

## The Structure of the Revelation to John

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In January of this year, a Coroner's Court declared that a further find of gold, silver and cloisonné garnets *was indeed* part of the Staffordshire Hoard, found in July 2009 near Lichfield. In February, a Team from Leicester University declared to the world that the human remains found in September 2012 under a car park in Leicester *were beyond doubt* those of King Richard III. It is now August and as the British New Testament Society meets at the University of St Andrews we *could have* our own discovery to celebrate, of a skeletal structure found firstly in New Jersey in July 1986! After the presentation of my paper and following our discussions, I will be asking the group for *its vote* on verification<sup>1</sup>.

It was in 1986 that, as a minister of the Methodist Church in Cardiff, I shared in an exchange with a United Methodist Church minister from Sicklerville, New Jersey, in the USA. My choice of focus for the six weeks of my ministry there was the Gospels and Acts, for their literary structures, the primary functions of the books, the organisation of their parts and the inter-relationships of those parts. Basically, I was asking then: 'Do we know the books that we are reading in church week by week?' In New Jersey, Sunday Services and mid-week meetings gave me my opportunity.

It wasn't long before someone asked me about the Revelation to John. What had I found out about the structure of that book? I was caught out! Up until then, I had never thought to investigate that book. And immediately I wondered why? Surely, this book of all the books of the New Testament would have a simple structure, wouldn't it? With some sense of excitement I embarked on the task. (I believed I had already discovered the structures of the four gospels and Acts. This was what encouraged me. Also, I had practised previously as an architect and possessed design skills.)

In the first instance, I thought I ought to look for any obvious structural components of the book. First, of course, there were 'the letters to the seven churches' with their introduction. Next, there were 'the seven seals' with a possible accompanying introduction. Then, there were 'the seven angels with their trumpets' and a possible introduction. And lastly, there were 'the seven angels with their bowls', also with a possible introduction. I soon entertained the possibility that there were three more sections 'of sevens' with introductions, of similar size to those that were already easily identified. Simple arithmetic suggested this: I counted up the book's number of verses, worked out the possible verses of a Prologue and an Epilogue and compared the sum of the verses of the discernible four sections against that of the sum of the, likely, remaining three sections. Further, because 'sevens' had their mention in the Prologue I thought that I should investigate for a seven section framework to the book. And last of all, there was also the popular maxim in scientific research: if the theory is not beautiful or harmonious, it is not likely to be correct.

Of the three sections that were the less obvious than the four, two sections with introductions were to be discovered because of the rhetor's repeating use of an anaphora (an introductory word or phrase), *Καὶ εἶδον...*, 'And I saw...', thus introducing 'visions'. The third 'missing' section defined itself also with anaphoras of a similar kind, such as *καὶ εἶπέν μοι...*, 'And he said to me...', thus introducing 'teachings'. In this way, within three days, I so came to a view on the matter: the book's structure consisted of seven sections of 'sevens'. Further, I then thought that the Prologue was 1.1-8 and that the Epilogue was 22.6-21.

