

**The Structure of the Apocalypse**

by

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## INTRODUCTION

Despite the objections of some,<sup>1</sup> it seems probable that the Apostle John intended and applied a structure to his most unusual work, the Apocalypse. His intentional and articulate linguistic style seems to imply a deliberate intent and technique.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, using suitable scholastic measures, one would assume that the structure conceivably could be recovered. Unfortunately, such a reconstruction has been elusive at best. The Apocalypse's internal complexity and maze of symbols have rendered definitive statements and schematics all but useless.

This is not to say, however, that Revelation cannot be segmented according to chapter and verse. In fact, there is little difficulty in segmenting the book of Revelation into chapter and verse divisions applying pithy summary statements to each segment.<sup>3</sup> The difficulty arises in analyzing this bizarre structure into a conceptual outline.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Heinrich Kraft, *Die Offenbarung Des Johannes*, Handbuch Zum Neuen Testament. 16a (Tübingen: Mohr, 1974), 14-15. Kraft suggests that John had no specific outline or structure in mind. Instead, the Apocalypse represents the narrative of his vision(s) with no underlying substructure.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation*, ed. Leon Morris, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 23. Morris tips his hand clearly in favor of definitive structure with the comments "It is important to realize that John is an artist in words." Furthermore, "We must not think of (the Apocalypse) as a kind intellectual puzzle sent to a relaxed church with time on its hands and an inclination for solving mysteries. It was sent to a little, persecuted, frustrated church, one which did not know what to make of the situation in which it found itself."

<sup>3</sup> According to UBS 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, there are thirty-six subheadings.

<sup>4</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, ed. Ralph P. Martin, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 52a (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), xci. Aune continues by suggesting that the highly exceptional structure of the Apocalypse demonstrates a period of development. Rather than considering the document to be one composed all at once, he suggests a time period of days, weeks or even months and a series of

Thus, the question remains: what, if any, was the organizing principle of the Apostle John for the Apocalypse?

Some scholars have suggested a literary structure for the Apocalypse, claiming only a wholistic approach to the document can yield fruitful results. Thus,

Some scholars have sought more intrinsic approaches, seeking to analyze the patterns of John's writing. Whether by summarizing earlier thoughts or themes or by the use of a numeric structure, the Apostle was using a complex maze to allow entrance into the meaning of the structure.

Some have desirously sought an eschatological structural outline by which to map a calendar of days, marking time until the return of Christ and the cataclysmic end of the world. However, is it necessary to demand a specific chronological approach? Perhaps western readers should bear in mind the western obsession with precision of chronology.

Thus, an analysis of the Apocalypse's structure demands a great deal of flexibility and adaptability in usage due to the complexity of the arguments and the invariable overlap. Furthermore, any discussion of the structure of the Apocalypse does not lend itself well to structure due to the complexity of arguments and the tenuous nature of the suggestions offered. However, the outline employed here attempts to delineate between those arguments that seek to ascertain structure based on the literary arrangement of the Apocalypse, such as an arrangement theory versus those that seek to employ a technical arrangement such as a thematic theory.

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visions with time for reflection and inspiration thus accounting for the variety of forms and styles.

## CHAPTER ONE

### LITERARY ATTEMPTS AT THE STRUCTURE OF THE APOCALYPSE

Analyzing the structure of Revelation centers on what one considers the major divisions and sections. Since this is a matter of considerable debate, there is little unanimity regarding this issue. While there are some sections that enjoy relative unanimity, such as a prologue and an epilogue, even among these can one find questions. This much is clear: the Apostle John unified a highly diverse work into a cohesive whole. Thus, while scholars of the last twenty centuries have sought to separate the book into digestible portions, the author reveled in the diversity of the book, using its variance as a tool. However, even in the midst of its divergence, the Apostle John provides linguistic clues as to possible divisions of the Revelation.

#### *The Six-fold Structure*

J. M. Ford offers a six-fold structural proposal for the Apocalypse.<sup>5</sup> Inherent in this theory is Ford's contention for a multiple authorship or at least an editor.<sup>6</sup> It is her contention that John the Baptist is responsible for Rev 4-11 based on the similar themes between the message of the Baptist and the Apocalypse such as the Lamb (John 1:29, 36 and Rev. 5:6 *et al.*).<sup>7</sup> A second author, perhaps a "disciple of John the Baptist,"<sup>8</sup> added chapters 12-22 although she does not give solid reasoning as to the separation. A third author, perhaps earlier than the

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<sup>5</sup> J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 14-17.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 46. Ford states "So masterfully is the text arranged that one cannot doubt the work of an editor."

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-33.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

second author, added chapter 1-3. This contention of authorship is an integral component of her view of structure since she must maintain consistency.

