

STRUCTURE OF REVELATION.

An understanding of the literary structure of the book is critical to correct interpretation as it

- Provides a road map to the book in that it enables the reader to follow the “argument” of the author as he journeys through its pages.
- Enables the reader to see relationships between its parts. The Book then begins to become self-explanatory as the parts fit together.

A. SEVEN IN REVELATION

Of all the numbers in Revelation, it is the number seven that predominates:

1. References to seven items occurs throughout the book:

- **seven golden lampstands** (Rev. 1:12, 13, 20, 21; 2:1)
- **seven stars** (Rev. 1:16, 20; 2:1; 3:1).
- **seven lamps of fire** (Rev. 4:5)
- **seven Spirits of God** (Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6).
- **Seven thunders** (Rev. 10:3-4).
- **seven horns** (Rev. 5:6)
- **seven eyes** (Rev. 5:6),
- **Seven angels** who are given seven trumpets (8:2, 6)
- **Seven angels** who have the seven last plagues (15:1, 6-8; 16:1; 17:1; 21:9)
- **seven heads** of the dragon (Rev. 12:3), *the Sea Beast* (13:1) and *the Beast on which the Woman sits* (17:3, 7, 9).
- **seven crowns** upon the seven heads of the dragon (12:1)
- The seven heads of the beast in Rev. 17 are explained as being **seven mountains** which are **seven kings** (Rev. 17:9-10).

2. There are also seven items which are there but un-numbered lists of seven

- There are seven attributes of the lamb in Revelation 5:11-12
- There are seven groups in Revelation 6:15-16 calling on the rocks and mountains to fall on them
- There are seven attributes of God in the song of praise to God in Rev.7:11-12
- The 144,000 are marked by seven attributes (Revelation 14:4,5)

3. There are seven items, un-numbered but scattered through the Book of Revelation

- There are **seven blessings** scattered throughout the Book of Revelation (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14)
- There are seven “**new**” things mentioned in Revelation: “a new name” (2:17); “my new name” (3:12) “New Jerusalem” (3:12; 21:2); “new song” (5:9; 14:3); “a new heaven” (21:1); “a new earth” (21:1); “all things new” (21:5)
- Some see exactly **seven scenes of worship** Rev. 4:2-11; 5:8-14; 7:9-17; 11:15-18; 13:1-15; 14:1-5; 15:2-4; 19:1-8
- Some see **seven symbolic beings** in chapters 12-14: the woman, the dragon; the child, Michael, the first beast, the second beast, and the Lamb

- **Sickles** are mentioned seven times in Revelation 14:14-20
- There are **seven hymns** in the Seal Section of Revelation: 4:8; 4:9-11; 5:8-10; 5:11-12; 5:13; 7:9-10; 7:11-12
- The title **“Jesus Christ”** occurs seven times: 1:1; 1:2; 1:5; 1:9 (2x); 12:17; 22:21
- The title **“God Almighty”** occurs seven times: 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 16:4; 19:15; 21:22
- The word **“sign”/ “signs”** occurs exactly seven times: 12:1; 12:3; 13:13; 13:14; 15:1; 16:14; 19:20;
- Variants of the expression **“the Four Living Creatures and 24 elders”** occur seven times: 5:6; 5:8; 5:11; 5:14; 7:11; 14:3; 19:4
- The word **“cloud”** occurs seven times: 1:7; 10:1; 11:2; 14:14; 14:15; 14:16
- The word **“earthquake”** occurs seven times: 6:12; 8:5; 11:13 (2x); 11:19; 16:18 (2x);
- The **“Book of Life”** is mentioned seven times: 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 20:15; 21:27; 22:19)
- There are seven references to Revelation as **“this book”**: 22:7; 22:9; 22:10; 22:18 (2x); 22:19 (2x)
- The expression **“bottomless pit”** occurs seven times: 9:2; 9:2; 9:11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1; 20:3
- The expression **“right hand”** is referred to seven times: 1:16; 1:17; 1:20; 2:1; 5:1; 5:7; 13:16
- There are seven references to **Judgment/ judgments**: 14:7; 15:4; 16:7; 17:1; 18:10; 19:2; 20:4
- The term **“prophecy”** occurs seven times: 1:3; 11:6; 19:10; 22:7; 22:10; 22:18; 22:19
- There are seven references to **“kingdom/kingdoms”**: 1:9; 11:15 (2x); 12:10; 16:10; 17:12; 17:17
- The expression **“come quickly”** occurs seven times. Six times the Lord promises to come quickly (2:5; 2:16; 3:11; 22:7; 22:12; 22:14)) and once it is stated that the third woe trumpet would quickly come (11:14).