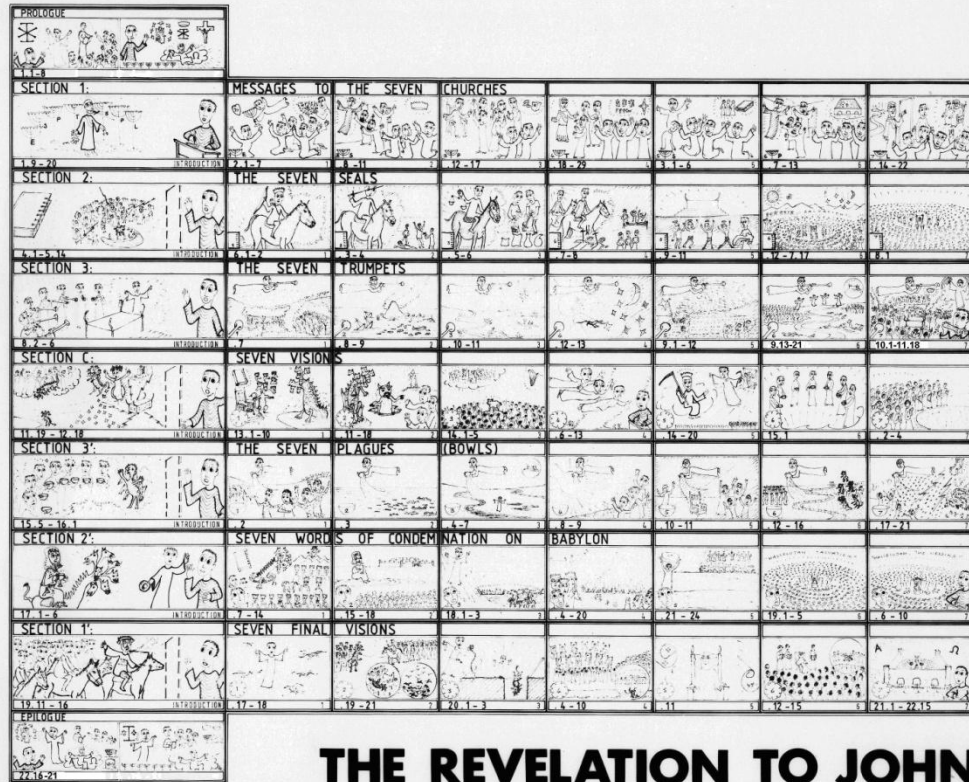
It was only after my return to the UK (and when I began writing my first book, *Sliced Bread: The Four Gospels, Acts and Revelation: Their Literary Structures*, 1988) that I saw that Sections 3 and 5 in my linear scheme mirrored each other for close detail. I pretty quickly found myself re-designating Section 5 as Section 3' ('3 prime') for the reasons as detailed below in the chart. Section 4 became the central Section C, the main focus of the book. Each side of it, Sections 1,2,3,3',2' and 1' balanced each other, forming a chiasm within an envelope of matching Prologue (P) and Epilogue (E):

P cf. 1.1,2,3,4,5,6,7	Jesus/ soon/ testifies/	sent his angel/	words of prophecy/	churches/ grace/	Amen/ is coming		
1 Intro. 1.14,16 Vision of JC	1 right to tree of life	2 second death	3	4	5 name in book of life	6 New Jerusalem	7 throne
2 'open'				6.7,8 plague...	6.9-11 slain souls	wrath, 7.10 'Salvation'	in heaven - silence
3	earth 8.7	sea 8.8	rivers and springs .10	sun, moon stars 8.12	agony 9.1-12	Euphrates 9.14	loud voice, earthquake, city collapse
C 'open' devil/Satan	a beast, 42 months	another beast, 666	the lamb + 144,000	the eternal gospel	the harvest of earth	another sign, wrath	victorious over beast
3' 'open'	earth 16.2	sea 16.3	rivers and springs .4	sun 16.8	agony 16.10-11	Euphrates 16.12	loud voice, earthquake, cities colla...
2'				18.4ff plague	.21ff blood - prophets	19.1 'Salvation'	in heaven - marriage
1' 'open' 19.12,15 Vision of JC			devil/Satan	second death	throne	second death, book of life	New Jerusalem, tree of life
E 22.16,18 22.20,21	Jesus/ sent his angel/	testifies/ churches/	words of prophecy/	is coming soon/ grace/	Amen		

It was only when I started researching for my PhD (*The Markan Matrix: A Literary-Structural Analysis of the Gospel of Mark*, awarded in 1998) that I began to learn about ancient rhetoric and the rules the writers of the first centuries BC and AD were expected to follow. A 'Skeletal Plan' was one requirement of any literary work, but it wasn't to stand out too clearly so as to provoke boredom in the listener. I was particularly encouraged by this find.

'Style' was another requirement of ancient rhetoric. So I began a close reading of Greek texts. Today, I define the style of writing of the Revelation as I do of all of the books of the New Testament<sup>ii</sup>. The common New Testament writing style is expressed by ABB', where A is the introductory part, B is the first development and B' (B prime) is the second and completing development. A 'full parsing' to define the style of this book proved less important than, say, with the books of Mark, Luke, Acts and John. As with Matthew, this book is primarily structured to a numerical/numerological scheme. Essentially, therefore, no change was required to the plan I had identified previously. But it did mean that I had another close look at the Epilogue. As a result, I found myself redefining it as 22.16-21. The artwork that I had drawn in 1989 had to be revised.

It is this fully-referenced artwork<sup>iii</sup> that will form the focus for the rest of my presentation. It is a matured version of the scheme I presented to the Sicklerville United Methodist Church in July 1986.



