
Revelation – Scope and Structure

Pastor Russ Kennedy

Christ – where is Jesus?

Do you remember the *Where's Waldo?* books? You had whole pages of very detailed pictures often filled with people or animals and you had to find one character named Waldo. The book of Revelation is a bit like that. The point is to find Jesus page by page. So, I am giving you a cheat sheet if you will. Here is an illustrative list.

- 1:1-3 Agent and substance of divine self-disclosure
- 1:4 Redeemer and ruler through his resurrection
- 1:5-6 Redeemer and ruler through His blood
- 1:7-8 Looking forward to His return with texts from the Old Testament
- 1:9 In Jesus is the partnership of kingdom, tribulation and endurance
- 1:12-16 Jesus is the culmination of the Old Testament symbols (through Daniel 7, etc.)
Reservoir of allusions and symbols for the rest of the book
- 2-4 Is the Lion and the Lamb
- 5:6 A composite vision
- 5 A perfection of praise
- 6:1 Opens the seven seals as qualified by His death and resurrection
- 7:10 Salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb
- 7:14 Christ is the center of the multitude (and 144,000)
- 9 Judgment is executed by the Lord
- 11 The kingdom of Christ and His forever rule flowing out of His death and resurrection
- 12 The child who is born and ascended is filled out with the people of God opposed by the dragon;
Last part of chapter shows how the church is suffering under the wrath of the dragon
- 14 The Lamb and the multitude
The Heralds of the Harvest
- 17:6 One saved by the other drunk upon the blood of Jesus

Concern – why study such a difficult book?

Seven "blessed" in the whole book...

- 1:3 **Blessed** is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and **blessed** are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.
- 14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: **Blessed** are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "**Blessed** indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"
- 16:15 ("Behold, I am coming like a thief! **Blessed** is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!")
- 19:9 And the angel said to me, "Write this: **Blessed** are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."
- 20:6 **Blessed** and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.
- 22:7 "And behold, I am coming soon. **Blessed** is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."
- 22:14 **Blessed** are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

Seven "endure" in the whole book...

- 1:9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient **endurance** that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.
- 2:2 "I know your works, your toil and your patient **endurance**, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.
- 2:19 "I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient **endurance**, and that your latter works exceed the first.
- 3:10 Because you have kept my word about patient **endurance**, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.
- 13:10 If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the **endurance** and faith of the saints.
- 14:12 Here is a call for the **endurance** of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.
- 2:3 I know you are **enduring** patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.

Construction – How is this book organized?

There are several very helpful ways to look at the book. It has a multilayered structure. Yet, no single way of looking at the book will adequately represent the real content of the book. It is like light. Light is both a wave and a particle. It can be observed to behave like waves do. It also behaves like particles do. Notice that I don't say, "sometimes this and sometimes that." It is always waves and particles – which properties you see depend on how you are observing it.

This book is even more complex than that. It reflects the dual natures of Christ in the incarnation where the deity and humanity are together in true union yet without mingling. And, this book is also like the Trinity where there are three distinct persons in one God.

It will be helpful to us then for the rest of our time to look at these structures.

Dual: The Hinge Structure

The book was written in two major halves with a central hinge. It looks like the following.

Chapters 1 - 12	The book turns on the summary in Revelation 12	Chapters 12 - 22
Historical focus		Eschatological focus
Literary setting (writing, letters, books)		Romance setting (woman, whore, bride)
Heavenly perspective		Earthly perspective
Jesus revealed		The dragon exposed
Warnings to the church		Warnings to the world
The kingdom and work of God		The kingdom and work of Satan

This is a good starting point to approach the book. It is a good way to summarize the book. But it will be inadequate to try to comment on the book.

I also want to call your attention to the fact that there varying ways of dividing the breaks in the book. This arises from different approaches taking transitional elements and including them either as the end of one section or as the beginning of the next. We'll sort that out better as we work through the book.

Drama: The Literary Structure

The book is written as a drama. There are distinct scenes which follow one another, have narrators and action. They are filled with high drama, great characters, violent action and scenes behind the scenes. I am indebted to Michael Wilcock in *The Message of Revelation*¹ for the basic ideas and a lot of the structures. I have also significantly altered his work to reflect the text more closely.

