The Theological Significance of Literary Structure in Revelation

0.0 Introduction

“The reader of the Greek text [of Revelation] will notice how unusual, not to say bizarre, is the author’s Greek—it is filled with substandard Greek expressions and peculiarities” (Bratcher and Hatton 1993:2). It is not my purpose in this essay to debate the fine grammatical points of John’s micro-style; there may in fact be cogent (rhetorical) reasons for some of the alleged infelicities that commentators call attention to. Rather, my intention is to examine certain higher-level formal characteristics which would reinforce the assertion that this “revelation by and about Jesus Christ” (subjective + objective genitive, 1:1) presents us with an intricately constituted text of demonstrable literary quality. The book’s artistically-fashioned macro-style serves a number of important compositional functions and also manifests several features of often unrecognized theological significance. Only a relatively small portion of the text can be examined in detail here, but it should be sufficient to support the case that this is an aspect of the Apocalypse which deserves further study. My investigation would also suggest that, while content is crucial in exegesis, literary form is not only a means to an end, but also is “meaningful” in and of itself.

1.0 What kind of “literature” is Revelation?

The book of “Revelation” (Ἀποκάλυψις, 1:1) begins in the dual manner of a prophecy (προφητεία, 1:3) and an epistle (i.e., a salutation, 1:4, 5; cf. 1:11). It ends in a similar way—that is, with pastoral admonition (22:12-16, 18-20) in reference to this “prophecy” (22:18-19) and an epistolary benediction (22:21). In terms of its text-type, or “genre,” then, it is of hybrid form—a “prophetic epistle,” which is a feature of considerable hermeneutical import. Like all NT letters, Revelation was written to a particular group of early Christians, those living in the Roman province of “Asia,” and it was therefore meant to be both intelligible and relevant to them at the time of writing and reception. It thus contains a certain amount of “prophecy” in the form of preaching intended to “strengthen, encourage, and comfort” its recipients (cf. 1 Cor. 14:3). We find this type of discourse primarily in chapters 2 and 3. “After these things” (4:1), however, the nature of the prophecy is more that of prediction, yet having the same general paraenetic purpose (chs. 4-22). This second and major portion of the book is also formally distinct, being written in the style of apocalyptic literature, which was relatively common in that age (ca. 200BC—100AD).1

As an example of apocalyptic writing, Revelation, like large portions of the book of Daniel, manifests a number of both formal and thematic qualities, which distinguish it from other types of biblical discourse, such as: (1) angelic guides and interpreters; (2) a cosmic perspective and eschatological emphasis; (3) its origin in situations of conflict (good versus evil), distress and persecution for the in-group; (4) striking contrasts and vivid content derived principally from dreams or visions; and (5) an extensive use of symbolism, figurative language, numerical signification, and even poetic diction. Unique to John’s Apocalypse, however, are several important attributes that distinguish it from the normal apocalyptic literature of the age—for example: its claim of direct divine revelation, as in Hebrew prophetic discourse (1:1-2); the attestable identification of its true author, John—the beloved disciple of Christ (1:1b)—as opposed to a pseudonym derived from some famous OT figure; and the verifiable character of its

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1 True biblical apocalyptic prophecy occurred much earlier, e.g., the latter visions of Ezekiel (chs. 38-48).
predictions, which are based on the undeniable historical facts of Christ’s redemption and the establishment of his Church of believers (1:5b-6). This strong Christological focus clearly distinguishes Revelation from all other, man-dreamt “apocalypses” of John’s day.

2.0 What is the “literary structure” of Revelation and how is it determined?

Based on a revision of an earlier study (1990), I would propose the following as a general outline for this prophetic-epistolary text; it is a progressively recursive composition based on the number seven. The central theme is reiterated throughout the book from different perspectives, with one vision set often anticipating the next (e.g., 14:8), but with a gradual build-up to a climax at the end.

Revelation—theme:  A message that proclaims the victory of Christ and his Church over Satan and all the demonic forces of evil!

