

Summary of the Revelation

We have been studying the Revelation together since March 13, 2022. Before we leave the book, let's review the theme that we proposed for it then, and walk once more through its structure.

Theme

The book develops the theme of John 16:33 (chart),

John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the **world κόσμος kosmos G2889** ye shall have **tribulation θλίψις thlipsis G2347**: but be of good cheer; I have **overcome νικάω nikaō G3528** the world.

Three words in this verse deserve our attention.

The Lord spoke of the “world” κόσμος *kosmos* G2889. The Revelation mentions the *kosmos* three times (11:15;13:8; 17:6), but prefers the word “earth” γῆ *gē* G1091. (See Note.) “Earth” refers to the planet; “world,” to the social and cultural system. The *kosmos* is visible in the Revelation, in the oppressive government headed by the Beast, but the main point is the redemption of the planet itself. This observation favors the earthly interpretation of passages such as chapters 14 and 20.

Many Christians think of “tribulation” θλίψις *thlipsis* G2347 as a future time of divine judgment on the earth. This is misleading. It appears 45 times in the NT, and only three (Rom 2:9; 2 Thes 1:6; Rev 2:22) refer to divine judgment against men. Overwhelmingly, the term reflects the world’s persecution of believers. Furthermore, only six instances (Matt 24:21, 29; Mark 13:19, 24; Rev 2:22; 7:14) are end-time events. In the Revelation, it describes the sufferings of John (1:9), Smyrna (2:9,10), and martyrs in heaven (7:14), and the judgment of Jezebel (2:22), .

“Overcome” νικάω *nikaō* G3528 appears only here in the gospel, but points to the Revelation, where it is more common than anywhere else (17/28). In spite of the world’s antagonism, God’s people will conquer.

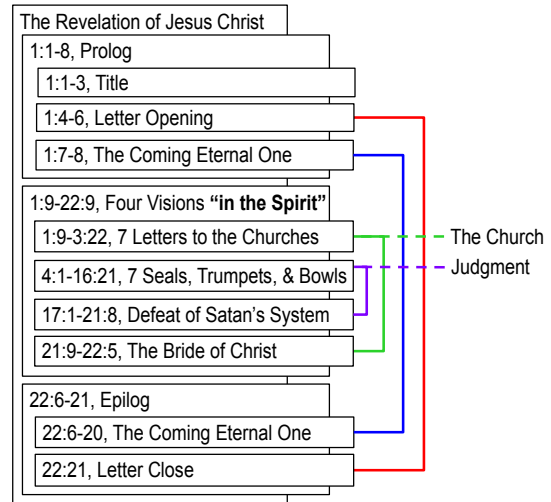


Figure 1: Overall Structure of the Revelation

Structure

The book has a prolog, a matching epilog, and four visions in the Spirit, arranged chiasmically (Figure 1). The four visions dominate the book. The second (describing the 3x7 judgments) is by far the longest (Figure 2), taking more than half the space (5177/9898 words).

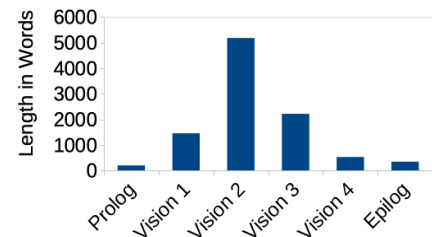


Figure 2: Relative Lengths of Sections of the Revelation

1:1-8, Prolog

The title, in 1:1-3, describes the chain of custody through which the information in this book passes, from the Father, to his Son, to an angel, then to John, and finally to the churches. The title emphasizes that the events described in the book “must shortly come to pass” (1:1, chart).

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Next comes a letter opening that reflects the pattern used by Paul. The blessing John conveys to his readers reflects the trinity, emphasizing the eternity of the Father.

Rev 1:4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from **him which is, and which was, and which is to come**; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; 5 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.

A prominent theme is the promise of the Lord's return:

Rev 1:7 Behold, **he cometh with clouds**; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.

Summary: This book warns of things that are about to happen, especially Lord's return.