The Prologue (1:1–8)

Beginning as an epistle

The Title (1:1–3)

The Greeting (1:4–8)

Scene 1: The Church in the World (1:9–3:22)

Setting: Christ among the church (1:9–20)

The first Letter: to Ephesus (2:1–7)

The second Letter: to Smyrna (2:8–11)

The third Letter: to Pergamum (2:12–17)

The fourth Letter: to Thyatira (2:18–29)

The fifth Letter: to Sardis (3:1–6)

The sixth Letter: to Philadelphia (3:7–13)

The seventh Letter: to Laodicea (3:14–22)

Scene 2: The Church in the Heavens (4:1–5:14)

Setting: Christ over the church

The Throne and the Sovereign God (4:1-11)

The Throne and the Saving Lamb (5:1-14)

Scene 3: Suffering for the Church: (6:1–8:1)

Setting: seven Seals opened

The first Seal: conquest (6:1, 2)

The second Seal: strife (6:3, 4)

The third Seal: scarcity (6:5, 6)

The fourth Seal: death (6:7, 8)

The fifth Seal: the suffering of God's witnesses (6:9–11)

The sixth Seal: the final cataclysm (6:12–17)

The gathering of the church in heaven (7:1–17)

The seventh Seal: silence before the trumpet sound (8:1)

Scene 4: Warning for the World: seven Trumpets sounded (8:2–11:18)

Setting: The prayers of the church in heaven (8:2–6)

The first Trumpet: the earth stricken (8:7)

The second Trumpet: the sea stricken (8:8, 9)

The third Trumpet: the rivers stricken (8:10, 11)

The fourth Trumpet: the sky stricken (8:12)

The Woes - beware remaining Trumpets! (8:13)

The fifth Trumpet: the people stricken (9:1–12)

The sixth Trumpet: the unbelieving stricken (9:13–21)

The Word - bitter and sweet scroll (10:1–7)

The Witnesses - fulfilled and finished preaching (10:8–11:14)

The seventh Trumpet: God's kingdom comes (11:15–18)

Scene 5: The Drama of History: the central story line (11:19–12:17)

Setting: behind the veil, God's covenant (11:19)

The story of God's Child (12:1–6)

The struggle of God's children (12:7–17)

Scene 6: The Week of Daniel: seven visions of the final days (13:1-15:4)

Setting: the wrath of Satan until the victory of the Lamb

The first Vision: the beast from the sea (13:1–10)

The second Vision: the beast from the earth (13:11–18)

The third Vision: the Lamb and his followers (14:1–5)

The fourth Vision: the angels of grace, doom, and warning (14:6–13)

The fifth Vision: the final reaping (14:14–20)

The sixth Vision: the angels with plagues 5 (15:1)

The seventh Vision: the song of victory (15:2–4)

Scene 7: Punishment for the World: seven Bowls poured out (15:5–16:21)

Setting: behind the veil, God's inescapable wrath (15:5–16:1)

The first Bowl: the earth stricken (16:2)

The second Bowl: the sea stricken (16:3)

The third Bowl: the rivers stricken (16:4–7)

The fourth Bowl: the sky stricken (16:8, 9)

The fifth Bowl: torment (16:10, 11)

The sixth Bowl: destruction (16:12–16)

The seventh Bowl: the world is no more (16:17–21)

Scene 8: Babylon the Whore: seven Words of justice (17:1–19:10)

Setting: the first Word about Babylon (17:1–6)

The second Word: the mystery of Babylon (17:7–18)

The third Word: the fall of Babylon (18:1–3)

The fourth Word: the judgment of Babylon (18:4–20)

The fifth Word: the death of Babylon (18:21–24)

The sixth Word: the doom song of Babylon (19:1–5)

The seventh Word: the successor of Babylon (19:6–8)

These are true Words of God (19:9, 10)

Scene 9: The Drama behind history: seven Visions of ultimate reality (19:11–21:8)

Setting: the first Vision: the Captain of the armies of heaven (19:11–16)

The second Vision: his victory is sure (19:17, 18)

The third Vision: his enemies are doomed (19:19–21)

The fourth Vision: the devil is chained (20:1–3)

The fifth Vision: the king rules (20:4–10)

The sixth Vision: the last judgment (20:11–15)

The seventh Vision: the new age (21:1–8)

Scene 10: Jerusalem the Bride: seven final Revelations (21:9–22:19)

Setting: the invitation to come and see (21:9)

The first Revelation: God’s city (21:10–21)

The second Revelation: God’s dwelling (21:22–27)

The third Revelation: God’s world renewed (22:1–5)

The fourth Revelation: God’s word validated (22:6–10)

The fifth Revelation: God’s work completed (22:11–15)

The sixth Revelation: God’s final blessing (22:16, 17)

The seventh Revelation: God’s final curse (22:18, 19)

The Epilogue (22:20, 21)

This literary structure is why some believe that the scenes in the book are *sequential*. They would see these scenes as following one another. They argue that the “then I saw” language means “then this happened”.