Part I: Messages of warning and comfort to the seven churches (chs. 1-3)

Setting: Opening vision of heaven—seven segments (1:1-2, 3, 4-5b, 5c-8, 9-11, 12-16, 17-20)

Seven letters (chs. 2-3: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea)

Part II: Visions of warning to the ungodly but comfort for the godly of this world (chs. 4-22)

Setting: Events in heaven—what John both saw and heard (4)

Seven visions, with periodic dramatic “interludes” (chs. 5-22)

Vision One: Seven “seals” of judgment opened by the Lamb (5:1-8:1)

Interlude: “Sealing” of the Church on earth provokes praise from saints in heaven (7:1-8, 9-17)

Vision Two: Seven trumpets of judgment sounded by 7 angels (8:2-11:19)

Interlude: A heavenly “eagle” announces three “woes” to come (8:13; cf. 9:12)

Interlude: A “mighty angel” gives John a “little scroll” to eat/prophesy (10:1-11);

John “measures God’s temple” while “two witnesses prophesy” (11:1-19)

Vision Three: Seven “sign” visions (12:1-15:8)

Midpoint of Revelation: “A great and wondrous sign…” (12:1; cf. 15:1)

Vision Four: Seven bowls of God’s wrath poured out by seven angels (16:1-21)

Vision Five: Seven visionary sayings predicting and lauding the fall of “Babylon” (17:1-19:8)

Interlude: John “writes” the blessing for those invited to the Lamb’s banquet (19:9-10)

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3 These divisions are based largely on semantic grounds and shifting from one topic to the next (e.g., blessing, v. 3).

4 The pattern of sevens conjoins chapters 4-5, with each new segment being marked by a reference to what John saw and/or heard “after these things” (Μετὰ ταῦτα, 4:1, cf. 1:19): 4:1-6a, 6b (Καὶ ᾠδοῦν implied!)-11, 5:1-5, 6-8, 9 (καὶ ἔβαλεν)-10, 11-12, 13 (ἡγεῖται)-14.

5 In a touch of irony (as well as literary interconnectivity) “seven trumpets” prepare to sound (8:2, 6) in response to the “silence” in heaven at the opening of the seventh seal (8:1). Accompanying this angelic preparation is a noisy heavenly theophany (8:5).

6 A woman enters the visions for the first time in the narrative centre of the revelation. . . . The woman appears as the bearer of the Lamb-Son. . . . The second part of Revelation is dominated by female symbolism” (Dormeyer 1998:254-255). Perhaps not “dominated,” but contrastively prominent nonetheless: Babylon (17) vs. the Bride (19).

7 This tripartite “great sign” (A: 12:1-6, B: 7-12, A’: 13-18) is followed by six visions introduced by Καὶ ἔβαλεν: 13:1-10, 11-18, 14:1-5, 6-11, (Interlude: 12-13), 14-20, 15:1-8 (with 15:2-4 being an insertion that completes 14:1-5).

8 These are normally introduced by a verb of saying, e.g., λέγον (17:1: 17:1-6 (this includes a vision, 3b-6a), 7-18, 18:1-3, 4-19 (Interjection—v. 20!), 21-24, 19:1-5, 6-8, (Interlude: 9-10). Note that the seventh and culminating “saying,” which reveals the heavenly “Bride” (19:7-8), anticipates the “New Jerusalem” visions of ch. 21.
The basic premise of this study is that a clear picture of the carefully constructed framework of Revelation is an important hermeneutical key that helps to inform our understanding of the book’s dramatic formal development and its corresponding forceful message. After an opening section that unfolds a series of seven short and mutually reinforcing paraenetic “epistles,” we can observe a definite climactic movement that is manifested in the subsequent series of seven paradigmatic “vision reports” (non-chronological, three-dimensional prophetic “scenes”). One thus proceeds from visions that graphically depict the trials and tribulations of God’s people while living alongside the wicked of this world (vision set 1-3) to those which celebrate Christ’s initial (on the cross, 12:11) and final victory over Satan and his diabolical, bestial forces (4-6). At last, we have a manifold portrayal of heaven itself, with the saints (even now) living in glory in the presence of their God (vision set 7). This final perspective also contrasts the former earthly existence of believers with the eternal fate of the wicked. Indeed, what a compelling and impactful conclusion to the Scriptures as a whole!

