

The Deep Things of God
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Chapter Six

The Structure of Revelation

A Unique and Complex Structure

In most books of the New Testament, the structure flows from beginning to end. The primary context of any passage is the material that comes just before and just after. In Revelation, however, things are different. There is an interlocking complexity to the structure of Revelation that is astounding. The primary context of a given passage may be in a totally different part of the book. So in Revelation the immediate context is not always as crucial as it is elsewhere. ***We should think of the primary context of most passages in Revelation as being the book as a whole.*** Parallel words, ideas, and structures at the opposite end of the book may be as vital to understanding a passage as its immediate context.

So the structure of Revelation is of even greater importance to understanding than is usually the case in the New Testament. In this chapter we discover some special literary strategies introduced by the author to help the reader gain a clearer understanding of the book. The strategies we explore here are repetitive structures, duodirectionality, chiasmic

parallels, and the use of the Old Testament sanctuary as a structuring device. Discovering these structures will not be merely an academic exercise, they help unlock the deep things of the book.

Repetitive Structures

There are a number of repetitive structures in the book of Revelation. Among other things, you will find several groupings of seven: seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls (often known as the “seven last plagues”). There are also seven beatitudes (“Blessed are”) scattered through the book. When you discover parallel structures it's helpful to notice both the parallels and the contrasts. If one of the parallel structures is clearer than the other, the clear can help to explain the unclear. This is an invaluable tool for studying some of the most difficult passages. By way of example, let's look at the trumpets (Rev 8-11) and the bowls (Rev 16).

“The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon **the earth**. A third of **the earth** was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.”

Revelation 8:7

Compare the first trumpet with the first bowl of wrath:

“The first angel went and poured out his bowl on **the land**, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.”

Revelation 16:2

According to the NIV the first trumpet falls on “the earth” and the first bowl falls on “the land.” Both terms, however, are actually translating the same Greek word. So the first

trumpet and the first bowl both affect the earth. But the parallels between the Trumpets and the Bowls go much further than this.

“The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the *sea*. A third of *the sea turned into blood*, a third of the *living creatures* in the *sea* died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.”

Revelation 8:8-9

Compare the second trumpet with the second bowl.

“The second angel poured out his bowl on the *sea*, and it *turned into blood* like that of a dead man, and every *living thing* in the sea died.”

Revelation 16:3

Notice that the second trumpet and second bowl both fall on the sea and in both cases water is turned into blood. While masked in translation, both verses use the Greek word for “soul” to describe creatures in the sea. So there is a very strong parallel between these two passages. Notice also the interesting contrast. In both of the trumpets we have looked at the plague falls on a “third” of the earth. A third of the earth is burned up (Rev 8:7), a third of the sea turns into blood (Rev 8:8), a third of the ships are destroyed (Rev 8:9), and so on. But in the seven bowls the plagues affect the whole earth. Everyone who has the mark of the beast is affected by the first bowl (Rev 16:2). Every living thing in the sea dies (Rev 16:3). So there are both parallels and contrasts. The trumpets and the bowls are very similar, they are also quite different.

If you continue working through the comparison, the third trumpet and bowl both fall on the springs of water, the fourth in each case falls on the heavens, the fifth trumpet and bowl produce darkness, the sixth both affect the Euphrates and the seventh each result in the consummation of all things. While there are differences, the trumpets and the bowls are

deliberately parallel in terms of their language and their content. This insight can be very helpful to an interpreter.

Most people studying the book of Revelation feel that the seven bowls are easier to understand than the seven trumpets. If that is the case, the information that you gain through a study of the bowls can be applied also to the study of the trumpets. By comparing passages that are eight chapters apart, one can gain information that works both ways. One thing that seems obvious in the bowls is that they fall exclusively on the enemies of God and His people. The parallel between the trumpets and the bowls help confirm that the trumpets also fall exclusively on the wicked. Repetitive structures, therefore, provide clues to the deeper meanings that the author has placed in the book.

There are a couple of other major parallel structures I'd like to mention at this point. Others will make their appearance in the discussion of chiastic structure below. A surprising parallel emerges when you compare what Revelation says about End-time Babylon in chapters 17, 18 and 19 with what it says about the New Jerusalem in chapters 21 and 22. The golden city is compared with the city of doom. The bride is compared with the prostitute. The New Jerusalem proves to be everything that Babylon failed to be. Citizens of Babylon, therefore, are excluded from the New Jerusalem. One further surprising parallel emerges when you compare the two witnesses of Rev 11:3-6 with the land beast of 13:11-18.

Finding Repetitive Structures

- 1) Choose a version of the Bible that is faithful to the grammar of the original
 - √ King James Version
 - √ American Standard Version
 - √ New American Standard Bible
- 2) Using a concordance or Bible margins look for potential parallel texts in Revelation
- 3) Where a significant number of words and ideas are clearly parallel you have a potential parallel structure
- 4) Notice also the points of contrast between the parallel passages
- 5) Evaluate the theological impact on both passages
- 6) Where one passage is clearer than the other, move from the clear to the unclear

Duodirectionality: Looking Both Ways

That brings us to a second type of structural tactic in the book of Revelation, for lack of a better description, I have called it duodirectionality. It is a fancy term that means transitional passages in the book of Revelation often look both ways, forward **and** backward. (people who study a lot develop fancy terms so they can quickly understanding each other) These duodirectional passages summarize what has gone before but at the same time point forward to what is yet to come.

