

Summary of Revelation¹

Overview

Review structural indices and the segments to which they lead us.

For each segment, observe its underlying message and the period of time that it describes.

When we stand back and look at these segments together, an overall pattern emerges that will enable us to synthesize the basic message of the book in just a few statements.

Structural Principles

The "Sevens": Churches (2-3), Seals (6-7), Trumpets (8-11), Bowls (15-16)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Sevens		c	c			s	s	s	t	t	t				b	b						

Each has a **setting**.

- Churches: Vision of Christ in ch. 1.
- Seals: Heavenly throneroom, ch. 4-5.
- Trumpets: Heavenly altar, 8:1-6
- Bowls: Inclusion from 15 reaches back to 11:15, thus encompassing 12-14.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Sevens			c	c		s	s	s	t	t	t	t			b	b						
Setting		c			s	s		t				b	b	b	b							

The settings of the last three of these all begin with a reference to the **thunders** of Sinai (4:5; 8:5; 11:19), augmented successively with earthquake (8:5; 11:19) and hail (11:19).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Sevens			c	c		s	s	s	t	t	t	t			b	b	b					
Setting		c			s	s		t				b	b	b	b							
Thunder+				x				x			x						x					

A fourth such reference (16:18-21) sets off the concluding chapters of the book, which have internal **chiastic** coherence. Also makes sense to consider end of 16 the setting for 17-22.

¹ April 1, 1995

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	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	
Sevens		c	c			s	s	s	t	t	t	t				b	b	b					
Setting		c			s	s		t				b	b	b	b		z						
Thunder+				x				x				x					x						
Chiasm																		z	z	z	z	z	z

That chiasm splits off 22:6ff, which has strong similarities to 1:1-3. 1:1-3 in turn is split off by the introductory formula in 1:4. These form the book's **prolog and epilog**.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22		
Sevens		c	c			s	s	s	t	t	t	t				b	b	b						
Setting		c			s	s		t				b	b	b	b		z							
Thunder+				x				x				x					x							
Chiasm																		z	z	z	z	z	z	
Prolog, Epilog	a																							a

Note that the seventh seal, trumpet, and bowl each introduce the next section. We will reckon them with what follows, though their place in the preceding series makes them strong transitions. This yields the following top-level divisions (note overlaps on seventh seal, trumpet, bowl)

- 1:1-3, Prolog
- 1:4-3:22, Letters to the Churches
- 4:1-7:17 (-8:6), Seals
- 8:1-11:14 (-11:19), Trumpets
- 11:15-16:17 (-16:21), Bowls
- 16:18-22:5, Victory of Christ over Antichrist
- 22:6-21, Epilog

Divisions, Themes, and Time Periods

Trace the time periods according to the Olivet Discourse (Matt)

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Reference in Matt	Name	Historical Period
24:4-12	Beginning of Sorrows	(first century)
(In Luke; not in Matt or Rev)	Days of Vengeance	(fall of Jerusalem to Titus)
24:14	Times of Gentiles	(our current period of history)
24:15-28	Great Tribulation ²	(personal Antichrist)
24:29-31	Return of Christ	
25:31-46	Judgment and Kingdom	

Prolog and Epilog: 1:1-3

The main purpose of these is to validate the message, not give historical details about eschatological events. They emphasize

- the truth and authority of what is presented;
- its nearness in time;
- the need for believers to be faithful.

1:4-3:22, Letters to the Churches³

Setting: 1:4-20, John addressed directly by the risen Lord Jesus, asserting his authority over the churches. This is the first of three similarly structured visions of Christ in the Revelation. (The others are in cc. 14, 19). There is a progression among them. In this one, he is encouraging, instructing, warning his people while they are on earth.

Body: ch. 2-3. Each one

- recalls some aspect of the Lord from ch. 1;
- emphasizes that he knows their sins and triumphs;
- threatens judgment to the sinful and promises blessing to those who overcome.