One often observes a similar build-up in intensity as the various individual visions unfold, for example, the seventh “sign” of vision three (15:1-4), and even within the internal sections that constitute a vision, for example, the progression which comprises the sixth trumpet:

**Sixth trumpet:** Four destructive angels from the Euphrates River, i.e., “Babylon” (9:13-21):

a. The sixth angel blows his trumpet (13a)
b. A command to free the four angels is given (13b–14)
c. The four angels are freed (15)
d. Their army of 200,000,000 horsemen (16)
e. Description of the soldiers and their horses (17–18)
f. The source of their destructive power (19)
g. Despite all the preceding calamities, the wicked do not repent! (20-21)

There is strong evidence that the textual architecture of the Apocalypse, its *structural parallelism* in particular, has been designed with a special emphasis upon the number seven—a familiar biblical symbol of completeness, even perfection. Other significant numbers (as well as their multiples or combinations) are employed as an important aspect of the prophetic message, such as *three*, in relation to the Deity (e.g., 1:4-5), *four* about created objects and creatures (e.g., 14:7),

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9 These are again usually introduced by Καὶ ἠδεόν: 19:11-16, 17-18, 19-21; 20:1-3, 4-6, 7-10; 20:11-15. The first three visions depict the defeat of Satan’s demonic agents (the two beasts); the next three visions focus on the binding and defeat of Satan himself; the final vision (20:11-15) spotlights the final judgment of humanity and the condemnation of all of the sinful followers of Satan. An anomaly occurs at 20:7 in that no Καὶ ἠδεόν appears, perhaps to signal a resumption of the topic broken off at the end of 20:3. Contrastively, there are two instances of Καὶ ἠδεόν at the onset of the final segment (20:11, 12), perhaps to underscore its final and climactic character (plus its immediate relevance to all readers, who are referentially included within its judicial scope).

10 The distinct sections of this seventh vision set are introduced by several different initiating markers (see section 3.0 below): 21:1, 2, 3-4, 5-8, 9-21, 22-26, 22:1-5.

11 The salient segments are as follows: 22:6-7, 8-9, 10-12, 13-16, 17, 18-19, 20-21. These divisions are debatable; for a more detailed, schematic view of this sevenfold discourse arrangement, see section 5.4 below.
six to typify good or evil works and products (e.g., 18:16), ten to denote the sum total of something or its completion (e.g., 1:13-16), and twelve to signify God’s people or the Church (e.g., 7:4). Hypothetically speaking, these key numeric-structural elements effectively summarize the central message, or theme of the prophecy as a whole: The Triune God’s (3) perfect salvific plan (7), when brought to its full completion (10), will enable believers/the Church (12) to overcome all diabolical opposition/evil (6).

However, the fundamental number seven is clearly paramount in Revelation, from beginning to end. Part one features seven pastoral letters to troubled congregations in Asia Minor, while part two presents seven composite, divinely mediated visions (4:1). The formulaic constituent structure of each of the seven letters is undoubtedly the clearest, most convincing example of the pervasive $7 \times 7 \times 7$ pattern in the book as a whole:

**Seven Pastoral Letters**—a seven-stage sequential pattern of hortatory development:

a. **Addressees**: “Unto the angel of the church of ____ write…”
b. **Author**: “These things says the one…”
c. **Evaluation**: “I know your works that…”
d. **Condemnation**: “But I have against thee that…”
   (But **Commendation** with warning in Letters 2 and 6)
e. **Appeal** (Call to repentance or fidelity): “…repent…” (cp. “crown” in 2 and 6)
f. **Promise**: “He that overcomes…”
g. **Exhortation**: “He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”

