual beast in heaven." Joseph Smith also plainly tells us that the beasts John saw do not represent "the different kingdoms of God on the earth," which was an idea current at the time.¹⁰⁵ Joseph is underlining the special role and place of beasts in the Revelation of John and perhaps also teasing us a little and endeavoring to lead us on to understanding. Then come these revealing words:

The beast John saw was an actual beast, and an actual intelligent being gives him his power, and his seat and great authority. It was not to represent a beast in heaven: it was an angel in heaven who has power in the last days to do a work. . . . The beasts which John saw and speaks of being in heaven, were actually living in heaven, and were actually to have power given to them over the inhabitants of the earth, precisely according to the plain reading of the revelations. I give this as a key to the Elders of Israel.

This review of the Prophet Joseph Smith's discourse concerning the beasts of John's revelation underscores the following facts:

- The beasts John saw who said to him "Come and see" were intelligent agents of God endowed with power and authority to act as guides to John in his visionary assignment.
- The beasts are closely related to and in some interpretive perspective may be identical to cherubim¹⁰⁶ and angels. Thus, for the purpose of this work, I designate these beasts who say to John "Come and see" with the term *beast-cherubim-angel*.
- What the beasts reveal to John is important to us in our quest to understand the opening of the seals of the heavenly book and what is happening at the time.
- God provided these marvelous beings to John specifically as guides for him as recorded but also by extension for us, to help us in our journey of understanding.
- We will see that this guidance especially includes the beasts informing John of the relation of the scroll and its seals to Jesus Christ and His infinite atoning sacrifice.

Jesus Christ and the Scroll of Destiny

The Atonement of Jesus Christ is the supreme truth, as He, under the Father, is the Supreme Being¹⁰⁷ and the governing reality. For this reason, it is appropriate that we examine where the Savior's Atonement is placed in the scheme of things regarding the book so richly designated with words such as *revelation*, *destiny*, and *apocalypse*. To do this we will focus on the first appearance of the sealed scroll as it is recounted in Revelation 5:4.

And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.

And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?

And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.

And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

The fact that John "wept much" because "no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon" informs us that John understood something about this heavenly scroll, something that we also need to understand. What was it John understood that caused him to weep? Scholars Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes provide an articulate answer:

John understood the significance of the failure. God's will stood in danger of not being executed, and therefore the righteous in danger of not receiving the necessary assistance to win the war or receive the reward. This failure brought an instant and sorrowful response from John; he mourned deeply. What may have intensified his pathos was a momentary, albeit false, impression that even his Savior was unable to unlock the book with its secrets and powers. For John that meant no protection for the righteous in the midst of their most bitter trials, no vindication of their suffering against the wicked, no ultimate victory for the faithful; and, most importantly, no final, divine inheritance.¹⁰⁸

We should consider John's life path to this point and try to walk a little in his shoes, however unlikely that may seem to be. John had been with Jesus; had followed Him from the earliest days of Christ's ministry; had been taught by Him in both precept and Holy example; had seen miracles performed and had seen him persecuted at close range and then executed by Roman authority as manipulated by the machinations of the wicked ruling elite of apostate Israel. He had subsequently ministered as Christ's servant to the seven churches in Asia Minor (with all the vagaries and challenges such responsibilities in ancient times must have entailed). He had been persecuted himself by the Roman emperor and now is enduring the harsh environment of banishment to the Isle of Patmos. One could see John saying, "I have been with you from the beginning and all these things have happened. The people are persecuted, deprived, and disappointed. When will the saints have some relief from all this suffering?"¹⁰⁹

Instead of relief earned many times over, as he is adjusting to an open vision of heaven, he sees a “mighty angel”—one of high and unquestioned authority in heaven—challenging the heavenly hosts. “Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?” He sees and hears that no one can do this. He understands the implications. He understands what is at stake with the scroll of destiny, but he does not yet understand his own transcendent role.

As he is undergoing this transformative experience, he sees that even heaven itself seems thwarted. And for a moment—perhaps it is a long moment, for the record tells us that he “wept much”—that is his reality. He weeps bitterly.

We empathize in our appreciation of this remarkable servant of God because we sense implicitly that the scroll and its seven seals are supremely important. The vision continues:

And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having *twelve* horns and *twelve* eyes, which are the *twelve servants* of God, sent forth into all the earth.¹¹⁰

And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. (vv. 5–7)

John sees and understands that only the “Lamb as it had been slain” can exercise the power and authority of the Lion, taking the scroll and opening its seals. Only as the seals are opened can the will of God be executed with its grand redemptive design for his fellow beings—the entire human family. The “*twelve* horns and *twelve* eyes” the Lamb has are “the *twelve servants of God*”—and John now comprehends what even he may not have fully realized before: that he is one of those servants both ordained and empowered to act in the fulfillment of God’s redemptive design for the human family. Relief as only God can provide it has come to the Lord’s faithful servant John.