Time: first century. These were current assemblies in Asia Minor, named in order of their location around the main postal road.

Olivet Matt 24-25	(OT)	Beginning of Sorrows	Times of Gentiles	Great Tribulation	Second Coming	Day of the Lord	Kingdom
Churches 1-3		1-2					

Theme: The Lord is not ignorant of those who gather unto his name. He sees both the sins they think are secret, and the victories they think no one appreciates. He is sovereign over the church. Putting this first in the book emphasizes two points:

- He will care for us through the battle to be described in the coming chapters,

² Rosenthal argues persuasively that this term refers only to persecution of believers by the Antichrist, and God's judgments are the day of the Lord, which follows the return of Christ.

³ April 9

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- but we must answer to him for how we fight.

4:1-7:17, Seals

Setting: 4-5, the heavenly throne room.

- 4:2-8, the characters (participles)
- 4:9-11, the background ongoing activity (durative tenses)
- 5, a specific event (aorists): the search for someone worthy to open the book of God's judgments. Only the Lord Jesus, as the one who has provided salvation, is found worthy to open the book. Only the savior can be the judge.

Body: 6-7, the result of opening the successive chapters of the sealed book. Closely follows the order of events in the Olivet Discourse, (Matt. 24-25), but leaves out anything specific to the GT!

The first four correspond to Matt. 24:5-7, "the beginning of sorrows." False religions (spirit of Antichrist) and natural disasters that characterize the present age.

The fifth is martyrdom of believers, cf. Matt. 24:9-10. NB: This, and not God's judgments, is what the word "tribulation" refers to. Tribulation is what unbelievers do to believers; "judgment" is the revenge that God brings on the unbelievers. But nothing in this seal is particular to the GT; it has been true down through history.

The sixth is the return of Christ in judgment, cf. Matt. 24:29; 25:31-46. Note the separation between the wicked (6:15-17) and two groups of the righteous (7:1-8, the sealed Israelites protected on earth, and 7:9-17, the martyred of every nation, rejoicing in heaven). The preservation of this first group and the avenging of the second are major themes of the rest of the book.

Time: the entirety of the church age, down to the return of the Lord. Seal 6 applies to the GT but also to earlier history; skips over the Great Tribulation as a distinct period (though from Olivet it would appear to come between the fifth and sixth seals).

Olivet Matt 24-25	(OT)	Beginning of Sorrows	Times of Gentiles	Great Tribulation	Second Coming	Day of the Lord	Kingdom
Churches 1-3		1-2					
Seals 4-7		S1-S5			S6		

Theme: The Lord is sovereign not only in his church (ch. 1-3), but also in the wide world, in spite of the disasters that we see on every hand. They can occur only because he opens the seals. Nothing is out of his control.

8:1-11:14, Trumpets

Setting: 8:1-5, offering up the prayers of the saints from the golden altar. Recall the prayers and altar from the fifth seal (6:9-11). The trumpet judgments are presented as God's response to the martyrs' cry for judgment.

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Body: Seven judgments.

- Drawn from God's plagues on Egypt (9:23-25 hail and fire; 9:19-21 water to blood; 10:21-23 darkness; 10:4 locusts); shows that we are here dealing not with "natural catastrophes," but with deliberate judgment.
- Grouped into 4 (on natural aspects of the world) + 3 "woes" (on people directly).

Time: the period that Christ on Olivet calls "great tribulation," though that word focuses on what happens to believers. Except for the events of ch. 11 in the sixth trumpet, the events described here are judgments, not tribulations.

Olivet Matt 24-25	(OT)	Beginning of Sorrows	Times of Gentiles	Great Tribulation	Second Coming	Day of the Lord	Kingdom
Churches 1-3		1-2					
Seals 4-7		S1-S5			S6		
Trumpets 8-11				T1-T6	11:12?		T7

Theme: God avenges the suffering that unbelievers impose on his people.