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We also find this elaborate triple-seven structural pattern in some less obvious places, for example, in the second “sign” (of 7) of “vision” three (of 7) in Part Two of the book:

A beast from the sea with **seven** heads and ten horns (13:1-10)

a. The beast is described (1-3a)
b. The whole world worships the beast (3b-4)
c. The blasphemy of the beast (5-6)
d. The power and authority of the beast (7-8a)
e. Those written in the Lamb’s Book of Life refuse to worship the beast (8b)
f. Warning about future judgment (9-10a-b)
g. Encouragement to the saints (10c)

As indicated above, these sevenfold structural units range in size from an entire paragraph to a distinctive portion of a particular clause, e.g., seven key terms in the doxology of 7:12 (all feminine nouns): …ἡ εἰργαία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ σοφία καὶ ἡ εὐχαριστία καὶ ἡ τιμή καὶ ἡ δύναμις καὶ ἡ ἱσχὺς τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν…
These septenary sequences are not mechanically reproduced by any means, and the patterns are sometimes modified (e.g., with respect to the seven inserted “beatitudes,” e.g., 20:6), thus allowing room for debate regarding their external and internal boundaries. But the prevailing multiple septential framework is pronounced enough to provide cohesion and coherence for the text as a whole and thus helps give guidance at points of ambiguity and uncertainty. Furthermore, certain unexpected interruptions and interesting variations may occur within an established frame—perhaps to prevent literary monotony and a sense of artificiality, but much more importantly, to distinguish some special point of thematic significance. For example, when composing the letters to the model congregations of Smyrna and Philadelphia, there is no need for an admonitory call to repentance, which is replaced by an analogous call to steadfastness.

Some vital theological and/or hortatory insertions also appear; for example, following the cosmic catastrophes depicted after the opening of the sixth seal of final judgment (6:12-17), we have a long “interlude” (7:1-17), involving a contrastive “flashback” in time. These visions offer comforting assurance to John’s readers that Christ’s Church will prevail and ultimately overcome (12:10-11), despite the awful persecution that believers face from Satan’s cohorts (12:13; cf. 6:9-10)—and seemingly even from all the forces of nature itself (12:15). Certain scenes or their constituents are long while others are relatively short—some frightening and others consoling. But they are all skillfully woven into the total patterned fabric of prophecy that John records as having witnessed while in the Spirit on the Lord’s day on the isle of Patmos (1:1, 9-10).

These arrangements of seven are seemingly established as a symbolic vehicle, well suited to the “blessed” communicative intentions (1:3) of the divine author in relation to his addressees—his faithful “servants” (δούλοις, 1:1). The structures are formally marked with regard to beginning, ending, and peak, in various ways (e.g., καὶ parataxis/asyndeton, parallel syntactic constructions, and synonymous lexical-semantic sets), but chiefly by means of the rhetorical device involving a patterned recursion of linguistic forms of all shapes and sizes. The most frequently used and hence distinctive kind of repetition is anaphora,12 which is effected by a reiteration of verbal elements at the onset of larger units of discourse whether successive or displaced. These demarcative recursions thus help indicate the beginning of new textual units (along with shifts of content, speaker, addressee, place, etc.)—for example, the commencement of the second part of the book in 4:1 – “After these things I saw…” (Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον – cf. 1:1-2, 11, 19; 7:1, 9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1). As already noted, one of the most common markers of such aperture is Καὶ εἶδον (e.g., 13:1, 11; 14:1, 6) or something equivalent to this (e.g., Καὶ ἤκουσα in 14:13; 16:1).

There is also a certain degree of reiteration that is used at the end of distinct structural units to mark closure (or epiphora), for example, the mention of “one-third” (τὸ τρίτον) at the conclusion of the trumpet series (8:7, 9, 11, 12), or “one hour” (µιᾷ ὥρᾳ) in the portrayal of Babylon’s fall (18:10, 17, 19). References to being thrown into (or found in) “the lake of fire” appear at the close of paragraphs in 20:10, 15, and 21:8. Lexical and/or semantic recursion at both the beginning and ending of a section (i.e., inclusio) is quite common, e.g., the reference to “Jesus” and “God” at the onset and close of the book as a whole (1:1, 22:21; cf. also the words in praise of God’s “just judgments” in 16:5, 7, and the report that John [‘Ἰ] “saw/the woman” [Babylon] in 17:3, 6).