Maybe I could put it a different way. In most books a writer introduces a chapter, adds the main content and then places a conclusion at the end of the chapter. The writer then puts an introduction at the beginning of the next chapter, and so on. But the author of Revelation, whether one thinks of God or John in that role, seems to have develop a special tactic in

presenting the vision. In the book of Revelation the introduction to what follows is very often embedded in the conclusion that precedes it. To notice this is to find the author's own explanation of what follows embedded in what precedes. To ignore this principle is to miss the author's own explanation of what follows. Discovering this principle, therefore, makes a major difference in the understanding of the deep things in the text. We'll look at a couple of examples here.

Rev 3:21

Rev 3:21 is the verse that brought the principle of duodirectionality to my attention more than ten years ago. "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Rev 3:21). This passage is clearly the climax of the letters to the seven churches. Each of the seven churches receives a promise to the "overcomer." The one who overcomes will receive specific rewards. What I find especially interesting is that the overcomer promises are progressive. The first church (Ephesus) gets one promise (Rev 2:7), the second (Smyrna) gets two (2:10-11), and so on, until the sixth church (Philadelphia) gets six whole promises (3:10-12)! So there is a clear intensification as you work through these seven overcomer promises.

The seventh overcomer promise, in Rev 3:21, is clearly the promise to end all promises! Not only is this promise the seventh in the sequence of seven, it is the climax and conclusion of all the others. After all, once you are sitting on the throne of God you have everything God could give! The seventh promise in the churches sums up and includes all the other promises.

So Rev 3:21 is clearly the climax point of the seven letters in Revelation chapters two and three.

But like Rev 1:19, this passage is more than just a conclusion to what has come before, it also contains ideas that set the stage for the next section, the heavenly throne vision leading up to the opening of the seven seals (Rev 4:1 - 8:1). Let's look at Rev 3:21 again, but this time in my own translation that expresses more of the nuances in the original.

"To the one who **overcomes** I **will give** to sit with me on my throne, even as I also **overcame**, and **sat down** with my Father on His throne."

The "even as" (underlined) divides this verse into two parts, the first focusing on the overcoming of the believer and the second focusing on the overcoming of Jesus Christ. The experience of the believer is clearly related to the experience of Jesus. Both go through a time of overcoming and both received a reward on the throne (all four elements are in italics in the text). But particularly interesting is the fact that each of these elements is uniquely featured in the section of Revelation that follows this verse.

Where in the book of Revelation do you encounter the Father's throne? It's in chapter four. Where in Revelation does Jesus join the Father on His throne? It's in chapter five. Where do the redeemed join Jesus on His throne? That is in chapter seven (verses 15-17). Each of these elements is a crucial piece of the following section, one of the most difficult to understand in the whole book of Revelation. Rev 3:21 contains in a nutshell the substance of what is to follow in chapters four, five, and seven. ***It is as if John had buried the key to the seven seals in the climax of the seven churches.***

The fourth element of Rev 3:21 is the part "the one who overcomes." What portion of

the seven seals does that phrase summarize? It would seem to summarize chapter six, where the seals are opened up one at a time. The opening of the seals is all about the overcoming of the people of God in the course of Christian history. So in the very conclusion to the seven churches we find a nutshell summary of the key themes of chapters 4-7. According to Rev 3:21, the main story line of the seals has to do with God's people and the process by which they overcome here on this earth. The overcoming of God's people is modeled on the overcoming of Jesus (Rev 5:5). And just as Jesus' overcoming was followed by his enthronement with the Father (Rev 5:6-14), so the overcoming of God's people will be rewarded by a secure place in the temple of God forever (7:15-17).

The principle of duodirectionality, therefore, uncovers a basic literary strategy of the author of Revelation. The author has embedded at the conclusion of the previous section material that offers a nutshell summary of the seven seals themselves. One reason people have had so much difficulty understanding the seven seals is because they have missed the author's own clues to the meaning of that vision. When we look carefully at the material in the previous sections of Revelation we will gain much information about the visions that follow.

The Fifth Seal (Rev 6:9-11)

Let's look at one more interesting example of duodirectionality. The fifth seal (Rev 6:9-11) functions as a climax to the four horses of Rev 6:1-8 and summarizes their overall effect. The suffering of God's people in the horses is graphically expressed:

“When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who **had been slain** because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.

They called out in a loud voice, '**How long**, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge **the inhabitants of the earth** and avenge our blood?'

Revelation 6:9-10

In the context of the four horsemen God's people have suffered a great deal. The result is many martyrs pictured under the altar. These martyrs raise the poignant issue of how long God will delay his judgment on those who have persecuted them. Note that the cause of their suffering is "the inhabitants of the earth." They seem to be saying, "How long, O Lord, will you hold back from passing just judgment on the one's who martyred us?" Once again, this summary passage looks forward to what follows in the book of Revelation. This cry of the saints finds an echo in Rev 8:13:

"As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: 'Woe! Woe! Woe to **the inhabitants of the earth**, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the by the other three angels!'"

Revelation 8:13

The phrase, "the inhabitants of the earth" is the key phrase of Rev 6:10, the climax of the four horsemen! Apparently, in the book of Revelation, "the inhabitants of the earth" is a way of describing those who trouble and persecute God's people. The cry goes out in Revelation 6:10 and is answered in Revelation 8:13. The trumpets of Revelation eight and nine are about what God is doing to judge those who have persecuted His saints.