Flowing, thus, from her view of authorship, she divides the Apocalypse into six sections. According to her view, she selects the number six, despite the Apostle's obvious penchant for seven, in order to balance the sections and thereby not requiring the invention of a seventh one.<sup>9</sup> The outline for her proposal is:

Series One: A Sextet

- (1) The white horse - 6:1-2
- (2) The red horse - 6:3-4
- (3) The black horse - 6:5-6
- (4) The yellowish-green horse - 6:7-8
- (5) The souls under the altar - 6:9-11
- (6) The earthquake - 6:12-17

Series Two: A Sextet

1. The earth is set on fire - 8:7
2. The sea is turned to blood - 8:8-9
3. The rivers and springs become bitter - 8:10-11
4. The heavenly bodies are dimmed - 8:12
5. The locusts - 9:1-12
6. The horsemen - 9:13-11:14

Series Three: A Sextet

1. The woman with child - 12:1-2
2. The dragon - 12:3-6
3. The beast rising from the sea - 13:1-10
4. The beast rising from the earth 13:11-18
5. The Lamb and the virgins - 14:1-5
6. The seven angels, counting one like a son of man -14:6-20

Series Four: A Septet

1. The bowl of the earth - 16:2
2. The bowl of the sea - 16:3
3. The bowl of the waters - 16:4-7
4. The bowl of the sun - 16:8-9
5. The bowl of the throne of the beast - 16:10-11
6. The bowl of the Euphrates - 16:12-16
7. The bowl of the air - 16:17-21

Series Five: A Sextet

1. The description of Babylon - 17:1-6

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 13.

2. The explanation of Babylon - 17:7-18
3. The fall of Babylon - 18:1-8
4. The mourning for Babylon - 18:9-20
5. The final ruin of Babylon - 18:21-24
6. The song of praise at her fall and the marriage of the Lamb - 19:1-10

Series Six: A Sextet

1. The rider on the white horse - 19:11-16
2. The supper of God - 19:17-18
3. The capture of the two beasts - 19:19-21
4. The angel of the abyss - 20:1-3
5. The first resurrection - 20:4-10
6. The judgment scene - 20:11-15<sup>10</sup>

The strength of Ford's argument lies in her willingness to not force the Apocalypse into seven sections. She willingly uses a six-fold structure rather than demanding a seventh. Furthermore, her suggestions as to the identity of John is insightful. The parallels between the Apostle John and John the Baptist are evidenced in the similar themes used by each.

However, the weight of church history stands opposed to a non-Apostolic origin of the Apocalypse. Some of the strongest manuscript evidence<sup>11</sup> as well as the church fathers support the Apostle John as the author of the Apocalypse.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, to deny Ford on the issue of authorship is to deny her a critical issue for her argument. Furthermore, she drops Rev. 7:1-8:6 and 12:7-17 from her schematic without explanation. She also decries Rev. 21:1-22:5 as "not part of the original text"<sup>13</sup> and thus not part of the final outline.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>11</sup> Both  $\aleph$  and A affirm the title Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰωάννη.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Bruce Manning Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).; F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988).

<sup>13</sup> This contention was most interesting since neither UBS 4<sup>th</sup> edition or NA27 indicate any sort of large scale textual difficulty.

<sup>14</sup> Ford, 50.

In conclusion, if one accepts the argument that the Apocalypse had an oral background, Ford's theory of a six-fold divisions is mute.<sup>15</sup>

### *The Four Visions*

Some scholars have suggested outlining the Apocalypse according to the four visions contained within.<sup>16</sup> Based on the four visionary visits to the Apostle John, this outline focuses on the visits as the organizing principle for the Apocalypse. Thus, the outline:

- (1) The First Vision - the Churches - 1:9-3:22
- (2) The Second Vision - the judgements - 4:1-16:21
- (3) The Third Vision - The Characters of Judgement - 17:1-21:8
- (4) The Fourth Vision - The Heavenly Jerusalem - 21:9-22:5.<sup>17</sup>

This theory emphasizes the progressive pattern of the Apocalypse with each vision transpiring sequentially or chronologically after the last. However, this theory does not account for some of the apparently intentional patterns the Apostle uses in writings, such as the repetition of certain themes in more than one vision.

### *The Poetic Theory*

In this concept, the Apostle John does not focus on structure or literary schematics when writing the Apocalypse. Although he employs numbers and repetition, they are not his primary concern. Rather, his concern is for the poetic flow of the document with a recurring theme of coming judgement and redemption of those in Christ.<sup>18</sup>

While this theory allows for the poetic nature of the Apocalypse to have its most complete extent, it fails to account for the apparent purposefulness of John's writing. Thus, as attractive as this theory may be for explaining

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<sup>15</sup> Barr, 243.

<sup>16</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 14-17.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Kiddle and M. K. Ross, *The Revelation of St. John*, *The Moffatt New Testament Commentary*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), xxvii.

the apparent dearth of structure, it is insufficient for explaining the structure that is unmistakable.

### *The Chiastic Structure*

K. Strand suggests a chiastic literary structure for the Apocalypse.<sup>19</sup> Strand uses a literary critical argument to structure the Apocalypse (albeit with a disclaimer).<sup>20</sup> The argument centers on the contention that the Apostle John was influenced by the Hebrew literature and, thereby, wrote in accordance with familiar literary structure. Strand, therefore, divides the Apocalypse into two major sections. The first section is the church militant referring to the historical portion of the Apocalypse.<sup>21</sup> The second section is the church triumphant implying the eschatological perspective of the Apocalypse.<sup>22</sup> These sections parallel one another with remarkable similarities, such as the Throne Room/Seven Seals section (4:1-8:1) as compared with 19:1-21:4 where the throne, twenty-four elders and the four Living Creatures praising God appear.