As we gain a deeper understanding of the book of Revelation—Scroll of Destiny, we see that a degree of the same relief may come to us. As we come to understand and fulfill our own individualized role in God’s grand design, however small that role may seem to be, we have the potential to be sanctified with pure motivations and righteous actions. As we worship the Lamb and discover how to act to advance His redemptive design for that portion of the human family allotted to us—our family, friends, and loved ones—we bring the sanctifying power of the Spirit into the circumstances of our daily lives. In acting in our daily lives in inspired ways to serve God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ—as befitting our end-times circumstances—we belong to Him and have claim on His grace and the inspiration of His spirit.¹¹¹

We may conclude from these verses that the opening of the seals takes place subsequent to the Savior bringing to pass the infinite Atonement, for only “the lamb as it had been slain” could take the book and exercise control. So, the opening of the seals and the unveiling of their contents happens after the mortal life and atoning mission of Jesus, which could include anytime from then until now or anytime from now into the future. This much we can be sure of. However, with the added light and truth of the Restoration, we can go further.

The Two Keys of Joseph Smith

A great deal of contradictory information has been published in print and online concerning the book of seven seals. The contradictions and confusion mainly concern timing or sequence (when the seals are opened), content (what John sees when each seal is opened), and context (where we are now in any chronology that is purported to be made known as the seals are opened). The scroll represents the unfolding will of God regarding the earth and its inhabitants—in other words, its destiny. As such, it is understandable that a variety of scholars and less well-trained people have sought to put forth their theories and conclusions. The result is a variety of views that do not always harmonize and can at times present a degree of confusion.

Fortunately, the Lord, through the Prophet Joseph Smith, supplied keys of understanding and insight that enable us to have a more correct perspective in our quest for understanding of the heavenly book. That perspective is that the time frame we are dealing with when we consider the seven seals of the book John saw is primarily one that pertains to things future to the Apostle's mortal ministry and in fact more fully to events immediately preceding the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

The First Key of Joseph Smith

The first key to examine is Doctrine and Covenants 77, wherein Joseph Smith posed questions to the Lord about specific verses in the Revelation of St. John and received divinely inspired answers.¹¹² Doctrine and Covenants 77:6–7 reads as follows:

Q. What are we to understand by the book which John saw, which was sealed on the back with seven seals?

A. We are to understand that 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.

Q. What are we to understand by the seven seals with which it was sealed?

A. We are to understand that the first seal contains the things of the first thousand years, and the second also of the second thousand years, and so on until the seventh.

From this we understand that John saw an image or vision of a book with seven seals, and we are told that each seal contains the “things of” each successive thousand-year period. This seems to be straight forward, and yet upon closer examination it is much less so than at first appears.

Revelation 6 records the Lamb opening the seals, and interspersed with the opening of the seals there are beasts (which we understand to be cherubim, or heavenly guides¹¹³) who say to John as each seal is opened, “Come and see.” Responding to this invitation or command, John records what he saw. For example, the first two verses of chapter 6 read as follows:

And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.

And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

The chapter heading of Revelation 6 in the LDS edition of the Bible says that “Christ opens the six seals, and John sees the events therein.”¹¹⁴ Many who have read this have concluded that what the beast-cherubim-angel then caused John to “see” was the same “things” as were contained “within” the thousand-year periods. For example, with the first seal being opened, representing the first thousand years of earth’s history, the belief has gained acceptance that what John then “sees” (a rider on a white horse) is the prophet Enoch in his victorious battle against the wicked people of his day.¹¹⁵

This belief that the things John saw are events “within” each thousand-year period has gained wide acceptance. However, this is not the only way to read this, and there is evidence it may be an error that has led to significant confusion. This is a thorny issue, and it needs careful analysis.

Doctrine and Covenants 77:6–7 plainly states that each seal “contains” the “things” (events, persons, conditions) of each thousand-year period. It *does not* expressly state that what the beast-cherubim-angel subsequently had John “see” (in Revelation 6 when the angel said “Come and see”) was the “things” of each thousand-year period. We need to approach this with due diligence, and we can begin with the chapter heading itself.