12 For a fuller definition of this and other literary-structural terms, see Wendland 2004:125-128.
There are a number of chiastic, or introverted structures in Revelation, both on the lexical as well as the thematic levels of signification. The following arrangement initiates a dialogue exchange between John and a heavenly elder (7:13-14):

A These, the ones clothed in white robes, who are they, and where do they come from?
B And I said to him, Sir, you know.
C And he said to me,
C’ These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation,
B' and they washed their robes and whitened them in the Lamb’s blood.

A longer concentric pattern is found in 20:12-15: (a) the book of life – (b) the dead were judged according to what they had done – (c) the sea gave up the dead that were in it = (c’) death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them – (b’) each person was judged according to what he had done – (c’) the book of life. Other even larger chiastic patterns encompassing the entire book have also been proposed (e.g., Snyder in Beale 1999:143), but these often leave important gaps or cover up certain critical inconsistencies.\(^{13}\)

Somewhat more common (or apparent) than chiasms to delineate compositional boundaries are related A—B—A’ “ring structures,” involving both smaller (lexical) as well as larger (thematic) formations. This disjunctive type of arrangement is important for interpreting the crucial change in perspectives of ch. 12: A the woman, her son, and the dragon (1-6), B the dragon defeated by Michael and Christ in heaven (7-12), A’ the woman, her offspring, and the dragon (13-17).

Three other prominent literary features must be briefly mentioned to round out this overview of structural analysis in relation to the book of Revelation: overlapping, insertion, and intertextuality. The device of overlapping involves those areas in the structural development of the text that serve as “hinge points”—reflecting back on a completed section while looking forward to the next. A good example of this is found in 13:1a—“He (the dragon, cf. 12:1-17) stood on the shore of the sea (cf. the beast described in 13:1b-8).” Such overlapping is related to foreshadowing, where an important element in one scene or vision anticipates its appearance in the next section—for example, an explicit mention of the seven churches of Asia Minor in 1:11 previews the actual messages to these groups in chapters 2-3. One might also view the sequence of plagues announced by the 7 seals, trumpets, and bowls as involving incorporation—the 7 bowls within the 7th trumpet (11:19, 15:5-6) and the 7 trumpets within the 7th seal (8:1-2).

The term insertion refers to relatively independent visions or sayings that appear within previously established sequences—primarily, the so-called “interludes,” such as that involving John and the “little scroll” in 10:1-11. The preeminent instance of these is the encouraging sequence of seven “throne-room” visions that periodically (often after some vision of dire calamity, e.g., 6:12-17) feature the saints in the blessed presence of their Creator and Redeemer: (a) 4:2-5:14, (b) 7:9-17, (c) 11:15-19, (d) 14:1-5, (e) 15:2-8, (f) 19:1-8), and (g) 20:11-15.\(^{14}\)

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\(^{13}\) For example, Snyder pairs these rather incompatible panels, which are made to correspond by their manufactured titles: “C. The Heavenly Sanhedrin Convened for Judgment and Enthronement (chs. 4-5)” — “C’ The Heavenly Sanhedrin Convened for Judgment and the Messianic Reign (chs. 17-20; cf. 20:4-15).”

\(^{14}\) Another vision that mentions “throne” is that of 20:11-15, but I have excluded that one from the present series because it is one of divine “judgment”—not praise and adoration like the others—and it refers to all “the dead, small and great,” believers as well as unbelievers.
Equally encouraging are the seven “beatitudes” (blessings) that occur in the book, from beginning to end: 1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, and 22:14. Their frequency towards the close of Christ’s revelation may be a reflection of the beatific visions that these chapters bring.