Correctly, Strand warns against interpreting the Apocalypse from a strictly historical perspective or an entirely eschatological perspective since either option does violence to the intended purpose of other portion. By employing this argument, Strand contends for a balanced proposal, emphasizing the present tense reality of God's

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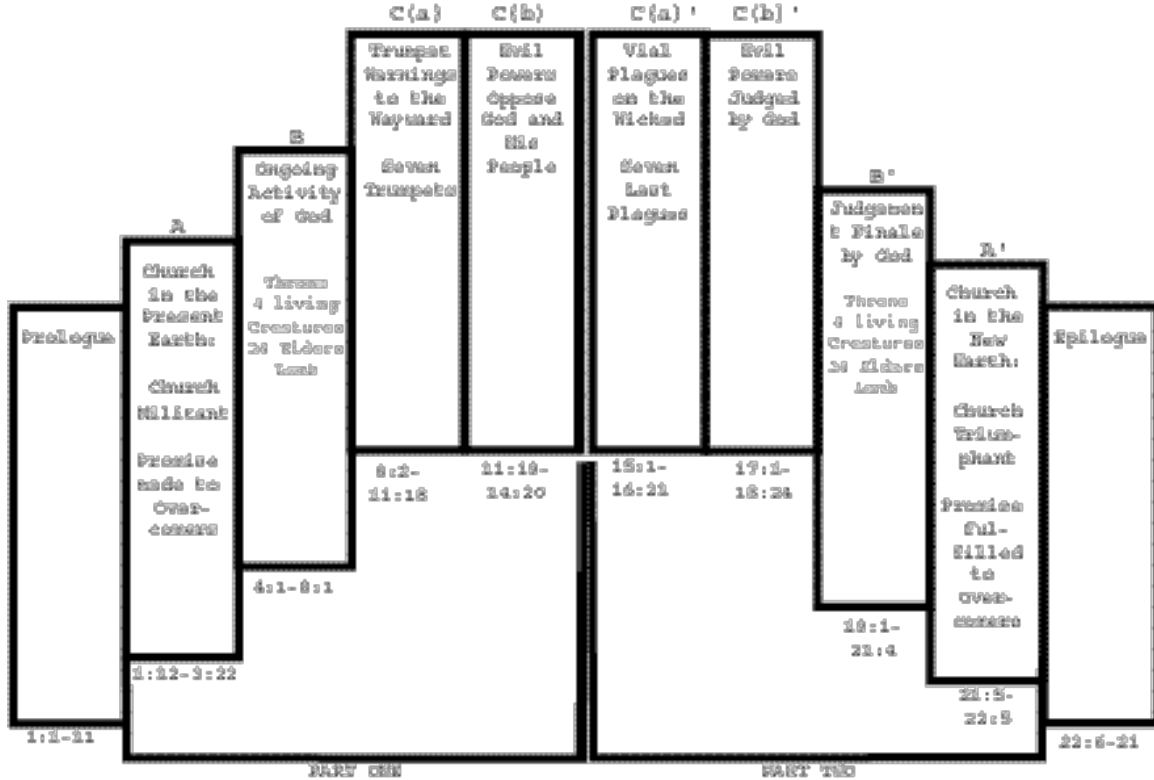
<sup>19</sup> Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation: Hermeneutical Guidelines with a Brief Introduction to Literary Analysis* (Worthington, OH: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1976). Cf. Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 4. Bauckham suggests a similar idea in paralleling the passages of 17:1-19:10 and 21:9-22:9. In fact, he goes so far as to say "it is astonishing" so many attempts at structure have overlooked the possibility of these as parallels. Cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation--Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 159-180.

<sup>20</sup> Strand, 52. At the bottom of the page on his structural diagram, Strand includes the disclaimer "The exact divisions of the text are somewhat tenable."

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

power on this earth as well as the future tense reality of the coming Kingdom of God.



The weakness of Strand's argument, however, lies in the disclaimers he presents. "We must not expect every individual item in the first part to be historical and every individual item in the last part to be eschatological."<sup>23</sup> Although this is an appropriate cession, it leaves Strand open for mitigation from the beginning.

For example, the sixth seal in Rev. 6, out of the "historical" section, seems to be more eschatological in nature than historical.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, if one follows Strand in dividing the Apocalypse between chapters 14 and 15, one must be prepared to divide what appears to be literary unit introducing the coming bowl judgements in chapters 12-15. Thus, while this division makes a convenient chiasmic structure, this proposal has definitive weaknesses.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>24</sup> John Andrew McLean, *The Seventieth Week of Daniel 9:27 as a Literary Key for Understanding the Structure of the Apocalypse of John*, ed. Mellen Biblical Press Series (Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1996), 250.