4. The number seven is also a structural component in Revelation. This is clearly seen in the Seven Letters to the Churches (Rev.2-3), each of which constructed on a seven-fold plan. This will be illustrated by reference to the first of the seven letters: The Letter to the Church in Ephesus:

7-FOLD PLAN OF EACH OF THE SEVEN LETTERS	THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS Rev. 2:1-7
1. COMMAND to write	“To the [a]ngel of the church of Ephesus write,
2. Christ identifies Himself	“These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:
3. ANALYSIS: Commendation	2 “I know your works, your labor, your [b]patience, and that you cannot [c]bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. . . 6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.
4. ANALYSIS: Criticism -issues in the church that need attention	4 Nevertheless I have <i>this</i> against you, that you have left your first love.
5. EXHORTATION Call to Repentance	5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

<p>6. Call to Hear what the Spirit says to the churches</p>	<p>⁷“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.</p>
<p>7. Promise to the Overcomer</p>	<p>⁷. . . To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”</p>

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NUMBER 7

We have seen that the number 7 occurs at all levels in Revelation. In fact it permeates the whole Book. This is “not due to some strange coincidence. It is used so frequently because it carries meaning beyond just the numerical value itself.”¹

“The Hebrew language is structured such that most words are based on *three-consonant root words*. Adding **vowels** to these root words produces other *derived* words that have different meanings, and yet these derived words remain *related* because they share the same root word.

For example, the Hebrew root word is “*saba*” (*Strong’s #7646*) carries the meaning of **fullness, wholeness, abundance, completeness**.

שָׁבַע
“saba’

By using the SAME three CONSONANTS but CHANGING the VOWELS we obtain a second Hebrew word “shaba” (*Strong’s #7650*), which means *swearing an oath*.

שָׁבַע

A further change in vowels results in a third Hebrew word “sheba” or “shiba” (*Strong’s #7651*), which is the Hebrew word for “seven”.²

שִׁבָּע

So to a Hebrew speaker the word “seven” has connections to “fulness”, “completeness”, “wholeness”. It also has connotations of “certainty” as in the swearing of an oath.

C. THE STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

There are also five major series of seven in Revelation.

- a. Four of these are explicitly numbered
 - The letters to the seven churches (Rev. 1:4, 11; ch.2-3)

¹ The Number Seven in REVELATION LOGIC <https://revelationlogic.com/articles/the-number-seven/>

² The Number Seven in REVELATION LOGIC <https://revelationlogic.com/articles/the-number-seven/>

- The scroll sealed with seven seals (5:1-5; 6:1-17; 8:1a)
- The blowing of the seven trumpets (8:2; 8:6-9:21; 11:15-19)
- The seven bowls (15:6-16:21; 17:1; 21:9)

b. One is un-numbered

- The seven last visions (19:11-22:5)

NOTE: There is also a series of “seven thunders” (See 10:1-6) which were not written down. These play no role in the structure of Revelation.

The five major series of seven outlined above form the backbone of the book of Revelation and are the key to its structure.

Each of these five major series are preceded by a SANCTUARY VISION which introduces the series of seven. We will now briefly consider each sanctuary vision in turn in order to establish that it is in fact a Sanctuary Vision. Details of each will be left to a later presentation.

THE FIRST SANCTUARY VISION (1:12-20) precedes and introduces the SEVEN LETTERS (ch.2-3). Two details given show that it is in effect a sanctuary vision:

Revelation 1:12-20 (NKJV)

¹²Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw **seven golden lampstands**, ¹³and in the midst of **the seven lampstands** One like the Son of Man, **clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.**

The mention of “**seven golden lampstands**” alludes to the Menorah with its seven lamps which was located in the HOLY PLACE. Revelation does not slavishly follow the Old Testament pattern but adapts that pattern to its purposes.