I do not generally agree with that. At most, the “then I saw” simply means, “this is what I saw next.” Other markers in the text, tied to the language of Daniel, Zechariah, Joel, Matthew and the Thessalonians give you the chronology. *You cannot establish the chronology of es-*

chatology from the Book of Revelation. We have been very carefully building a chronology from the books in which it is plain. Revelation assumes you know that timeline and is not terribly concerned to write “pre-history”.

Chiastic: The Linguistic Structure

The book also has a very intricate parallel structure.

Text	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Center
1:1-3:22	Jesus and His Church The Messages from the Lamb <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perseverance • Overcomers • On Earth • Time 			
4:1-8:1		The Seven Seals		
8:2-11:19			The Seven Trumpets	
12				The Woman and the Dragon
13:1-16:21			The Seven Bowls	
17:1-19:8		The Final Judgments		
19:8-22:21	Jesus and His Church The Marriage of the Lamb <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perfection • Overjoyed • New Heavens and Earth • Eternity 			

This parallel structure is also reflected inside the levels with the use similar words, analogies and symbols.

Level 1 – Christ and His Church

Revelation 1:1 - 3:22

Revelation 19:9 - 22:21

The Messages from Jesus to His Church

The Marriage of Jesus to His Church

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|--|---|
| 1. "Write" (1:11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14) | 1. "Write" (19:9; 21:5) |
| 2. "Testimony of Jesus" (1:2, 9) | 2. "Testimony of Jesus" (19:10) |
| 3. "Faithful and true" (3:14) | 3. "Faithful and true" (19:11; 22:6) |
| 4. "His eyes were as a flame of fire" (1:14) | 4. "His eyes were as a flame of fire" (19:12) |
| 5. "Out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword" (1:16) | 5. "Out of his mouth goes a sharp sword" (19:15) |
| 6. "He shall rule them with a rod of iron" (2:27) | 6. "He shall rule them with a rod of iron" (19:15) |
| 7. "Prince of the kings of the earth" (1:5) | 7. "King of kings" (19:16) |
| 8. "I John" (1:9) | 8. "I John" (21:2; 22:8) |
| 9. "New Jerusalem" (3:12) | 9. "New Jerusalem" (21:2) |
| 10. "I am Alpha and Omega" (1:8, 11) | 10. "I am Alpha and Omega" (21:6; 22:13) |
| 11. "The beginning and the ending" (1:8) | 11. "The beginning and the end" (21:6; 22:13) |
| 12. "He/Him that overcomes" (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) | 12. "He that overcomes" (21:7) |
| 13. "The tree of life" (2:7) | 13. "The tree of life" (22:2, 14) |
| 14. "God gave ... to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent ... it by his angel" (1:1) | 14. "God ... sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly be done" (22:6) |
| 15. "Behold, I come quickly" (3:11) | 15. "Behold, I come quickly" (22:7, 12) |
| 16. "Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things" (1:3) | 16. "Blessed is he that keeps the sayings of the prophecy of this book" (22:7) |
| 17. "For the time is at hand" (1:3) | 17. "For the time is at hand" (22:10) |
| 18. "The first and the last" (1:11, 17) | 18. "The first and the last" (22:13) |
| 19. "Morning star" (2:28) | 19. "Morning star" (22:16) |
| 20. "Even so, Amen" (1:7) | 20. "Amen. Even so" (22:20) |

Level 2 – The Great Sufferings

Revelation 4:1-8:1

1. Throne, elders, living creatures (4; 5:11; 7:11)
2. Was, and is, and is to come (4:8)
3. Book with seven seals (5:1)
4. "Come and see" (6:1, 3, 5, 7)
5. Seal of God in foreheads (7:2, 3)
6. Them that were slain for the word of God (6:9)
7. "How long will you not judge and avenge our blood" (6:10)
8. Great multitude (7:9)
9. They have washed their robes and made them white (7:14)

