

An Outline of the Book of Revelation

Many years ago, I set out to see if there were natural divisions in the book of Revelation, so I marked off the things that were clear, such as the seven letters, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls of wrath. Then I looked at what was left, and because the book emphasizes the number seven, I wondered if there were seven natural divisions in the book. This is the outline that I came up with.

- I. Letters to the Seven Churches: Chapters 1-3
 - A. Introduction: 1:1-20
 - B. The Letters: 2:1-3:22
- II. The Seven Seals: Chapters 4-7
 - A. God's Throne: 4:1-11
 - B. The Conquering Lamb: 5:1-14
 - C. The Seals Opened: 6:1-8:1
- III. The Seven Trumpets: Chapters 8-11
- IV. The Woman, the Dragon and the Beast: Chapters 12-14
- V. The Seven Bowls of Wrath: Chapters 15-16
 - A. Introduction: 15:1-8
 - B. The Seven Bowls: 16:1-21
- VI. The Two Women and Their Destinies: Chapters 17-19
 - A. The Whore of Babylon: 17:1-18
 - B. Babylon: 18:1-24
 - C. The Bride and the Marriage Supper: 19:1-21
- VII. The Millennium and the Consummation: Chapters 20-22
 - A. The Millennium: 20:1-15
 - B. The Consummation: 21:1-22:21

It also struck me that Revelation's visions often overlap each other chronologically: while the visions of Revelation build upon one another until ultimately reaching the zenith of the new heaven and the new earth, there is also a pattern of synchronicity with the visions often covering much of the same ground chronologically. Therefore, things that textually are found later oftentimes actually refer to things that precede them chronologically.

For example, the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ is recorded in Revelation 12:5, near the beginning of the Vision of Christ and the Dragon: "And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne." Whereas, the Day of Judgment is recorded a chapter before it, in Revelation 11:18, because it is at the end of the Vision of the Seven Trumpets: "And the nations were enraged, and your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth."

In other words, Revelation 12:5 refers to a cluster of events that is thousands of years earlier than the cluster that is referred to in Revelation 11:18. Not only does one find this pattern in other places in the book (e.g., Revelation 11:1-6 precedes Revelation 6:12-14 chronologically), but this pattern is also clearly seen in the book of Daniel, where the vision of chapter 7 extends far into the future beyond the events of the vision of chapter 8.

In Revelation the same events are recorded in multiple places, often separated by a number of chapters. One should consider these parallel descriptions of the cataclysmic destruction of planet Earth, where "every mountain and island were moved out of their places" in Revelation 6:14, yet "every island fled away, and the mountains were not found" ten chapters later, in Revelation 16:20.

‘I looked when he broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”’ (Revelation 6:12-17).

‘Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, “It is done.” And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of his fierce wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe’ (Revelation 16:17-21).

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