The connection between the trumpets and the fifth seal is made even firmer by a look at the introduction to the trumpets, Rev 8:3-4:

"Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood **at the altar**. He was given much incense to offer, with **the prayers of all the saints**, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand."

Once again there is mention of the altar, presumably the same one as in the fifth seal. Where in Revelation do we find the prayers of these saints? In the fifth seal! Those prayers begin to ascend as the saints cry out in Revelation 6:9-10. Those prayers rise up from earth and come before the heavenly altar in Revelation 8:3. Notice how God responds to these prayers.

“Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake. Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.”

Revelation 8:5-6

The response of God to the prayers of the saints is to ready the seven trumpet angels to hurl judgments down to the earth. This sequence is tremendously important. The seven trumpets are perhaps the most difficult passage in the book of Revelation, certainly among the most difficult in the Bible. But the principle of duodirectionality opens a window into the author's own understanding of this complex vision. Whatever else they may mean, the trumpets are clearly a response to the prayers of the saints for justice in relation to the persecutions that have taken place in the course of Christian history. In the seven trumpets God responds to the cry of the souls under the altar by sending judgments down on their enemies. We have, therefore, learned something very important about the trumpets. They are not to be understood primarily as natural disasters or random events, they are focused judgments on the wicked. They are God's way of assuring the saints that He is still in control of this world, even when things seem totally out of control.

The principle of duodirectionality, then, is a marvelous tool to open up some of the deep things of Revelation. It gives the reader a window into the purpose and understanding of

the author, whether one thinks of the author as the human being named John, or as the divine source of the visions, Jesus.

The Principle of Duodirectionality

“The key to the author’s intention for difficult passages in Revelation is often located in a preceding statement, usually at the climax of the preceding section of the book.”

1) Give careful attention to the “seams” of Revelation (passages at the transition point between major visions).

Examples:

√ Rev 1:19

√ Rev 3:21

√ Rev 6:9-10

√ Rev 11:18

√ Rev 12:17

√ Rev 15:1-4

√ Rev 17:1-6

√ Rev 21:1-8

2) Notice words, phrases and ideas that recall the previous vision or section

3) Notice words, phrases and ideas that anticipate the next vision or section

4) Determine the theological impact of number 3.

Chiastic Structure

A third major literary strategy of the author of Revelation seems to be structuring the book into a chiasm. If you’ve never heard it before “chiasm” sounds like a fancy word you shouldn’t have to know. Actually the word is based on the Greek letter “X” which is pronounced “kai” (a hard “ch” sound). Chiasm describes a way of thinking and writing that was quite typical of Hebrew people but is foreign to us today. For example, a typical outline today

moves from A to B to C. In a chiastic outline, however, things go differently. You go from A to B and back to A. But the second “A” is enhanced, sort of like a musical scale. In a musical scale you keep coming back to the same keys but at a higher pitch with enhanced vibrations.

Unlike Western thinking, which moves forward to a conclusion that is usually quite different than the starting point, in chiastic thinking you make a full circle and come back to where you started. It is a different kind of logic, a different way of reasoning. The “X” (chi) is a good illustration because you move from the A point to the center (“B”) and back to an A point at the end. The words and ideas at the beginning parallel the words and ideas at the end. The second part is parallel to the second from the end, and the third part is parallel to the third from the end, etc. until you reach the center. Now in Greek logic--the ABC approach--the climax comes at the end. But in Hebrew logic--the ABA approach--the climax comes at the center. Having made the main point, the author goes back to review how he or she got there, helping the reader to tie things up into a comfortable package.

What might make us suspect that the book of Revelation is constructed as a giant chiasm? My Revelation teacher at Andrews back in the 1970s, Dr. Kenneth Strand, is the one who first noticed this chiastic structure in the book of Revelation. He started by looking at the Prologue, the first eight verses of the book and comparing them with the Epilogue, the last fifteen or so. Notice the following list of “Chiastic parallels” as a starting point for verifying Strand’s observations. These are only selective, the parallels are far more extensive in the text itself.

Chiastic Parallels in Revelation

Prologue and Epilogue

1:1	“things which must happen soon”	22:6
1:3	“blessed is the one who keeps. . .”	22:7
1:3	“the time is near”	22:10
1:4	“the seven churches”	22:16

Seven Churches and New Jerusalem

1:17	“first and last”	21:6
2:7	“tree of life”	22:2
2:11	“second death”	21:8
3:12	“New Jerusalem”	21:10

The Seals and the Consummation

4:4	“24 elders”	19:4
4:6	“four living creatures”	19:4
5:6; 7:17	“the Lamb”	19:7,9
6:2	rider on white horse	19:11
6:8	“sword”	19:15,21

Church Militant

Church Triumphant

The Prologue and the Epilogue

Notice first the list of parallel texts under ***Prologue and Epilogue***. There is a parallel between Rev 1:1 and Rev 22:6.

“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants ***what must soon take place***. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.”

Revelation 1:1

“The angel said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants ***the things that must soon take place.***'”

Revelation 22:6

While the translation of the highlighted words differs slightly the exact same wording is used in the original of both texts. At the beginning and the end of the book of Revelation mention is made of “the things that must soon take place.” This is one of nearly a dozen

striking parallels of word and phrase between the Prologue and the Epilogue of Revelation.