Chapter Headings, Divisions, Guides and Doctrine

The LDS edition of the scriptures—with its copious cross-references, Topical Guide, maps, and chapter headings—is the outcome of skillful, selfless, and prolonged service and sacrifice of many individuals, including those not of our faith. These individuals have produced an inspired and important tool of gospel study.¹¹⁶ However, the chapter headings do not carry the same authority and divine inspiration as the text of the scriptures themselves. This is evident from the words of Elder Bruce R. McConkie, who himself wrote the chapter headings:

[As for the] Joseph Smith Translation items, the chapter headings, Topical Guide, Bible Dictionary, footnotes, the Gazetteer, and the maps. None of these are perfect; they do not of themselves determine doctrine; *there have been and undoubtedly now are mistakes in them*. Cross-references, for instance, do not establish and never were intended to prove that parallel passages so much as pertain to the same subject. They are aids and helps only.¹¹⁷ (emphasis added)

Elder McConkie’s own words give us sufficient pause to reflect carefully on both the use and the potential limitations of chapter headings and cross-references. We will carry this cautionary understanding with us in our exploration.

The same caution should be applied to the chapter and even verse divisions found in the scriptures, particularly the Bible. Chapter divisions were not part of the original text format of the Bible as is widely known in scholarly research:

Chapter and verse divisions did not appear in the original texts of Judeo-Christian bibles; such divisions form part of the paratext of the Bible. Since the early 13th century, most copies and editions of the Bible have presented all but the shortest of

the scriptural books with divisions into chapters, generally a page or so in length. Since the mid-16th century, editors have further subdivided each chapter into verses —each consisting of a few short lines or of one or more sentences.¹¹⁸

We learn that paratext plays a role in the interpretation of literary works, and the Bible certainly qualifies in this regard:

In literary interpretation, *paratext* is material that surrounds a published main text . . . supplied by the authors, editors, printers, and publishers. These added elements form a frame for the main text, and can change the reception of a text or its interpretation by the public.¹¹⁹

In addition, it is useful to note these words from the introduction to the Topical Guide of the LDS edition: “Because of space limitations, the guide is not intended to be comprehensive. It is also recommended that the reader look up each scripture and examine it in its context, in order to gain a better understanding of it.”¹²⁰

This is exactly what we are attempting to do as we proceed with our examination of the context of different passages of scripture. That context includes cross-references to other canonized scriptures of the restored gospel, the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, recorded statements or teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and other relevant sources. We hope to “drill down” on this context by close examination of several verses and their relation to the seventh seal.

These cautionary notes regarding chapter headings, chapter divisions, scripture guides, and their relation to what we regard as doctrine become important as we seek to parse and connect various verses from the book of Revelation and arrive at an understanding that may not be evident from a superficial reading. One example of how examining context can suggest a different view from that which is commonly accepted is what John is reported to “see” as the fifth seal is opened.

The Martyrs and the Little Season

Revelation 6:9 reads as follows: “And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.” The footnote attached to the word *altar* links to Doctrine and Covenants 135:7, which references the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum. It is worth the time to review this verse in its entirety. It reads:

They were innocent of any crime, as they had often been proved before, and were only confined in jail by the conspiracy of traitors and wicked men; and their *innocent blood* on the floor of Carthage jail is a broad seal affixed to “Mormonism” that cannot be rejected by any court on earth, and their *innocent blood* on the escutcheon of the State of Illinois, with the broken faith of the State as pledged by the governor, is a witness to the truth of the everlasting gospel that all the world cannot impeach; and their *innocent blood* on the banner of liberty, and on the magna charta of the United States, is an ambassador for the religion of Jesus Christ, that will touch the hearts of honest men among all nations; and their *innocent blood*, with the innocent blood of *all the martyrs under the altar that John saw*, will cry unto the Lord of Hosts till he avenges

that blood on the earth. Amen. (emphasis added)

We can see plainly from this that the verse from Revelation 6 that references the opening of the fifth seal references the verse in the Doctrine and Covenants which directs our attention to the life and martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum, who we are told John saw. The verse plainly links the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith with “all the martyrs under the altar that John saw.”

If we accept the commonly accepted interpretation that each seal represents a thousand-year period of earth history, then the fifth seal would represent the years 0 to 1000. It is evident that this would not include the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum, which the Doctrine and Covenants plainly references. This being the case, we begin to gather evidence that the events shown in vision to the Apostle John as the fifth seal opens may include the time from the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph forward. Further examination of this scriptural context brings further insight. In response to the cries of the martyrs for justice, they are told in Revelation 6:11 that they are to “rest yet for a little season until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.”