Further in the dress of “one like the Son of Man” we have an allusion to the dress of the priest.

So here we have a Sanctuary Vision – with a priest and Menorah in the Holy Place.

THE SECOND SANCTUARY VISION (ch.4-5) immediately precedes and introduces THE SEVEN SEALS (CH.6-8:1a). The following details in Revelation 4 which establish that it is in effect a sanctuary vision:

Revelation 4:2-6 (NKJV)

²Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, **a throne set in heaven**, . . . ⁵ . . .
 .. Seven **lamps of fire** were burning **before the throne** . . . ⁶ Before the throne **there** ^[e] **was a sea of glass, like crystal.** . .

“The Throne” alludes to the Mercy Seat which was located in the MOST HOLY PLACE. It was here, between the wings of the two cherubim that the Shekinah manifested the presence of God. In the Psalms there is reference to the Mercy Seat as the throne of God.

“The Seven lamps of fire” that burn before the throne is another reference to the Menorah which was located in the HOLY PLACE in the earthly tabernacle.

“The Sea of Glass” alludes to the Lavar which was located in the Outer Courtyard.

Revelation 4-5 are clearly a sanctuary vision. The action of Revelation 5 takes place within this context. Here there is a clear reference to “a lamb . . . slain” which is an allusion to the sacrifice that took place at the Altar of Burnt Offering.

This second sanctuary vision introduces the second major series of seven in Revelation – the SEALS.

THE THIRD SANCTUARY VISION (8:2-5) introduces the TRUMPET SECTION (8:6 – 11:19) which it precedes. It contains the following allusions to the Old Testament Sanctuary and its services:

Revelation 8:2-5 (NKJV)

³ Then another angel, having **a golden censer**, came and stood at **the altar**. He was given much **incense**, that he should offer *it* with the prayers of all the saints upon **the golden altar** which was before **the throne**. ⁴ And **the smoke of the incense**, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel’s hand. ⁵ Then the angel took **the censer, filled it with fire from the altar**, and threw *it* to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.

Note the references to the golden censer, the altar (of Burnt Offering), “the golden altar” (Altar of Incense), “the incense”, “the smoke of the incense”, the “fire from the altar”. There can be no doubts that in 8:2-5 we have a sanctuary vision

THE FOURTH SANCTUARY VISION (CH.15) precedes and introduces the BOWL SECTION (ch.16):

Revelation 15:

² And I saw **something like a sea of glass** mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and ^[a]over his mark *and* over the number of his name, standing on **the sea of glass**, having harps of God. . . ⁵ After these things I looked, and ^[c]behold, **the ^[d]temple of the tabernacle of the testimony** in heaven was opened. ⁶ And out of the ^[e]temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, **clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands**. ⁷ Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels **seven golden bowls** full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. ⁸ The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter **the temple** till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

In this vision we have “the sea of glass” which was a component of the second sanctuary vision (4:6).

The dress of the seven angels who have the seven bowls is the same as the dress of the priest who stands in the midst of the candlesticks.

The reference to the “temple of the tabernacle of the testimony” is clearly a sanctuary reference.

So Revelation 15 is a sanctuary vision.

THE FIFTH SANCTUARY VISION (19:1-10) introduces THE SEVEN LAST VISIONS (19:11-22:5). The following details establish that it is in effect a sanctuary vision:

Revelation 19:1-10 (NKJV)

19 After these things I ^[a]heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven . . .³ Again they said, “Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!” ⁴ And **the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures** fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, “Amen! Alleluia!” ⁵ Then a voice came from **the throne**, saying, “Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both ^[a]small and great!”

Revelation 4:4-6 locate the “twenty-four elders and the four living creatures” in the Heavenly Sanctuary.