Note the parallels to Rev 1:3 in Rev 22:7,10:

“Blessed is the one who reads ***the words of this prophecy***, and blessed are those who hear it and ***take to heart*** what is written in it, because ***the time is near.***”

Rev 1:3

“Behold, I am coming soon! ***Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy*** in this book’. . . . Then he told me, ‘Do not seal up ***the words of the prophecy*** of this book, because ***the time is near.***”

Rev 22:7,10

Needless to say, there are a number of parallels between Rev 1:3 and Rev 22:7-10. A careful study of the Prologue and the Epilogue shows a consistent and intentional parallelism between them.

The Seven Churches and the New Jerusalem

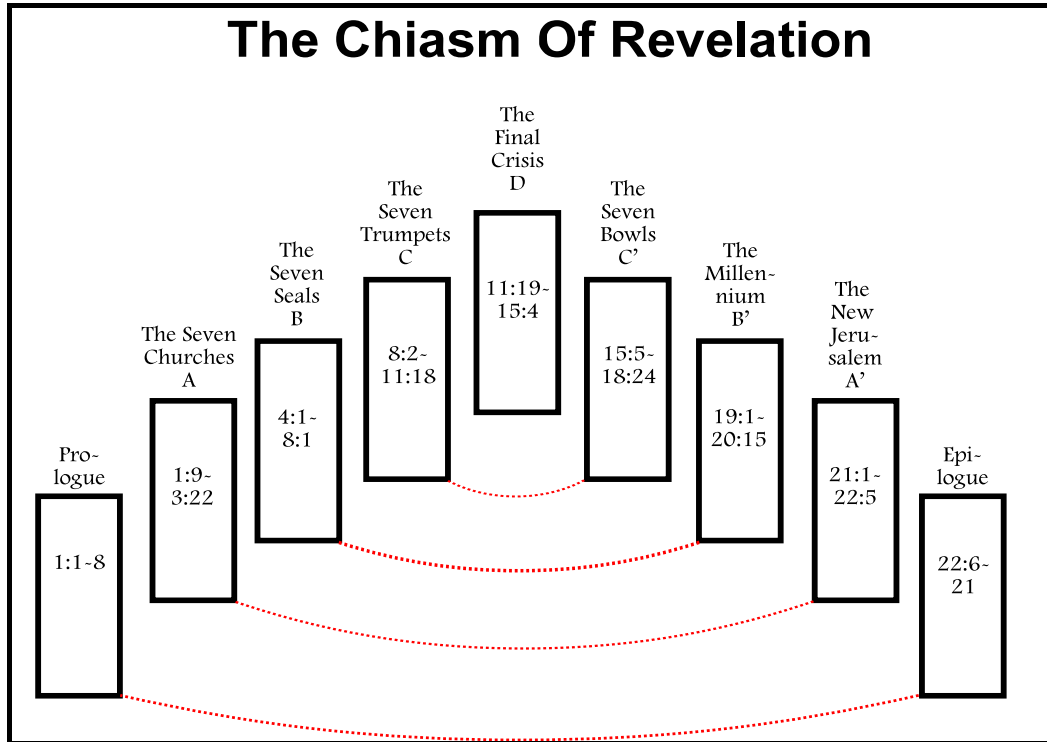
A similar situation exists when you compare the letters to the seven churches with the New Jerusalem section of the book. The contents of the second part of Revelation are parallel to that of the next to last part. For example, in Rev 2:7 the overcomer in Ephesus is promised the right to the Tree of Life, which is in the Paradise of God. Rev 22:2 describes the Tree of Life in the New Jerusalem, available to the redeemed. Similarly, Rev 2:11 promises the overcomers that they will not be hurt by the second death, Rev 20:14 and 21:8 describe death being thrown into the lake of fire and 21:4 announces that God will wipe every tear from their eyes because there will be no more death in the New Jerusalem. Strand has noted more than a dozen major parallels between the seven letters and the New Earth portion of Revelation.

In the verses just mentioned we have the basis for another observation by Strand. You

will notice that in the letters to the seven churches things are promised that become actual reality in the context of the New Jerusalem. This led Strand to the conclusion that the first part of the Revelation chiasm relates to the big picture of earth's history running from the author's day to the second coming. The second half of Revelation, on the other hand, is related to the final events of earth's history.

We have already taken a look at the parallel between the Trumpets and the Bowls, and the "B" parallel between the seals and Rev 19-20 will be taken up below. The center of the chiasm ("D"), which turns out to be chapters 12-14 (here I differ a little with Strand), is the climax, the key to the whole puzzle. At the center of the book of Revelation is the great final battle between the dragon and the remnant. This section, with its messages from three angels, is what the whole structure works toward and away from. It is the key to understanding the whole book. And the center of the center is the three angel's messages (Rev 14:6-12). Here God's agenda for the final events of earth's history is set forth.

So Revelation, as a whole, functions as a giant chiasm made up of seven major parts with a prologue and an epilogue. The big picture of this outline is illustrated in the box which follows. The full outline of the book is located at the end of this chapter.



The Seals and Rev 19-20

Before we close our brief exploration of Revelation's chiasm, I would like to demonstrate how helpful Strand's chiastic structure can be. We will compare the seals (chapters 4-5-6-7) with Revelation 19, the chiastic counterpart of the seals. Refer back to the part of the earlier chart titled *The Seals and the Consummation*. A comparison of chapters 4-5 with chapter 19 is interesting. Both are similar as worship scenes. In fact, the only places in Revelation where you have elders, four living creatures, the throne, and scenes of praise and worship are in the seals and Revelation 19. So the material is strongly parallel. But notice also the interesting difference: Why is God praised in chapters four and five? In chapter four God is praised for being the Creator and in chapter five the Lamb is praised for His sacrifice on the

cross. So creation and the cross are the grounds for praise in these passages. What is the reason for praise in Revelation 19? The conquest of end-time Babylon.