The Once and Future Church

The first and fourth visions both concern the church.

1:9-3:22, Vision 1: Churches of Asia Minor

First we see the risen Lord walking among seven candlesticks, each representing a local church.

Rev 1:12 ... I saw **seven golden candlesticks**; 13 And in the midst of **the seven candlesticks** one like unto the Son of man, ...

This vision has seven messages, one for each church. There is no hierarchy. Each church is independently related to the Lord, and may lose that relation in case of sin:

Rev 2:5 [Ephesus] Remember therefore from whence **thou art fallen**, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will **remove thy candlestick** out of his place, except thou repent.

All of the messages except Smyrna and Philadelphia include rebukes, and all end with a promise to believers who “overcome” (echoing John 16:33). The dominant problem is idolatry:

Rev 2:14 [Pergamos] But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, **to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication**.

Rev 2:20 [Thyatira] Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to **commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols**.

While “fornication” ($\sqrt{\pi\omicron\rho\nu}$) may be physical impurity, the word elsewhere in the book describes Babylon the harlot, whose fornication is idolatry (Figure 3), so spiritual fornication may be in view here as well.

Both the prolog (1:1) and the epilog (22:6) say that the things in this book must “shortly” come to pass. Previous prophecies identified several milestones before the final conflict: Messiah's sacrifice (Daniel 9), worldwide evangelism (Matthew 24), and spiritual falling away (2

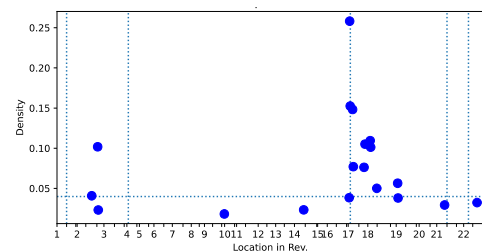


Figure 3: Distribution of Greek root $\sqrt{\pi\omicron\rho\nu}$ (underlying “whore,” “fornication,” “fornicator,” etc.)

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Thessalonians 2), now apparent in the churches of Asia.

Each letter ends with a promise to those who “overcome.” From the outset, the churches are depicted as at war, whose outcome varies not only church by church, but individual by individual. The challenge is for those who receive the revelation to be victorious in this conflict.

Summary: The Lord will judge the churches individually for their sins (particularly idolatry), and reward faithful believers.

21:9-22:5, Vision 4: The Future Bride

In contrast with the first century churches, when the Lord returns, his bride will be spotless, as Paul predicted (chart):

Rev 21:27 And there shall in **no wise enter into it any thing that defileth**, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Eph 5:27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, **not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing;** but that it should be holy and **without blemish.**

Summary: The Lord will bring his faithful church to spiritual perfection.

4:1-16:21, Vision 2: Three Series of Seven Judgments

This section o more than half of the book (Figure 2). Each series has seven judgments, but there is more here than judgments. As Figures 4 and 5 show, the seals and bowls each have an introduction before the judgments, and the seals and trumpets each have an interlude between the sixth and seventh judgments (chart). If we add up these components (Figure 6), the introductions to the seals and bowls are larger than all of the judgments together.

The law of proportion focuses our attention on the introductions. The first introduction, chapters 4-5, takes us into the heavenly throne room, where we meet God and the Lamb (ἀρνίον *arnion* G721, see note), who is authorized to open the scroll of judgment. This is his distinctive title in the Revelation. Our Lord is called “lamb” 18x in this vision and 29x in the whole book, but “Jesus” only 3/15 and “Christ” 2/10, and “Lord” only 2/6. The second introduction, chapters 12-15, introduces the dragon (δράκων *drakōn* G1404), identified with Satan, “the old serpent” active since Genesis 3 (Rev 12:9). He and his beasts dominate the bowls and the third vision. The history of the world is a contest between the Lamb and the dragon. The terrors of the judgments stem from this fundamental conflict.