### *Symbolism Theory*

The symbolism theory seeks to analyze the structure of the Apocalypse according to the symbols and symbolic language used. From the symbolic and varied use of the number seven to the use and application of Jewish liturgy, these symbols provide insight into the organizational principles of the Apocalypse.<sup>25</sup> This argument also encompasses an appreciation for the use of symbols in other apocalyptic type writings, such as *1 Enoch* and *2 Baruch*. Thus, for Farrer, structure appears:

1. Seven Messages - 1-3
2. Seven Seals - 4-7
3. Seven Trumpets - 8:2-11:14
4. Seven Unnumbered visions - 11:15-14:20
5. Seven Bowls - 15-18
6. Seven Unnumbered Visions - 19-22<sup>26</sup>

The difficulty with this view lies in the name itself. Because these are symbols, they are open to interpretation. Thus,

### *Patchwork Theory*

This theory hinges on the acceptance of a multiple sources and authorship or at least a multiple editorship. The author / editor (or authors) pieced the work of the Apocalypse together from a multitude of sources, welding them together in such a way as to render structure a mute question. Thus, it is pointless to examine the Apocalypse for a line of reasoning or for the development of thought since he (or they) have been so deeply influenced by their sources to allow for such questions.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Austin Marsden Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse* (Westminster [London]: Dacre Press, 1949), 40.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 45. Cf. Austin Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

<sup>27</sup> James Moffatt, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Expositors Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 292-293. Moffatt states "The Apocalypse was originally Johannine, but endured editorial additions." Cf. James Moffatt, *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* (Edinburgh,: T. & T. Clark, 1918), 485-488.

A related theory relies upon the principles of intrinsic probability in the field of textual criticism. Founded and popularized by John Oman, this theory cites the structure of the Apocalypse to a later editor and not to the Apostle. Thus, when the author wrote the text, accidental changes were made. The editor rearranged them to the order which seemed best to him.<sup>28</sup> The text, when properly arranged, falls neatly into sections of thirty-three lines each, approximately the length of one papyrus sheet.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, R. H. Charles suggests a much more nefarious view of editorial work. He suggests the later redactor of the Apocalypse either was "stupid" or "morally culpable" in allowing interpolations into the text.<sup>30</sup> As a result of this view, Charles suggested a sequentially chronological pattern for the visions of the seer thus overcoming the difficulty of repetition of prophecy.<sup>31</sup>

#### *Paschal Liturgy Structure*

This structural theory centers on the Apocalypse as a liturgical document intended for use in a worship service. This view is perhaps the most fascinating simply because of its uniqueness. Although admittedly not based solely on scripture,<sup>32</sup> this view centers on the integral role of the

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<sup>28</sup> John Oman, *Book of Revelation : Theory of the Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), 135. Cf. John Oman, *The Text of Revelation; a Revised Theory* (Cambridge: The University press, 1928), 94.

<sup>29</sup> Oman, *Revelation: Theory*. The resultant view of Oman is a radically different structure of the Apocalypse. Please see Appendix One for that structure.

<sup>30</sup> R. H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1913), 1ff.

<sup>31</sup> Donald A. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 972.

<sup>32</sup> Massey H. Shephard Jr., *The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse* (Richmond, VA.: John Knox Press, 1960), 79. "We readily admit that it would be very difficult if not impossible to construct from the Apocalypse an order of Paschal celebration, if we didn't have the outline of such an order in the Apostolic tradition of Hippolytus, a work composed about a century later than Revelation."

Apocalypse in the life of the early church. Partially founded in the use of Hallel Psalms (113-118) in Revelation 19, the proponents of this worked bi-directionally from 19 reconstructing the balance of the components in terms of an ancient liturgical service.<sup>33</sup>

Specifically, chapters 1-3 represent the scrutinies imposed upon catechumens before baptism. Chapters 4-6 represent the vigil preparing one for the paschal observation. Chapter 7 represents baptism or initiation into the community of faith through the washing of the flesh by water, sealing of the faithful and the wearing of white clothes. Chapters 8-19 represent the Synaxis of the service including scripture readings, psalms, a sermon and prayer time. Finally, chapters 19-22 represent the Eucharist and the hope for the future that it possesses.<sup>34</sup>

The true strength of this view is its emphasis on the unity of the Apocalypse and its logical sequencing.<sup>35</sup> It allows the Apocalypse to stand as a unified whole and employed in the early church. Furthermore,

Concern, however, is clearly appropriate since one is required to accept an early Christian tradition in order to espouse this view.

#### *Revelation as a Divine Drama*

Alternatively, Bowman suggests that the structure of the Apocalypse is a "divine drama".<sup>36</sup> Segmented into seven acts with seven scenes each, this drama represents the cosmology of the present universe and eschatology without a necessarily chronological sense.

#### *Revelation as an Aural Document*

Barr suggests the Apocalypse's structure is rooted in its origins as an oral presentation. According to this view, the Apocalypse was originally transcribed from an oral presentation into its present form, thus accounting for its unique and highly unusual style and flow of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 80-84.

<sup>35</sup> Guthrie, 974.