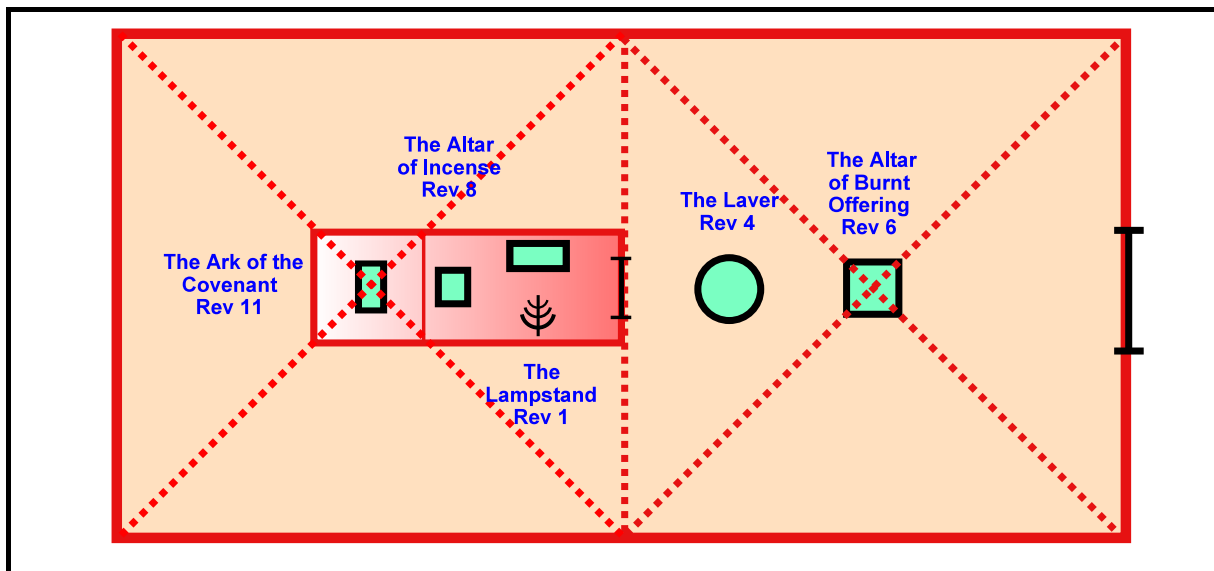
What does this parallel tell us about Revelation 4-5? It tells us that Revelation 4-5 is not an end-time passage as many have thought. Rev 4 and 5 instead set the tone for the whole book of Revelation by building on creation and the cross, which are the foundation of Christian theology. Revelation 4 and 5 occur, therefore, at the beginning of the Christian era. On the other hand, Revelation 19, in the latter part of the book--the end time part of the book--celebrates the end time events and the completion of the destruction of Babylon. Insights like this caused Strand to see the first half of the chiasm as primarily historical and the last half as primarily eschatological or end-time. This is strongly confirmed by a careful comparison of Rev 6:10 with Rev 19:1-2. In the former text souls under the altar cry out, "How long, O Lord, will you be not judging and not avenging?" (author's translation) Then in Rev 19 there is a celebration because God *has* judged and *has* avenged. If you continue your way through Revelation 4-6 and Revelation 19, you will see perhaps a dozen or more of these kinds of parallels.

So a major structural aspect of Revelation is the way material at the beginning of the chiasm compares with material at the end. The focus of the first half of Revelation is on the large sweep of Christian history, with special emphasis on its beginnings with the cross and the exaltation of Jesus to His heavenly role and status. The focus of the second half of Revelation is on the final events of earth's history. The first half looks forward to God's great final acts in the controversy, the second half chronicles the completion of those acts and eventually treats

them as if they were already in the past.

The Hebrew Sanctuary in the Book of Revelation

I'd like to turn now to the last major structural strategy of Revelation that we will examine in this chapter. Careful investigation suggests that the Hebrew sanctuary of the Old Testament and its rituals play a major role in the structure of the book of Revelation. A full understanding of Revelation requires knowledge of the Old Testament sanctuary, its furnishings, and the various feasts and sacrifices that occurred there. The major furnishings of the Hebrew sanctuary are located in the chart below along with the chapters in Revelation where these furnishings are mentioned.



The Old Testament sanctuary complex was a rectangle made up of two squares. The western square contained the tabernacle (tent) or temple and the eastern square was entirely in the outer court. At the center of the outer court was the altar of burnt offering. At the

center of the other square was the ark of the covenant. The tabernacle (tent) was a smaller rectangle located in the western square (left). It was made up of a square area (actually a cube, as the height equaled the length and width) called the Most Holy Place, in the center of which was the ark of the covenant. The rest of the tabernacle was called the Holy Place and its shape was the same as the larger compound, a rectangle in "2 x 4" shape. The Holy place contained three pieces of furniture, the seven-branched lampstand (to the south of the room), the table of showbread (to the north) and the golden altar of incense (to the west). The remaining major article of furniture was the laver (signified by the circle) in the outer court.