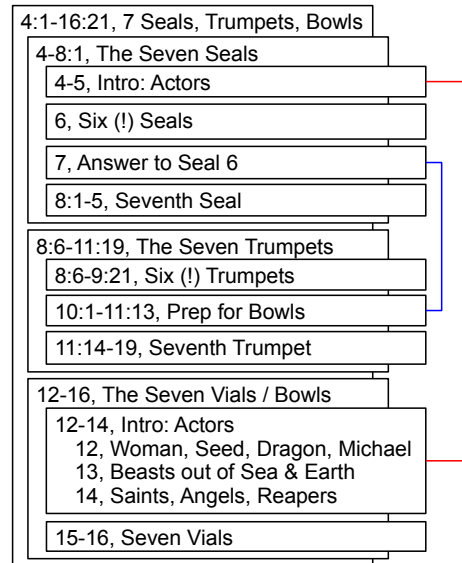


Figure 4: The Judgments

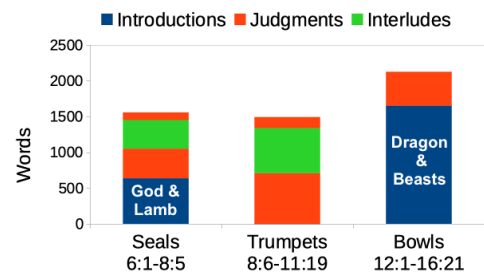


Figure 5: The Judgment Series

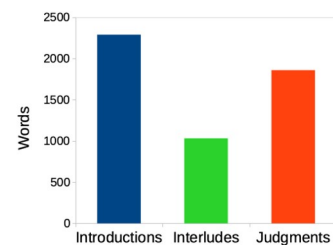


Figure 6: Components of the Judgment Series

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The Lamb (Figure 7, see note) peaks three times in this section: his introduction in chapter 5, then in the two interludes, in chapter 7 with martyred saints in heaven, and in chapter 14 with the 144,000 on mount Zion. Though superficially weak, he encourages his people through the conflict, and appears as their bridegroom in the fourth vision. After his introduction, the Dragon appears only in 16:13, when an unclean spirit comes out of his mouth in the sixth bowl to summon kings to the great battle, and in 20:2, when he is locked up in the abyss for the millennium.

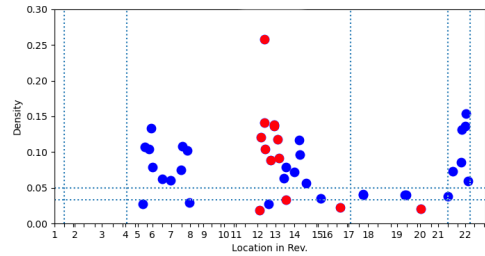


Figure 7: The *Lamb* and the *Dragon*

The seventh element of each series recalls the heavenly vision of chapters 4-5. The opening of the seventh seal reveals the seven trumpets (chart):

Rev 8:1 And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.

The trumpets and bowls are similar. Both recall the plagues of Exodus 7-11 (Table 1, chart), and they end the same way:

Rev 11:19 ... and there were **lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.**

Rev 16:18 And there were **voices, and thunders, and lightnings;** and there was a great **earthquake,** ... 21 And there fell upon men a **great hail** out of heaven, ...

Trumpets (Rev. 8-9)	Ten Plagues (Exod. 7-11)	Seven Bowls (Rev. 16)
	6. Boils (9:8-11)	1. People with Beast's mark afflicted with sores (16:2)
1. Earth hit with hail , fire, and blood, 1/3 of trees and all grass burned (8:7)	7. Fiery Hail (9:13-34)	
2. 1/3 of sea turned to blood and 1/3 of sea creatures die (8:8-9)	1. Blood (7:14-21)	2. Sea turned to blood and all sea creatures die (16:3)
3. 1/3 of fresh waters embittered by Wormwood (8:11)	1. Blood (7:14-21)	3. Rivers and springs turned to blood (16:4)
4. 1/3 of sun , moon, and stars darkened (8:12)	9. Darkness (10:21-23)	4. Sun scorches people with fire (16:8-9)
5. Locust-horses released on earth after Abyss is opened (9:1-11)	8. Locusts (10:3-19)	5. Darkness on earth (16:10-11)
6. 200 million troops at Euphrates River released by 4 angels (9:13-16)	2. Frogs (8:2-14)	6. Kings from east gathered to Euphrates River by 3 unclean spirits resembling frogs (16:12-13)
7. Heavenly temple opens, accompanied by lightning, earthquake, and hail (11:15, 19)	7. Hail (9:18-34)	7. Lightning, severe earthquake, and plague of large hail (16:18-21)

Table 1: *The Trumpets, the Bowls, and the Plagues of Egypt*

Both end with the fall of a “great city,” introduced in 11:8.