**NOTES:**

It is clearly the case that this chiastic structure of 7 sections of '7s' held meaning for the writer/rhetor. 'Seven' is a sacred number that stands for 'fulfilment' and/or 'completion'. Given Christian, first-century interpretation of the meanings of 'numbers' (and there is much meaning in the numbers of this book), the structure of the book itself expresses the belief of the Church in a perfect completion and fulfilment of all God's purposes. The church is being warned to remain true and faithful to the Lord Jesus who is coming soon. God is in control. All evil **will be** destroyed.

The writer's choice of book structure likely has something to do with a 'lampstand' of the Old Testament: either of Exodus 25.31-40, or of Zechariah 4.2-3, or of the two in synthesis. It is the latter that I favour. In Rev. 11.4, which is surely an allusion to Zech. 4.2-3, the writer introduces his own additional lampstand and, therefore, speaks of two. Golden lampstands have their reference in Rev. 1.12, v.13, v.20; 2.1 and v.5. The Jewish *menorah* is described in the Book of Exodus (chs. 25 and 37): it has seven lamps and is fashioned in gold. To Orthodox rabbis, it is a representation of 'the life and light of God in the world'. In John's Gospel (which exhibits a seven-section chiasm<sup>iv</sup>), we are distinctly told in the opening piece that 'Jesus is the life and light of God in the world'. Here in the Revelation to John, it appears that we are now being told that 'the Church of the Lord Jesus' is the life and light of God in the world'. (The Acts of the Apostles relates similarly to the Gospel of Luke: in the church, the life of Jesus is lived over again: it is a life of mission that the Spirit brings to birth, directs in the world and sustains through every kind of trial.) The menorah, because of Rev. 2.1, v.5 and/or the Oxford Movement, perhaps, has its central representation in very many church buildings today, though I suspect it mostly goes unnoticed.

The Book's Literary Scheme is summarised as follows:

**Prologue: 1.1-8 (1-3/4-6/7-8) Introduction; Address and Greeting; 'Jesus is coming'**

**Section 1: 1.9-3.22 The Messages to the Seven Churches**

(63 verses) Intro./ parts 1-7 1.9-20 / 2.1-7; 8-11; 12-17; 18-29; 3.1-6; 7-13; 14-22

**Section 2: 4.1-8.1 The Seven Seals**

(60 verses) Intro./ parts 1-7 4.1-5.14 / 6.1-2; 3-4; 5-6; 7-8; 9-11; 6.12-7.17; 8.1

**Section 3: 8.2-11.18 The Seven Angels with Trumpets**

(62 verses) Intro./ parts 1-7 8.2-6 / 8.7; 8-9; 10-11; 12-13; 9.1-12; 13-21; 10.1-11.18

**Section C: 11.19-15.4 Seven Central Visions**

(60 verses) Intro./ parts 1-7 11.19-12.18 / 13.1-10; 11-18; 14.1-5; 6-13; 14-20; 15.1; 2-4

**Section 3': 15.5-16.21 The Seven Angels with Plagues (Bowls of Wrath)**

(25 verses) Intro./ parts 1-7 15.5-16.1 / 16.2; 3; 4-7; 8-9; 10-11; 12-16; 17-21

**Section 2': 17.1-19.10 Seven Words of Condemnation on Babylon**

(52 verses) Intro./ parts 1-7 17.1-6 / 17.7-14; 15-18; 18.1-3; 4-20; 21-24; 19.1-5; 6-10

**Section 1': 19.11-22.15 Seven Final Visions**

(68 verses) Intro./ parts 1-7 19.11-16 / 19.17-18; 19-21; 20.1-3; 4-10; 11; 12-15; 21.1-22.15

**Epilogue: 22.16-21 (16-17/18-19/20-21) Concluding Testimony: 'Jesus is coming'**



The Temple Menorah is seen sculpted in an inner panel of the Arch of Titus in Rome. The arch celebrates the General's successes, but chiefly his destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple in AD 70 while crushing the Jewish Revolt in Judea.

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- i The Verification for signing will read:  
**The Literary Structure of the Revelation to John is  
'A Seven-times-Seven Chiasm set between a Prologue and a balancing Epilogue'.**
  - ii Samples will be available at the seminar.
  - iii An A3-sized print will be available for each person at the seminar.
  - iv I will bring copy with me to the seminar.