<sup>36</sup> John Wick Bowman, "The Revelation of John: Its Dramatic Structure and Message," *Interpretation* 9 (1955), 440.

argument.<sup>37</sup> It contains features, which suggests its oral substructure. As examples of the aural nature of Revelation, Barr suggests that repetition of the number seven and the recapitulation of crucial concepts could be interpreted as oral markers to the hearer for didactic or reinforcement purposes.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> David L. Barr, "The Apocalypse of John as Oral Enactment," *Interpretation* 40 (1986), 243. "The original audience encountered (Apoc) as an aural experience (1:3) and that experience determined both the way the Apoc. was structured and the meaning the auditors found in it." Likewise, see M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier and James Luther Mays, *Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), vii. Boring states distinctly "Revelation was designed to be read aloud, heard all at once in the context of worship. This is not optional."

<sup>38</sup> Barr, 254.

## CHAPTER TWO

### TECHINICAL STRUCTURE POSSIBILITIES FOR THE APOCALYPSE

The structure of the Apocalypse is not a strictly literary structure. There is some question as to rectitude of seeking structure from either of these groups since it is not clear that the Apostle intended any meaning behind them.<sup>39</sup> However, in some cases, such a conclusion is hard to avoid.

#### Repetition and Variation of Phrases

##### *The Recapitulation Theory*

Recapitulation is "a plot line that recurs throughout the central section of a book."<sup>40</sup> This theory states that later sections of the Apocalypse recapitulate the arguments of the earlier passages.<sup>41</sup> Thus, these recapitulations provide a "complex network of textual cross reference which helps to created and expand the meaning of any one passage by giving it specific relationships to many other passages."<sup>42</sup> This technique may have been employed as an

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<sup>39</sup> Aune, xcv. Aune states "The chief interpretive problem is whether the consequences of the opening of the Seven seals, the blowing of the seven trumpets and the pouring out of the seven bowls represent imaginative descriptions of essentially the same eschatological events described in different ways (the recapitulation theory) or they should be understood as present the linear unfolding of an eschatological scenario culminating in the dénouement of the new Jerusalem."

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., xcii.

<sup>41</sup> Joachim of Fiore (c.AD 1135-1202) is credited with the origin of this concept. See Arthur W. Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse: Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 51.

<sup>42</sup> Bauckham, 22.

oral marker for understanding's sake<sup>43</sup> or it may have been the recurrence of a plot line.<sup>44</sup>

As an example of the recapitulation theory, the plagues from the seven trumpets (ch. 8) and the series of the seven bowls (ch. 15) share similarities in the number of angels and their destructive themes. Therefore, it is possible to interpret the second pair of these three visions as recapitulating the first featuring the power of the angelic force and the destruction of those outside of the Kingdom of God. In similar fashion, the idea of the triumph of the Lamb is seen repeatedly throughout the Apocalypse.

The dilemma with recapitulation theory, however, lies in defining recapitulation and consistently maintaining that definition throughout Revelation.<sup>45</sup> Whereas some issues are overtly recapitulated, such as destruction and victory of the redeemed, other issues are given little if any attention, such as the introductory phrase καὶ εἶδον used repeatedly by the Apostle.<sup>46</sup> Inexplicably, this phrase garners little if any attention yet this phrase usually implies a temporal aspect.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, if the author had intended to recapitulate his ideas and concepts, certainly he would

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 23. Cf. Guthrie, 969.

<sup>44</sup> Charles Homer Giblin, "Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Theology of Revelation 16-22," *Biblica* 55 (1974), 488. Giblin asserts that there is a singular plot line in the Apocalypse containing a beginning (4:1-8:6) a middle (8:7-15:8) and an end (16:1-22:11).

<sup>45</sup> Aune, xcii.

<sup>46</sup> This phrase is used more than thirty times by the Apostle John. Rev. 5:1, 2, 6, 11; 6:1, 2, 5, 8, 12; 7:2; 8:2, 13; 9:1; 10:1; 13:1, 11; 14:1, 6, 14; 15:1, 2; 16:13; 17:3, 6; 19:11, 17; 20:1, 4, 11, 12; 21:1.

<sup>47</sup> A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 1215. Robertson notes εἶδον as a 2 Aorist a completed sense to the thought, thus a temporal nature to it. Cf. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Fredrick W. Danker, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, Third ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 220.

have made such a desire clear. This theory lacks "any clear formal literary indications of its presence".<sup>48</sup> The Apocalypse, however, represents a style of literature known to literary critics as "homodiegetic" narrative.<sup>49</sup> The Apostle John was present only as a bystander and not as an active participant within the events. Therefore, his role is to describe that which he saw, not disseminate his understanding of the visions into segmented recapitulations. The Apostle's desire is to discuss an eschatological understanding in a somewhat chronological sequence.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, as attractive as the recapitulation theory may appear, it is not necessarily the best structural option.