Rev 11:13 And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the **tenth part of the city fell,** ...

Rev 16:19 And **the great city was divided into three parts,** ... and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

But the first six bowls are more intense than the first six trumpets. The seventh trumpet and seventh bowl both describe the return of Christ, but the first six bowls follow the first six trumpets. The series are not consecutive. The seal judgments emerge as the lamb opens the seals on the scroll, the scroll contains the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls occur between the sixth and seventh trumpets (Figure 8).

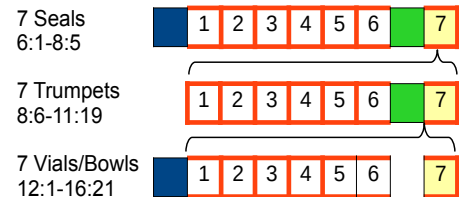


Figure 8: *Nested Judgments*

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These judgments are drawn out because of God’s longsuffering. He does not destroy the sinful world with one blow, but sends a series of increasing strokes to urge men to repent (Isa 26:9). They do not become “wrath” or “anger” until the sixth seal and the bowl judgments (Figure 9).

Summary: The conflict between the Lamb and the Dragon brings increasingly severe disasters, culminating in the wrath of God.

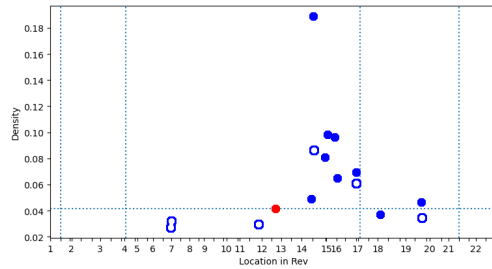


Figure 9: *óπη* (open) and *θυμός* (solid; red = Satan) in the Revelation

17:1-21:8, Vision 3: Defeat of Satan’s System

The third vision, like the second, describes judgment, no longer on the earth, but the satanic system that has dominated it (Figure 10, chart). The apostate church, represented as a whore and named after idolatrous Babylon, supports the Antichrist, the beast out of the sea. The beast turns on the whore after exploiting her, leading to mourning by those who had profited from her (ch. 18) and rejoicing by the believers whom she had oppressed (19:1-10). The Lord destroys this spiritual whore when he returns with his true saints. Then a series of events consigns the entire Satanic system, including people who had followed it, to the lake of fire.

Summary: The Lord Jesus wins the conflict in Vision 2.

We have already summarized Vision 4, which like Vision 1 shows us the church, now victorious and purified.

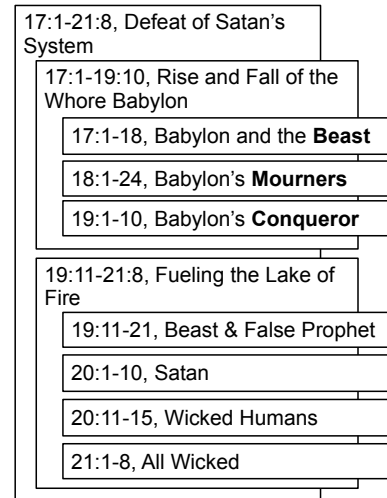


Figure 10: Defeat of Satan's System

22:6-21, Epilog

The book closes with the same themes emphasized at the beginning (Figure 11).

The *urgency* of the events described (the battle between God and Satan, culminating in the return of the Lord) is developed in an alternation in which the Lord promises twice to return suddenly, and commands his people to live obedient lives.