11:15-16:17, Bowls

Setting: 11:15-15:8. Marked by inclusio between ch. 11 and ch. 15, with the following corresponding features:

- heavenly setting;
- hymn by the redeemed;
- hymn concerns God's judgment;
- heavenly temple open for judgment.

Subsections:

- 12-13, Gives history of Satan's work in opposition to the Woman, the New Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ, an effort that began in the Garden of Eden and continues down through the Tribulation under the Beasts. (These chapters describe the Tribulation from the perspective of Tribulation!)
- 14 emphasizes the victory of the two groups of saints from ch. 7 (1-5; 12-13) and vengeance on the oppressor. (God never lets us forget who wins!)
- 14:13-16 is the second great vision of Christ, here gathering his people to himself.

Body: 16:1-16, the seven bowls. Roughly parallel to the trumpets, though more severe. They continue the theme of Exodus: this is Judgment, not Tribulation. The important difference: now that the beast has been introduced, these are seen to be focused on him and his followers, something that could only be hinted at in ch. 11 in the trumpets.

Time:

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- The setting spans OT and NT history.
- The bowls themselves (like the trumpets) belong to the Great Tribulation.
- The introduction (11:16-18) looks forward to the final culmination.

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Seals 4-7		S1-S5			S6		
Trumpets 8-11				T1-T6	11:12?		T7
Bowl setting 12-14	12:4	12:7		12:13ff	14:14-16	14:14-20	
Bowls 15-16				B1-B7			

Theme: Takes us behind the scenes of the tribulation described in earlier chapters. It is not just a human phenomenon, but motivated by Satan in his opposition to God.

16:18-22:5, Victory of Christ over Antichrist

Setting: 16:18-21, a baroque amplification of the thunder/earthquake/hail motif that initiates each of the sections. Describes the completion of God's judgments ("it is done," v.17) and the fall of Babylon.

Body: Chiastic

Begins and ends with detailed descriptions of two women:

- the Harlot Babylon (17-18, note 17:1)
- the New Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ (21:9-22:5, note 21:9).

In between a more detailed chiasm centers on the Millennium, 20:4-6.

Contains the third detailed picture of the Lord Jesus (ch. 19), this time coming from heaven with his people to destroy the Beast.

Time: The end of great tribulation and on through the eternal state.

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Seals 4-7		S1-S5			S6		
Trumpets 8-11				T1-T6	11:12?		T7
Bowl setting 12-14	12:4	12:7		12:13ff	14:14-16	14:14-20	
Bowls 15-16				B1-B7			
Final chiasm							
--whore 17-18				17-18			
--victory 19-20					19		20
--bride 21-22							21-22

Theme: God's complete victory over the Antichrist and his master Satan.

Synthesis

Ch. 12 ff repeat the ground covered in the earlier part of the book, chronologically. Note the ambivalent position of 11:15-19. Structurally it introduces the bowls, but chronologically it finishes out the first half of the book, a position reinforced by its place as the seventh trumpet.

Contrast the themes in these two halves of the book.

- Ch. 1-11, the Lord's sovereignty over his church and the world. Only a very brief reference to the Beast, at the end of the sixth trumpet (11:7), by way of transition.
- Ch. 12-22, the Lord's conflict with Satan and the Beast.

General Principle: Earthly events are the shadow and reflection of heavenly conflict. Evidence:

- Angelic conflict in Daniel 10:12-21;
- "principalities and powers" language in Paul (angels in Eph. 6:12; human magistrates in Titus 3:1; cf. contrast in Rom. 8:38)

The first half of the book shows how the Lord is our portion in dealing with adversity, before we understand its root. The second half of the book takes us behind the scenes to understand what the real conflict is about, and assures us of God's ultimate victory.

Summary

The church's lot is one of conflict and suffering.

The Lord is not absent; he knows and watches over us.

The conflict we feel results from an age-long heavenly conflict between Satan and God; between Babylon and the Church.

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The Lord will come again and bring this conflict to a successful conclusion.

Our role is to be faithful to him and love his appearing.