### *The Combat Myth*

A. Y. Collins has popularized a view of the Apocalypse's structure. Her contention revolves around the founding of the Apocalypse on a "repeated pattern which moves from visions of persecution/threat to those of salvation/history."<sup>51</sup> Thus, Collins contends for the belief that the Apocalypse is primarily concerned with the "confrontation between the followers of Jesus and the Roman Empire"<sup>52</sup> When this understanding is combined with a renewed awareness of the overwhelming influence of the combat myths of other nations and ethnic groups, the "combat motif" of the Apocalypse allows understanding into the structural question. The link between the other myths and writings with the Apostle's Apocalypse begins at Rev. 12, which Collins ascribes as the center-point for the entire writing of the Apocalypse.

Themes are repeated or recapitulated for the purpose of emphasizing the combat motif of the Apocalypse. These themes include threat, theophany of the Divine Warrior, victory shout, combat and victory, salvation, and fertility

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<sup>48</sup> Aune, xciii.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Adela Yarbo Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), xv.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., xi.

of the restored order.<sup>53</sup> These themes are connected by a series of interlocking patterns.<sup>54</sup> One example of these interlocking patterns is the intimate connection between Rev. 1, 5, and 10. For Collins, these three chapters stand as parallels and thereby form an interlocked pattern by which she connects them into a cohesive whole.

Accepting the prologue and the epilogue, Collin's argues that the Apocalypse is divided into two major sections.<sup>55</sup> Her argument is based on two main arguments. First, the parallels between the commissioning of the seer in Rev. 1:9-3:22 and his secondary commissioning in Rev 10 provide the consistency of the first section. Without the two commissionings, the seer's writings would be on the same level as any other apocalyptic writing. Second, the similar parallels as well as the contrasts between the scrolls of Rev. 5 and Rev. 10. These parallels provide sufficient similarities to tie them together, such as the heavenly scrolls handed over to a divine being and the emphasis on the numeric significance of seven. Thus, it is at least conceivable to use these two chapters as a basis for structure.

The resultant structure for Collin's Apocalypse is:

1. The Seven Seals (6:1-8:5)
2. The Seven Trumpets (8:2-11:19)
3. Seven Unnumbered Visions (12:1-15:4)
4. The Seven Bowls (15:1-16:21) with the Babylon Appendix (17:-19:10)
5. Seven Unnumbered Visions (19:11-21:8) with the Jerusalem Appendix (21:9-22:5).

Collin's contribution to the structure of the Apocalypse is significant due to the connection she draws in the combat motif. Furthermore, her detailed and specific interest and examination of Rev. 12 are one of this view's strongest assets.

Problematic, however, in Collin's view are the two groups of unnumbered visions. The number seven has a prominent role in the life of the Apocalypse. However, not every aspect of the Apocalypse must fit into a heptad

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 57-83.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>55</sup> The first section is 1:19-11:19. The second section is 12:1-22:5.

pattern. Therefore, this portion of Collin's view ought to be eschewed.

Moreover, The larger difficulty arrives at Collin's contention for Rev. 12 as the center-point for the Apocalypse. In order to accept this, one has to break what appears to be a standard literary unit of Rev. 11-13. While Rev. 11 could be segmented from this unit, it seems difficult to divide chapters 12 and 13. Therefore, while this view

### *The Encompassing Technique*

J. Lambrecht suggests the development of the Apocalypse represents an "encompassing technique."<sup>56</sup> Through this technique, the Apocalypse combines recapitulation and progressive judgement.<sup>57</sup> For Lambrecht, recapitulation in the Apocalypse is a repetition "manifesting an increasing intensification from seals to trumpets to bowls."<sup>58</sup> Thus, the seals contain all that follow them and the trumpets contain all that follow them with the bowls closing the judgement of God.<sup>59</sup>

Lambrecht suggests three intercalations<sup>60</sup> appear in the Apocalypse (7:1-17; 10:1-11, 13; 12:1-14:20). These intercalations reflects "careful consideration" of the punitive issues involved, to give attention and encouragement to persecuted Christians and to justify the punitive justice of God. Therefore, Lambrecht offers a solution based on these three intercalations reflecting these themes and the recapitulated intensification of the

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<sup>56</sup> Jan Lambrecht and George Raymond Beasley-Murray, "The Structuration of Revelation 4:1-22:5," in *L'apocalypse Johannique Et L'apocalyptique Dans Le Nouveau Testament* (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1980), 79, 103.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>58</sup> McLean, 260.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Lambrecht and Beasley-Murray, 95-99. An intercalation, according to Lambrecht, are "carefully placed interludes that prepare the reader for further progressive movement in the development of the literature."

judgement of God. Following the prologue of Rev. 1-3, Lambrecht's constructs his outline as such:

- A1 4-5 The Introductory Vision of the Scroll
  - (1) 4 The one sitting on the Throne
  - (2) 5 The Lamb taking the scroll sealed with seven seals
- B1 6-7 First Six Seals
  - (1) 6:1-17 - The First Six Seals
  - (2) Intercalation - Those sealed on earth: Martyrs in Heaven
- C1 8:1-22:5 Seventh Seal and Trumpets
  - (A2) 8:1-6 - Introduction
  - (B2) 8:7-11:14 - First Six Trumpets
    - 1. First four trumpets
    - 2. Intercalation - 10:1-11, 13. The little open scroll and the two witnesses.
  - (C2) 11:15-22:5 - Seventh Trumpet and Bowls
  - (A3) 11:16-1 - Introduction
    - 1. 11:15-19 - Seventh Trumpet - intercalation:12, Woman and child and Dragon-Satan.
    - 2. 15:1 - Seven angels with Seven plagues
    - 3. 15:2-4 - Song with the Victorious
    - 4. 16:1 - The angels are order to pour out the bowls.
  - (B3) 16:2-16 - The First Six Bowls
    - Intercalation from ch. 12-14
  - (C3) 16:17-22:5 - Seventh Bowl and Completion

For Lambrecht, A1, A2 and A3 represent the introduction to the three major judgements. B1, B2 and B3 represent the major judgements and C1, C2 and C3 are the final, climactic portions of those judgements. Therefore, a pattern of intercalation rises, thus further reinforcing his view of structure. The intercalations each appear before the concluding portion of that subset. Thus, an intercalation appears in B1, B2 and B3, each preceding the cataclysmic conclusion of the judgement.

Contrary to the patchwork theory, Lambrecht maintains that the Apocalypse stands as coherent work, albeit the work contains traditions from other apocalyptic writers and writings.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, Lambrecht contends that recapitulation stands as a progression marker in and of itself.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, the structure of the Apocalypse is a chronological document, although not strictly so.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 103.

Lambrecht's view does well in recognizing the sequential ordering and logical consistency. Furthermore, it takes essential steps in solidifying recapitulation. However, are all of these intercalations necessary for his argument? Although the three intercalations make for connective symmetry, one must question as to their flow, specifically of B3.

*Paired Angelic Revelation*

When paralleled, Revelation 17:1-19:10 and 21:9-22 present an unusual structure distinct from the balance of the book. The similarities in these passages are striking.

**Rev 17:1 - 19:10**

17:1 - Καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ  
Then came one of the seven

ἀγγέλων τῶν ἐχόντων τὰς ἑπτὰ  
angels with the seven

φιάλας  
bowls

καὶ ἐλάλησεν μετ' ἐμοῦ λέγων  
and spoke with me saying

δεῦρο, δεῖξω σοι  
Come, I will show you

17:3 - καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν με  
He then transported me

ἐν πνεύματι  
in spirit

19:9b - καὶ λέγει μοι  
Then he said to me

οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι ἀληθινοὶ  
These are the true words

19:10 - καὶ ἔπεσα ἔμπροσθεν  
Then I fell before. . .

**Rev 21:9 - 22:9**

22:1 - Καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ  
Then came one of the seven

ἀγγέλων τῶν ἐχόντων τὰς ἑπτὰ  
angels with the seven

φιάλας τῶν γεμόντων τῶν ἑπτὰ  
bowls full of the seven

πληγῶν τῶν ἐσχάτων  
last plagues

καὶ ἐλάλησεν μετ' ἐμοῦ λέγων  
and spoke with me saying

δεῦρο, δεῖξω σοι  
Come, I will show you

21:10- καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν με  
He then transported me

ἐν πνεύματι  
in spirit

22:6 - καὶ λέγει μοι  
Then he said to me

οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοί.  
These words are trustworthy  
and true. . .

22:8 - ἔπεσα προσκυνῆσαι  
ἔμπροσθεν  
I fell to worship before. .  
19:10 - τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ  
his feet

καὶ λέγει μοι ὄρα μή  
and he said to me "Don't do  
that!"

σύνδουλός σου εἰμι  
I am a fellow-servant with  
you

καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου τῶν ἐχόντων  
and your brothers who  
maintain

τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ  
the testimony of Jesus.

τῷ θεῷ προσκύνησον.

Therefore, perhaps the author's purpose in doing so was to emphasize the unique nature of these revelations. Thus, the author departs from his normal pattern(s) and links several smaller passages together to create a unified whole.<sup>63</sup>

Worship God!

22:8 - τῶν ποδῶν τοῦ ἀγγέλου  
the feet of the angel

22:9 - καὶ λέγει μοι ὄρα μή  
and he said to me "Don't do  
that!"

σύνδουλός σου εἰμι  
I am a fellow-servant with  
you

καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου τῶν  
προφητῶν  
and the your brothers the  
prophets.

τῷ θεῷ προσκύνησον.  
Worship God!

### *Heavenly Throne-Room Scenes*

The flow of Revelation's narrative has several throne-room scenes dominating the landscape. In Rev. 4:1-5:14, the longest of these scenes demonstrates this influence. Six other scenes include 7:9-17; 8:1-4; 11:15-18; 14:1-5; 15:2-8; 19:1-10 as throne-room scenes. These episodes can provide a potential structure from which one could base an outline for the book of Revelation. Most significant in these scenes are the hymns and hymnic fragments. These fragments provide a "literary context"<sup>64</sup> for the commentary accompanying them. They provide insight into the narrative concepts and

### *Unusual Vocabulary as a Matter of Structure*

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<sup>63</sup> Aune, xcvi.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., xcvi.