The phrase “a little season” is important. It suggests that the time frame from the death of the martyrs (which we may consider includes Joseph and Hyrum Smith) to the opening of the sixth seal (next verse) or the time when justice is to be served is not a long period of time. When we are dealing with periods of time that reference centuries to cover all the martyrs of previous times and even thousand-year periods of referencing the content of the seven seals, then we can see that this interpretation does not fit the accepted narrative of John “seeing” events transpiring within the thousand-year periods. It is plain that “a little season” could include the time of Joseph Smith to our present time. Of necessity we must consider that the events associated with the opening of the fifth seal are events occurring sometime from the time of Joseph Smith to the present. It is the near future we must examine to further our understanding of angels and attempt to discern any possible chronology of end-times events. The angels’ divinely sanctioned role is to prepare the earth and its inhabitants for the thousand-year reign of Christ.

[77.](#) *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith—Collectors Edition*, 195

[78.](#) This phrase (call vision) has been utilized by Margaret Barker to denote the inaugural vision that qualified and prepared a person to act as a prophet of God. In John’s case, he has already “qualified” as the beloved Apostle, yet now he is about to embark on a new and grander spiritual career than likely even he anticipated, one that would impact and inspire many centuries of faithful saints even to the end of time. See *The Mother of the Lord*, 86, 106, and 166.

[79.](#) It may be observed that the meaning of the term *angel* varies depending on context. For the purposes of this work, we will refer to angels as personages who act as emissaries and agents of God and who possess authority and power to execute the will of God. This simple definition applies whether they are spiritual, as was Gabriel appearing to Mary, or resurrected, as the Apostle Peter was when appearing to Joseph Smith, or translated as we will see was the Apostle John. Our focus is that they are personages acting under divine direction and possessing authority and power to execute the will of God.

[80.](#) JST, Revelation 1:1.

[81.](#) “‘To give a sign, to signify,’ (and) carries the idea of giving an identifying sign or token. . . . With these words, John signaled his reader that the vision was authentic and came from God via a true messenger, who gave John the necessary sign which validated the message” (Draper and Rhodes, 89).

[82.](#) Richard D. Draper and Rhodes, 82–83.

[83.](#) Revelation 4:1 records: “After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.” From chapter 4 onward we may consider the tense as being things future to John’s time. It may also be that John received the “vision” on several occasions.

84. Chapter heading, LDS edition of the Bible.
85. It is acknowledged that the dichotomy of the free will (agency) of man and the omniscience of God have posed a dilemma for philosophers for centuries. The Church has taken no official position on the philosophical debate but clearly emphasizes the agency (free will) of individuals. This work relies on the Book of Mormon teaching in 2 Nephi 2:14 that “there is a God, and he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are, both things to act and things to be acted upon” and 2 Nephi 10:23, which informs us, “Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life.”
86. Doctrine and Covenants 130:5.
87. Revelation 22:8–9.
88. “Relief Society: Divine Organization of Women,” in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church—Joseph Smith* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 449.
89. Readers are encouraged to review Elder Jeffery R. Holland’s entire October 2008 general conference address titled “The Ministry of Angels,” available at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2008/10/the-ministry-of-angels?lang=eng>.
90. In some contexts, devils are referred to as angels, but in this work, we will confine the term to denote angels of God only.
91. “The Hebrew word *Malakh*, usually translated “angel” occurs 213 times in the Old Testament” (see Donald W. Parry, *Angels—Agents of Light, Love and Power*, 14). “During the decades since 1971, general conference speakers have referred to angels or cited scriptures about angels more than fourteen hundred times” (page 3).
92. Hebrews 1:13–14.
93. “Now the doctrine of translation is a power which belongs to this priesthood. There are many things which belong to the powers of the Priesthood and the keys thereof, that have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world; they are hid from the wise and prudent to be revealed in the last times. Many have supposed that the doctrine of translation was a doctrine whereby men were taken immediately into the presence of God, and into an eternal fulness, but this is a mistaken idea. Their place of habitation is that of the terrestrial order, and a place prepared for such characters He held in reserve to be ministering angels unto many planets, and who as yet have not entered into so great a fullness as those who are resurrected from the dead” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith—Collectors Edition*, 135).
94. 3 Nephi 28:25–32.
95. See Doctrine and Covenants section 7:1–8 for the full account of this remarkable commissioning of the Lord’s servant—Apostle John.
96. *Millennial Messiah*, 105.
97. See Joseph Smith—History 1:72. See also Larry C Porter, “The Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods,” *Ensign*, Dec. 1996, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1996/12/the-restoration-of-the-aaronic-and-melchizedek-priesthoods?lang=eng>.
98. “The Church Fathers . . . testify that he outlived the remaining apostles and was the only one to die of natural causes, although modern scholars are divided on the veracity of these claims” (John the Apostle, *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/John_the_Apostle).
99. Doctrine and Covenants 7:6. See also John D. Claybaugh, “As Flaming Fire and a Ministering Angel,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1999, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1999/10/as-flaming-fire-and-a-ministering-angel?lang=eng&id=html#series_title1
100. In the strict sense, the Lord is the author-originator of the book of Revelation and its multiple visions, yet for simplicity’s sake, we will follow convention and refer to John as the author. Though for ease of reading we attribute authorship in the human historical sense to John, we want to bear in mind that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who is the origin, focus, and central theme of this transcendent vision.
101. Examples are numerous but surely would include the angel Gabriel appearing to Zacharias and Mary heralding the birth of the Son of God; the angel Moroni appearing to Joseph Smith, heralding the restoration of the gospel and Church of Jesus Christ; the angels appearing to Nephi, Daniel, and many others in sacred history.
102. My use of the phrase “figures or entities or angel-forms” is a deliberate ploy to signal to the reader that we are about to enter a discussion that is at once both ambiguous and of great interest.
103. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith—Collectors Edition*, 228; Joseph Fielding Smith edition, 289.)
104. *Ibid*, 229.
105. “When God made use of the figure of a beast in visions to the prophets He did it to represent those kingdoms which had degenerated and become corrupt, savage and beast-like in their dispositions, even the degenerate kingdoms of the wicked world” (*Ibid*, 228).
106. Revelation 6:1 cross-references beasts to cherubim.
107. Mosiah 15:1–9.