From a New Testament perspective, the sanctuary is rich in Christian symbolism. The furnishings and the activities in the sanctuary all point to the person and work of Jesus Christ (see Hebrews 8-10, for example). The Sanctuary itself in the left half of the sanctuary compound represents the heavenly side of the of God's saving activity, including intercession, judgment and divine authority. The outer court in the right half represents the earthly side of God's saving activity, including Christ's baptism and his death on the cross (Rev 11:1-2).

The incarnation of Jesus involved a movement from His position on the heavenly throne (represented by the ark in the Most Holy Place— Rev 11:19) down to earth (the right half of the sanctuary compound). The center piece of his earthly work was the cross (represented by the altar of burnt offering). At his ascension to heaven Jesus was moving from right to left in the sanctuary diagram. The sanctuary compound also represents the path people take back to God. The cross (burnt offering altar) attracts people through the gate, they move to baptism (laver), enter the fellowship of heavenly places in the church (Rev 1:12-20), and through judgment are

granted intimate relationship with God for eternity (Rev 11:18-19).

As indicated in the above chart, many aspects of the sanctuary find their fulfillment, in one way or another, in the book of Revelation. We will begin our look at the role of the sanctuary in Revelation with a look at the introductory scenes to the seven major vision in the book.

The Introductory Scenes

The book of Revelation seems to be structured to some degree on the Old Testament sanctuary and its services, feast days, and furniture. As we noted in the chiastic structure above, the book of Revelation is divided into seven major sections. At the beginning of each of these seven sections is an introductory section that contains recollections of the sanctuary. For example, in Rev 1:12-20, the introduction to the seven letters of Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus is pictured among the sanctuary candlesticks. In Rev 8:3-5, the introduction to the trumpets, there is a view of the altar of incense. So it goes through the book of Revelation, each of the seven-fold visions is preceded by an introduction that reminds us of the Old Testament sanctuary or temple. We will examine each of these sanctuary introductions briefly.

Sanctuary Introductions

Introduction	Main Vision
1) 1:12-20	1) Seven Churches (2-3)
2) 4:1-5:14	2) Seven Seals (6:1-8:1)
3) 8:2-6	3) Seven Trumpets (8:7-11:18)
4) 11:19	4) The Wrath of the Nations (11:19-15:4)
5) 15:5-8	5) The Seven Bowls (16:1-18:24)
6) 19:1-10	6) The End of Evil (19:11-20:15)
7) 21:1-8	7) The New Jerusalem (21:9-22:5)

Revelation 1:12-20. In the introductory vision to the seven churches there is a picture of Jesus Christ among seven golden lampstands (Rev 1:12-20). This reminds us somewhat of Solomon's Temple where there were ten golden lampstands in the Holy Place. Here in Revelation one like a son of man stands in the middle of the lampstands wearing a foot-length robe and a golden sash, garments typical of the High Priest. Is this scene located in heaven sanctuary or on earth?

Clearly, in this vision Christ is not in the heavenly sanctuary, He is on Patmos. John himself was on Patmos at the beginning of this vision (1:9). He hears behind him a loud "voice" that sounds like a trumpet (1:10). "When he turns around to "see the voice" he sees this vision of Christ (1:12-13). So this vision is on earth and not in heaven. The lampstands are not pieces of heavenly furniture, they represent the churches on earth (1:20). And if we still had any doubts, they are dispelled by the discovery that it is not until Rev 4:1 that John is called up into

heavenly places. So this scene is not a vision of the heavenly sanctuary, rather it uses a sanctuary image to describe what Jesus is doing on earth among the churches.

But in what way is it appropriate for Christians to apply heavenly sanctuary imagery to the church on earth? The answer to this question is hinted at in Matt 18:20: "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." This is a virtual quotation of a common saying among the rabbis. "Where two sit together to study the Torah, the Shekinah glory rests between them" (*Mishnah*, Pirke Aboth 3:2). Jesus was alluding to this first-century rabbinical tradition to communicate a powerful message about Himself. He replaces the Shekinah glory with Himself. In His person, the glory of the sanctuary is present whenever two or three gather together in Jesus' name. So in Matt 18 Christ's Shekinah presence is in the midst of the church. That is the message of Rev 1 as well. It is the sanctuary on earth and not the heavenly sanctuary that is in view. It is the sanctuary of the church. And the church is found wherever two or three come together in the name of Jesus.

Revelation 4-5. In the vision of Revelation 4-5 we clearly move into the heavenly sanctuary. John is called up through an open door into the heavenly throne room (4:1). There is abundant sanctuary imagery in this passage--more than in the rest of the book combined. For example, the three stones that are mentioned in connection with God's throne (4:3) are all found on the breastplate of the High Priest in the earthly sanctuary (Exod 28:17-21). The twenty-four elders remind us that there were twenty-four courses of priests in the Old Testament sanctuary, according to 1 Chronicles 24. The lamps (Rev 4:5) remind us of the sanctuary lamps of Revelation 1. The four living creatures around the throne (Rev 4:6-8)

remind us of Solomon's temple with two smaller angels on the ark and two larger ones spreading their wings over the ark in the Most Holy Place (1 Kings 6:23-28). This passage also mentions the Lamb that was slain, incense going up, a trumpet. So there is a thorough mix of images from the entire sanctuary in Revelation 4-5. This raises the question: What aspect of the sanctuary is in view here since there are images from all over the sanctuary?

There are two occasions in the ancient tabernacle services when the whole sanctuary was involved. The first was the inauguration of the sanctuary itself. In the inauguration service, every article of furniture and every detail was involved in one way or another. The other occasion in which the entire sanctuary was involved was the Day of Atonement. Is it possible to know which of these two occasions is in view here? Is the reader to see in Rev 4-5 the Inauguration of the Heavenly Sanctuary or the Day of Atonement imagery in view?