Then three testimonies recall the chain of custody from the book’s title. *The angel’s* testimony urges unbelievers to turn to the Lord, and believers to call on the Lord to return by their witness. *John* exhorts his readers not to tamper with the message that has been given to him, and *the Lord* promises to return suddenly, an announcement that John heartily endorses.

The summary of the prolog serves for the epilog as well.

Summary of the book: In the light of growing apostasy, believers should watch for the appearance of Antichrist and the subsequent return of the Lord Jesus, expect spiritual combat, and be confident of victory.

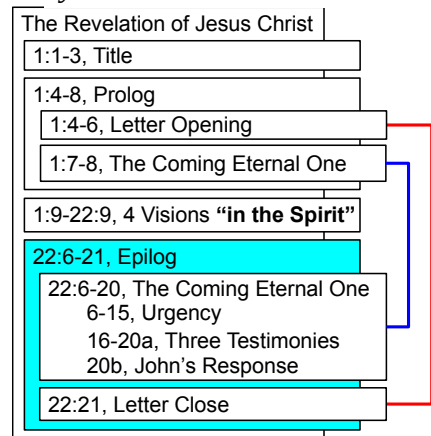


Figure 11: The Epilog of the Revelation

Notes

World vs. Earth

κόσμος is a favorite word of John's, appearing 102/187x in the gospel and 1 John (more often than in any other book), though only 3x in the Revelation. But Paul uses it extensively as well (47x). It is not the same as "earth" γῆ *gē* G1091. "Earth" refers to the planet; "world," to the social and cultural system, currently dominated by Satan.

The prevalence of κόσμος and γῆ in the gospel and the Revelation are inverted (Table 2). Revelation dominates all other books in its use of the word γῆ. Nine of the instances in the Revelation refer to those who dwell κατοικέω *katoikeō* G2730 upon the earth, an expression used elsewhere only once,

	κόσμος	γῆ
Gospel and 1 John	102 (5.65/1000)	13 (0.722/1000)
Revelation	3 (0.30/1000)	82 (8.28/1000)
Total in NT	187	251

Table 2: κόσμος and γῆ in John's writings

Acts 17:26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to **dwell on all the face of the earth**, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

This emphasis on the relation of people to the earth is reflected in οἰκουμένη *oikoumenē* G3625, which Revelation uses 4/16x (0.40/1000), more than any other book except the longer Acts (5/15, 0.27/1000) (Hebrews has 2/16, 0.40/1000).

One of the three instances in the Revelation looks forward to the end of this system:

Rev. 11:15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this **world** are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

The other two remind us that though God permitted this system to come into being at a past time, he always made provision for a people that would be separate from that system. He prepared a redeemer to deliver them from their sin:

Rev. 13:8 And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of **the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world**.

And he enrolled them in the book of life:

Rev. 17:8 The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not **written in the book of life from the foundation of the world**, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

Introductions, Judgments, and Interludes

See Table 3.

Introduction	First six	Interlude before #7	#7
4:1-5:14	6:1-17	7:1-17	8:1-5
	8:6-9:21	10:1-11:14	11:15-19
12:1-15:8	16:1-16		16:17-21

Table 3: Structure of Individual Cycles

The Lamb

This term, ἀρνίον *arnion* G721, is used only by John in the NT, and (except for Jn 21:15) only in the Revelation. It is distinct from ἀμνός *amnos* G286, the term for a sacrificial lamb in the LXX, used throughout the NT (John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; 1 Pet. 1:19; never in the Revelation) to describe Christ in his sacrificial character. See Vine for excellent summary. (13:11 is the only instance of the word in the Revelation that does not describe the Lord Jesus; it ascribes to the best out of the earth “two horns like a lamb.”):

In the Revelation, the term peaks at four places (Figure 12):

- ch. 5, when he is introduced as having authority to open the scroll of judgment;
- ch. 7, in heaven, receiving the great multitude;
- ch. 14, on mount Zion with the 144,000;
- ch. 22, as the bridegroom and king in the new heavens and new earth.

Once we see the book as a conflict between the lamb and the dragon, it is important to note how the lamb appears in the interludes to comfort and encourage his people in their conflict.