108. Draper and Rhodes, 228–29. See also Richard D. Draper, “The Exalted Lord.” “John understood that somebody had to execute God’s will. John saw 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” (<https://rsc.byu.edu/shedding-light-new-testament/exalted-lord>).
109. Surely, John, like Enoch of old, “wept” and “had bitterness of soul” as recorded in Moses 7:41 and 44: “And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto Enoch, and told Enoch all the doings of the children of men; wherefore Enoch knew, and looked upon their wickedness, and their misery, and wept and stretched forth his arms, and his heart swelled wide as eternity; and his bowels yearned; and all eternity shook. . . . And as Enoch saw this, he had bitterness of soul, and wept over his brethren, and said unto the heavens: I will refuse to be comforted.”
110. Verse 6 is from the Joseph Smith Translation.
111. “Thus, the doctrine of belonging comes down to this—each one of us can affirm: Jesus Christ died for me; He thought me worthy of His blood. He loves me and can make all the difference in my life. As I repent, His grace will transform me. I am one with Him in the gospel covenant; I belong in His Church and kingdom; and I belong in His cause to bring redemption to all of God’s children” (D. Todd Christofferson, “The Doctrine of Belonging,” October 22 general conference, [https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2022/10/28christofferson?lang=eng;emphasis added](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2022/10/28christofferson?lang=eng;emphasis%20added)).
112. This is one of the few instances wherein the Lord devotes a full revelation (section or chapter) to provide explanation about another book of scripture. Thus it suggests the importance the Lord attaches to the book of Revelation and our efforts to grow in our understanding of its momentous narrative of end-times events.
113. See reference to cherubims given earlier.
114. See heading to chapter 6 of Revelation in the LDS edition of the Bible.
115. Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles suggested that Revelation 6:1–2 describes Enoch’s day and that the rider is Enoch (see *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. [1966–73], 3:476–78).
116. A reading of this article titled “The Coming Forth of the LDS Editions of Scripture” by [Wm. James Mortimer](#) is well worth the time of any serious student of the scripture (*Ensign*, Aug. 1983, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1983/08/the-coming-forth-of-the-lds-editions-of-scripture?lang=eng>).
117. Mark McConkie, ed. *Doctrines of the Restoration: Sermons and Writings of Bruce R. McConkie* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 289–90; emphasis added. See also Mike Thomas, “Bruce McConkie on the Fallibility of Chapter Headings,” *Scriptural Mormonism*, May 16, 2016, <http://scripturalmormonism.blogspot.com/2016/05/bruce-mcconkie-on-fallibility-of.html>.
118. “Chapters and verses of the Bible,” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, Sept. 21, 2024, https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Chapters_and-verses_of_the_Bible.
119. “Paratext,” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, Sept. 23, 2024, <https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Paratext>.
120. Topical Guide, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/tg?lang=eng>.

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