A careful look at the evidence suggests that the inauguration is in view. Day of Atonement imagery is clearly present in the second half of the book of Revelation, but the evidence for it here is weak. For example, in the Day of Atonement the special sacrificial animal was the goat. But chapter 5 centers on a lamb instead of a goat. Lambs were sacrificed during the dedication of the temple, but not goats (1 Kings 8:63). So the fact that a lamb was involved in this vision would suggest a focus on inauguration rather than on the Day of Atonement. This is confirmed by the fact that whatever is taking place here is in direct response to what happened on the cross. It is the sacrifice that dedicates the temple. Further, there is no reference to judgment in Rev 4-5, which we would expect if the Day of Atonement were in view. Instead of judgment, intercession is the focus here, with incense continually going up

(5:8). So the scene of Rev 4-5 would appear to be a symbolic description of the inauguration of the sanctuary in heaven.

Revelation 8:3-5. Since this passage is quite a bit shorter than the previous one, we will quote it here:

“Another angel, who had a **golden censer**, came and stood at the **altar**. He was given much **incense** to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the **golden altar** before the throne. Then the angel took the **censer**, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.”

Rev 8:3-5

Here we see three sanctuary images: golden incense altar, incense, and the censer. It seems clear from the images that the focus of this particular introduction is on intercession. In the sanctuary, God is interceding for His people. The prayers of the saints are combined with incense to enhance their effectiveness before God.

Revelation 11:19. At the very center of the book and its sanctuary introductions comes Rev 11:19: “Then God's **temple** in heaven was opened, and within his **temple** was seen the **ark of his covenant**. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.” Rev 11:19. In moving from Rev 8 to Rev 11 we move from the Holy Place of the sanctuary to the Most Holy Place, where the ark of the covenant can be found. The word for “temple” here is the Greek term **naos**. It is a special term reserved especially for the Most Holy Place of the temple. This is true, not only of the Bible, but also of the ancient Greek temples one can still see in Egypt today. When the tour guide brings you to the inner shrine of a temple he says something like, “This is the **naos**, the holiest part of the temple.” So in this passage there is a clear focus on the ark and the Most Holy Place. And, in

verse eighteen, there is also a mention of the final judgment:

“The nations were angry; and your wrath has come, ***the time has come for judging the dead*** and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great--and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

Rev 11:18

Rev 11:18 is the first verse in Revelation where “judgment” is described as a present reality (in 6:10 it has not yet begun). In the context of that judgment there is a view of the ark in the Most Holy Place. So I would conclude that Revelation 11:19 contains the theme of judgment just as Revelation 8 contained the theme of intercession.

Revelation 15:5-8. The next sanctuary introduction is found in Rev 15:5-8:

“After this I looked and in heaven ***the temple***, that is, the ***tabernacle of the testimony***, was opened. Out of the ***temple*** came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were ***dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests***. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven ***golden bowls*** filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. And ***the temple was filled with smoke*** from the glory of God and from his power, and ***no one could enter the temple*** until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.”

Revelation 15:5-8

This passage contains a large number of sanctuary images. We have already made mentioned of the term ***naos***, the Greek word for the Most Holy Place of the temple. It occurs again here, translated “temple.” The angels in this scene wear white and gold garments reminding us of the garments worn by the priests. The phrase “tabernacle of the testimony” occurs in Numbers 17 and is applied to the Most Holy Place there. But perhaps the primary background to this introduction is imagery found in Exodus 40 and 1 Kings 8, where the tabernacle and the temple were dedicated, respectively.

This passage, therefore, contains imagery related to the inauguration of the Old

Testament sanctuary. But there is a difference here. In Revelation 15 and 16 the temple is emptied and is never put in use again. The powerful message of this passage seems to be that the temple in heaven is abandoned and intercession is no longer available. The sanctuary was inaugurated in Revelation 4 and 5, went through phases of intercession and judgment, and is here shut down, the services cease.

Revelation 19:1-10. The scene in Rev 19:1-10 is remarkably parallel to Revelation 5. This scene of celebration and praise mentions worship, the throne, the Lamb, and the twenty-four elders, among other things. So it is the chiasmic counterpart of the worship scene in Rev 4 and 5. There is a very interesting difference, however. In this section there is a total absence of explicit sanctuary images: there is no incense, no altar, no ark of the covenant, no doors or any other article of furniture from the OT sanctuary. Worship is taking place, just as it does in Revelation 5, but all direct reference to the sanctuary and its furnishings is absent.

Revelation 21:1-8. The final sanctuary introduction in Revelation is found in chapter 21, verses 1-8. There is a remarkable statement in verses 2 and 3:

“I saw the Holy City, ***the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God***, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Now ***the dwelling of God is with men***, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.’”

Where is the sanctuary in this text? The original for “dwelling” (in verse 3) is actually “tabernacle” or tent. God’s tabernacle (same word as in 15:5-8) has come down to earth. But verse 2 makes it clear that this “tabernacle” is actually the New Jerusalem, the Holy City itself. So in Revelation 21-22, the New Jerusalem becomes the sanctuary. It is shaped like a cube, just like the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary. In fact the only perfect cubes in the Bible are the

Most Holy Place and the New Jerusalem. This perfect cube is founded on the stones that are in the High Priest's breastplate. So the New Jerusalem, in essence, becomes the Most Holy Place. God and the Lamb themselves become the temple of the city.