One of the distinguishing marks of Revelation is the exceptional vocabulary employed by John. Some have suggested that the apocalyptic subject matter required the use of specialized terms. In fact, out of every eight words used by John in the Apocalypse, one word is used by no other New Testament writer.<sup>65</sup> Such diversity of language represents the distinctive manner and subject matter about which John writes.

As well as exceptional vocabulary, another mark of structure is found in the use of certain phrases as structural markers. These words or phrases surface at transitional points, perhaps a further indication of an oral background for the Apocalypse. The best example of these phrases is ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι (1:10). Appearing again in 4:2, 17:3 and 21:10, this phrase could stand in favor of the Four visions theory of structure as well as the oral background of the Apocalypse.<sup>66</sup>

### Numerical Composition

#### *The Series of Sevens*

For reasons unexplained, the author of Revelation was enamored with the symbolic significance of numbers, specifically the number seven.<sup>67</sup> The number seven appears fifty-four times in the Apocalypse, the repeated use of the number signifying the Apostle John's affinity for its use.<sup>68</sup> There are seven churches (1:4, 11, 20); seven spirits (1:4b); seven golden menorahs (1:12, 20; 2:1); seven stars (1:16; 20, 2:1; 3:1); seven flaming torches representing the seven spirits of God (3:1; 4:5; 5:6); the Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes (5:6); seven angels who stand before God (8:2); seven trumpets (8:6); the seven thunders

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<sup>65</sup> Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text with Introductions, Notes and Indices* (London: Macmillan, 1911), cvvi. Aune, ccvii-ccxi.

<sup>66</sup> Bauckham, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Lambrecht and Beasley-Murray, 79. Cf. Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung Des Johannes, Erklärt Von Ernst Lohmeyer*, Handbuch Zum Neuen Testament. 16 (Tubingen, : Mohr, 1970), 185.

<sup>68</sup> Ford, 46-49.

(10:3-4); seven bowls of wrath (15:7); and the great dragon with seven heads (12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 7, 9).<sup>69</sup> Thus, one could conceivably structure Revelation according to the sevens listed within the text.

It is possible that the Apostle John was influenced by the non-canonical works featuring the number seven.<sup>70</sup> Thus, some of the most highly complex part of the Apocalypse (6-16) is some of the most prominent use of the number seven.<sup>71</sup>

#### *Use of phrases numerically*

Whether accidental or intentional, the Apostle John uses certain words and phrases a specific number of times. In accordance with above suggestion that John used markers such as numbers to symbolize certain aspects of completion or incompleteness, perfection or imperfection. For example, John used the the phrase κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ,<sup>72</sup> seven times (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22). This phrase is exceptional for its use in the LXX as the Holy name for God. Thus, for the Apostle John, this is apparently equivalent to the Old Testament Yahweh Sabaoth. Is it a coincidence that the Apostle found usage for this phrase seven times and only seven times?<sup>73</sup>

The most important of these numerically employed phrases is the description of Christ as the ἀρνίον. Used by the Apostle twenty-eight times (seven times four), John employs the term seven times to directly link the ἀρνίον

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<sup>69</sup> So pervasive is the influence of the Apostle's use of the number seven that some have suggested he was more interested in form than function. Cf. Guthrie, 972.

<sup>70</sup> Examples of apocalyptic writings featuring the number seven is 4 *Ezra* and 2 *Baruch*. See Tom W. Willett, *Eschatology in the Theodicies of 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra*, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha. Supplement Series, 4 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1989), 80-95.

<sup>71</sup> Bauckham, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Bauer, 609. This phrase, according to Bauer, is used "only of God." Likewise, see Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), I.12.7.

<sup>73</sup> Bauckham, 33.

with God (5:13; 6:16; 7:10; 14:4; 21:22; 22:1, 3). Again, should this be interpreted as accidental or circumstantial? It would seem unlikely that John would use such an important idea incidentally.<sup>74</sup>

However, lest one think that every number in the Apocalypse is structurally significant, there are times when John seems to use words or phrases a specific amount of times without significance for the structure. For example, there are seven beatitudes in the Apocalypse (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). In spite of this precision in employment, John does not seem to apply an special importance to these.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 35. "There are far too many of these numeric patterns for them to be accidental." For another example, please see the Heavenly Throne-Room scenes above. Used seven times, these scenes provide insight into the presence of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 30. Bauckham states "These comprise a kind of summary of Revelation's message."

## CONCLUSION

No single structural option is sufficient to encompass the intricate structure of the Apocalypse. Each option demonstrates at least one fatal flaw. However, a fourth option for structure is available. It is conceivable to combine several of the suggested outlines and concepts and blend them into a composite whole useful for the study of the Apocalypse.

In the morass of suggestions, therefore, one can assert clearly that had John intended a specific or overt structure, certainly he would have made that clear.<sup>76</sup> If he had intended to ascertain a paralleling or chiastic structure, surely with his linguistic and grammatical prowess, he would have made his structure plain.

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<sup>76</sup> Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 32.

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