Revelation 17:1-19:8

1. Throne, elders, living creatures (19:4)
2. Was, and is not, and yet is (17:8, 11)
3. Book of life (17:8)
4. "Come here, I will show you" (17:1)
5. Name of Babylon on forehead (17:5)
6. The martyrs; all that were slain (17:6; 18:24)
7. "He has judged...and has avenged the blood" (19:2)
8. Great multitude (19:6)
9. Made herself ready... Dressed in fine linen, clean and white (19:7, 8)

Level 3 – The Great Judgments

The Seven Trumpets

Seven angels with trumpets are introduced
(Rev. 8:2)

Non-contextual preview (3 verses)

The angels prepare to sound the trumpets
(8:6)

1. Earth
2. Sea became blood
3. Rivers and fountains of waters
4. Sun
5. Air darkened
6. The great river Euphrates

The development of God's movement
(10:1-11:13)

7. Lightning, voices, thunder, earthquake, hail
(11:14-19)

The Seven Last Plagues

Seven angels with plagues are introduced
(Rev. 15:1)

Non-contextual preview (3 verses)

The angels prepare to pour out the plagues
(15:5-16:1)

1. Earth
2. Sea became blood
3. Rivers and fountains of waters
4. Sun
5. Darkness
6. The great river Euphrates

The development of Satan's movement
(16:13-16)

7. Voices, thunder, lightning, earthquake, hail
(16:17-21)

This chiasmic structure is why some, including me, see a great deal of the book as being parallel. An honest handling of the book will have to deal with the obvious overall layout of the book and the internal parallel structures.

Consolidated: The Layered Structure

Greg Beale in his commentary on the Book of Revelation² offers this synthesis of the two primary structures as an amazing parallel structure. His main structure and the repeated elements within the structure consolidate the drama and the chiasmic structure so well. I have basically reproduced it below with some edits for our own understanding.

- A. **Prologue:** nearness of the faithful witness's coming, with covenant sanctions (1:1–8)
- B. **Vision:** imperfect church in the world promised salvation for perseverance (1:9–3:21)
- C. **Seven Seals:** already and not-yet judgments on the world (4:1–8:1)
 - Prelude:** the conquering lamb-lion on heaven's throne (4:1–5:14)
 - Vision:** opening of the book, judgments initiated by the conquering horsemen and completed directly by God (6:1–17; 8:1)
 - Interlude:** saints protected, receiving final salvation from the lamb, and clothed in white (ch. 7)
 - D. **Seven Trumpets:** judgments on the ungodly world and the great city (8:2–11:18)
 - Prelude:** heavenly commissioning of seven angels (8:2–6)
 - Vision:** sounding of the trumpets of judgment (8:7–9:21; 11:14–18)
 - Interlude:** witnessing church versus persecuting world (10:1–11:13)
 - E. **War of the Ages** (11:19–14:20)
 - Prelude:** ark of the covenant in heaven (11:19)
 - Vision:** dragon and beasts versus the heavenly woman, her child, and the saints (12:1–13:18)
 - Interlude:** covenant sanctions involving judgment, though blessing is included (ch. 14)
 - D'. **Seven Bowls:** judgments on the world and the great city (15:1–19:10)
 - Prelude:** heavenly commissioning of seven angels (ch. 15)
 - Vision:** bowls of judgment poured out (ch. 16)
 - Interlude:** the world as an ungodly prostitute versus the church as a faithful bride (17:1–19:10)
 - C'. The World's **Final Judgment Portrayed** from Various Perspectives (19:11–21:8)
 - Prelude:** the conquering Messiah and his army (19:11–16)
 - Vision:** the messianic horseman judges the ungodly horsemen led by the false prophet, the judgment of Satan and his hordes, the opening of books for judgment (19:17–20:15)
 - Interlude:** the lamb's bride adorned for her divine husband (21:1–8)
 - B'. **Vision:** the perfect church in glory having received the promised salvation (21:9–22:5)
 - A'. **Epilogue:** the nearness of Christ's coming attested by the faithful witness (22:6–21)

Reflect and Respond

A final word: great symphonies, great plays, great dramas all have a discernable underlying structure that helps the forward movement of the music or the storyline. But if you go to the symphony or to the play in order to revel in the structure of the story, you are missing the purpose of the event. So it is with this book. The point of the book is its *message to believers* not its marvelous and magnificent structure.

That is what our exposition will be about – the message of the Lord of heaven to His people.

¹ Wilcock, Michael. *The Message of Revelation : I Saw Heaven Opened*. The Bible speaks today. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., U.S.A.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986.

² Beale, G. K. *The Book of Revelation : A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999.