There are also sacrificial services in that temple. "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his *servants* will serve him." Rev 22:3.

The word "servants" reflects a Greek word that is not the usual word for servant or slave.

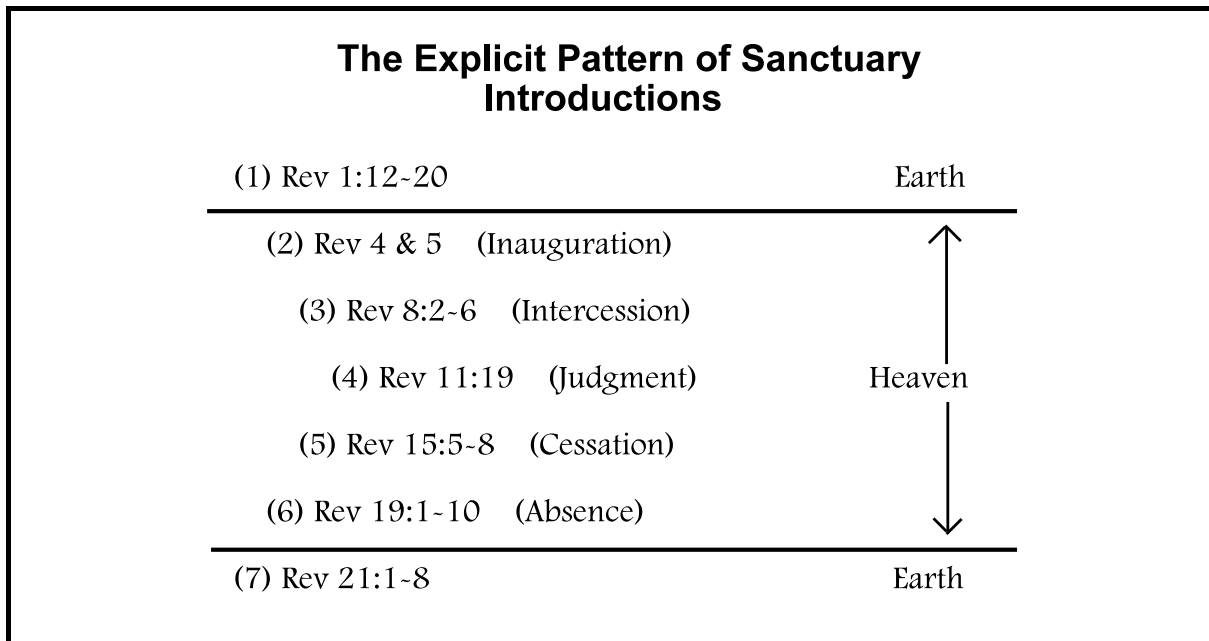
Instead it has to do with priestly, even sacrificial, service in the sanctuary. They will serve Him in the city that has become the eschatological temple.

In conclusion, we see that each of the seven visionary introductions in the book of Revelation have a theme related to the Sanctuary. These themes are listed below.

The Meaning of the Sanctuary Introductions	
Introduction	Meaning
1) 1:12-20	1) Church = Temple
2) 4:1-5:14	2) Inauguration
3) 8:2-6	3) Intercession
4) 11:19	4) Judgment
5) 15:5-8	5) De-Inauguration
6) 19:1-10	6) Absence
7) 21:1-8	7) City = Temple

As we examine these themes as a whole, it becomes apparent that there is a complete cycle moving from the earthly temple in chapter 1 (the seven churches) to the earthly temple

in chapters 21-22 (the New Jerusalem). On the next chart below, an earth-heaven-earth pattern can be observed. When the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven, the heavenly sanctuary returns to earth (Rev 21:2-3). The New Jerusalem on earth is the chiasmic counterpart to the scene of Jesus among the lampstands in chapter 1. In both cases the scene takes place on earth. But scenes 2-6--the five sanctuary introductions in the middle of the book--are all in heaven and related to the heavenly sanctuary.



Here's the point I want you to notice in particular: Taken together, ***Sanctuary Introductions two through six present a complete history of the heavenly sanctuary throughout the Christian era.*** The sanctuary begins its function with an inauguration ceremony. That history continues with a phase of intercession, followed by judgment, abandonment, and eventually absence. Through the Christian era, the sanctuary is established, goes through its phases of intercession and judgment, then closes its work and is no longer

needed in the New Jerusalem. So the Sanctuary Introductions of Revelation provide a beautiful picture of the role of the heavenly sanctuary throughout the Christian era of earth's history.

It is interesting how much of the book of Revelation is dependent on the sanctuary and how the sanctuary even helps to structure the book. The sanctuary imagery of the book of Revelation seems to be purposefully chosen rather than randomly placed.

Conclusion

The book of Revelation is challenging and difficult, but its deep things begin to open up when we apply the author's own strategies to gain an insight into the book's meaning and purpose. So with regard to structure, careful attention to detail in Revelation helps one unpack the book and see things that would otherwise be missed. In the structure of Revelation are many clues by which the author has sought to reveal his meaning. As we observe these special features of the book of Revelation, we gain a clearer understanding of what is happening in the book.

In the next chapter, we will turn to another major key to discovering the "deep things of God" in this book, the way the book's authors allude to the Old Testament and build on its symbolism. Discovering the Old Testament background to passages in Revelation opens up a whole new dimension of understanding.