The worship of “God who sat upon the throne” is also a clear sanctuary reference. (See 4:2-4)

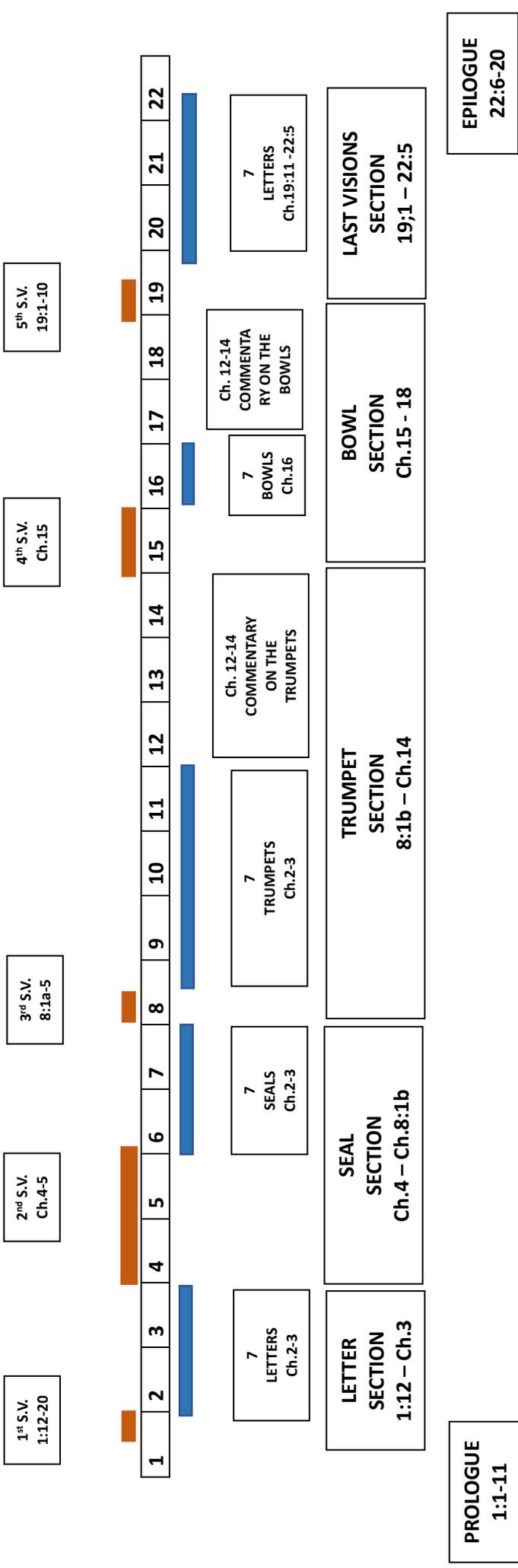
So each of the 5 major series of seven is preceded by a Sanctuary Vision. Each Sanctuary Vision and the Series of Seven it introduces functions as a major subsection of Revelation. There are FIVE such subsections.

But the first Sanctuary Vision (1:12-20) is preceded by a PROLOGUE (1:1-11)
The fifth series of seven (19:11-22:5) is followed by an EPILOGUE (22:6-22)

Therefore Revelation has a SEVEN-FOLD STRUCTURE:

1. PROLOGUE (1:1-11)
2. SEVEN LETTERS (1:12 -ch.3)
3. SEVEN SEALS (ch.4-8:1a)
4. SEVEN TRUMPETS (8:1:b-ch.14)
 - a. Sanctuary Vision (8:1b-5)
 - b. Seven Trumpets (8:6 -11:19)
 - c. Commentary on the Trumpets (12-14)
5. SEVEN BOWLS (ch.15-18)
 - a. Sanctuary Vision (ch.15)
 - b. Seven Bowls (ch.16)
 - c. Commentary on the Bowls (ch.17-18)
6. SEVEN LAST VISIONS (19:1-22:5)
7. EPILOGUE (22:6-21)

SEVEN-FOLD STRUCTURE OF REVELATION



1. The MAJOR SECTIONS consist of two parts: a SANCTUARY VISION which introduces one of the SERIES OF SEVEN
2. Thus each Sanctuary Vision introduces a new section
3. Five major sections plus the Prologue and Epilogue give a TOTAL of SEVEN SECTIONS to REVELATION
4. The Five Major Sanctuary Visions occur in HEAVEN – they picture the ministries in the Heavenly Sanctuary
5. The Five Major Series of Seven occur on EARTH – these reveal the journey of the Church through time into eternity
6. the Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary forms the umbrella under which the Journey of the Church takes place
7. As the Church journeys on earth its eyes are ever fixed on the Heavenly