The distinctiveness of this distribution is clear when compared with other names that John might have used: κύριος, Ἰησοῦς, and Χριστός.

Χριστός (Figure 13) is concentrated in the prolog, once in the epilog, and appears only four times in the visions, three times in parallel with “God” or “Lord” (11:15; 12:10; 20:6).

Ἰησοῦς (Figure 14) is concentrated in the prolog and epilog. Twelve of its 15 instances are genitives, for example, “faith of Jesus,” “testimony of Jesus.”

κύριος (Figure 15) is mostly a name for the Father, though six times it is clearly the Son. The book closes with two references to “Lord Jesus.”

None of these three terms, in reference to the Lord Jesus, is at all prominent in the second vision, leaving “Lamb” as his distinctive title there. Table 4 shows the relative distribution of these terms in Vision 2 and in the entire book. Clearly, ἀρνίον is the distinctive and characteristic title preferred in this section. ἀρνίον is used once (13:11) in

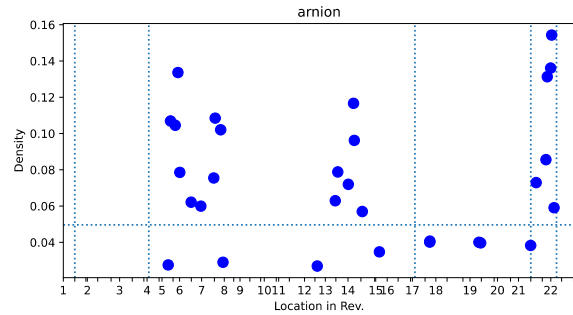


Figure 12: ἀρνίον in the Revelation

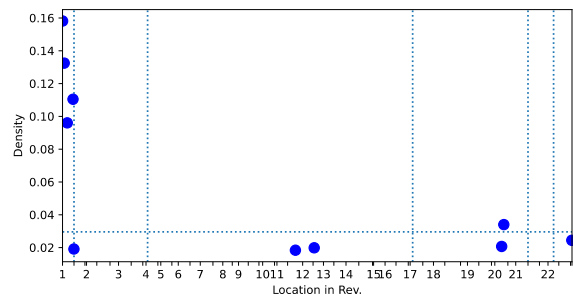


Figure 13: Χριστός in the Revelation

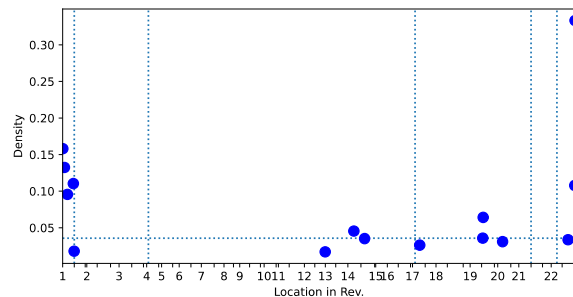


Figure 14: Ἰησοῦς in the Revelation

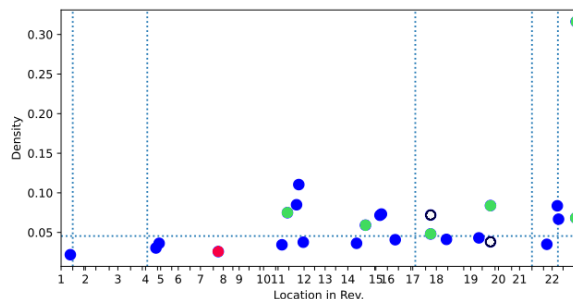


Figure 15: κύριος in the Revelation: **God**, **Christ**, “**sir**”

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reference to the false prophet, and is not included in these counts (though it is in the data that generate Figure 12 and Figure 7).

	ἀρνίον = Christ	Ἰησοῦς	Χριστός	κύριος = Christ
Total in Rev	29	15	10	6
Chapters 4-16	18	3	2	2
% in ch. 4-16	.62	.20	.20	.33

Table 4: Names for the Lord Jesus in Vision 2 and in the whole Revelation