Finally, intertextuality refers to the numerous, primarily Old Testament, passages that are incorporated by citation or allusion within the text of Revelation—most notably, from the narrative-apocalyptic prophet Daniel. We have, for example, a sevenfold reference to “peoples, nations, and languages” in Dan. 3:4, 3:7, 3:29, 4:1, 5:19, 6:25, and 7:14, which is paralleled by a sequence in Rev. 5:9, 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6, and 17:15. More significantly, there are a host of allusions from Daniel 7 that occur throughout the book of Revelation (see Pattmore 2003: 206-207 for a comparative chart of these). Furthermore, Beale feels that “Daniel’s structure of five synonymously parallel visions (chs. 2, 7, 8, 9, 10-12) may be the most influential on the structure of Revelation, since Daniel is used…to signal the broad structural divisions” within a broad septenary framework (1999:135-136).

3.0 Overview of a sample of the 7x7 macrostructure of Revelation

To illustrate the sevenfold, semi-poetic patterning of Revelation and to indicate its structural and thematic significance within the text, I have reproduced what I consider to be the book’s climactic “Vision Seven” (21:1-22:5) below in a relatively literal translation (modified RSV). Spaces serve to demarcate its seven internal units and indentations their numerically corresponding sub-sections. Each line, as formatted, often corresponds to an “utterance unit”—that is, a complete speech span in English (roughly matching the original Greek) were the text to be articulated aloud, as initially intended. Footnotes point out some of the primary lexical markers and other rhetorical features that help to delineate the structural contours of this vision.

21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth;\(^{15}\)

Ⅰ for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,
and the sea was no more.

2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem,\(^{16}\)

Ⅱ coming down out of heaven from God,
prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,\(^{17}\)

Ⅲ “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. (a)
And he will dwell with them, (b)
and they shall be his people, (b’)
and God himself will be with them. (a’)\(^{18}\)

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\(^{15}\) Καὶ εἶδον... is a common discourse marker of aperture, in this case signaling a new macro-section—the setting for the whole of Vision Seven.

\(^{16}\) καὶ τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν Ἱερουσαλήμ καινὴν εἶδον... The front-shifted object reveals the “object” in focus throughout this vision—the “new Jerusalem.” The referential scope is reduced from that of “a new heaven and earth” in the preceding segment. The spotlight then narrows to the “throne”-room and God’s words in sections III and IV.

\(^{17}\) καὶ ἤκουσα... is another prominent anaphoric marker of aperture.
4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, 
and death shall be no more, 
neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, 
for the former things have passed away.”

5 And he who sat upon the throne said, And he said to me, 
“I am the Alpha and the Omega, 
the beginning and the end. 
To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment. 
7 He who conquers shall have this heritage, 
and I will be his God 
and he shall be my son. 
8 But as for the cowardly, and faithless, and polluted, and murderers, 
and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, 
their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, 
which is the second death.”

9 And there came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and he spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

10 And he carried me in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the city, the holy Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.
It had a great, high wall,\textsuperscript{12} having \emph{twelve} gates, 
and at the gates \emph{twelve} angels, 
and on the gates were inscribed 
the \emph{names} of the \emph{twelve tribes} of the sons of Israel: 
\begin{itemize}
  \item [\textsuperscript{13}]on the east \emph{three} gates,
  \item [\textsuperscript{13}]on the north \emph{three} gates,
  \item [\textsuperscript{13}]on the south \emph{three} gates,
  \item [\textsuperscript{13}]and on the west \emph{three} gates.
\end{itemize}
\textsuperscript{14}And the wall of the city had \emph{twelve} foundations, 
and on them the \emph{twelve names} of the \emph{twelve apostles} of the \emph{Lamb}.

\textsuperscript{15}And he who talked to me had a \emph{measuring} rod of \emph{gold}\textsuperscript{23} to \emph{measure} the city and her gates and her walls.

The city lies foursquare, 
it's length the same as its breadth. 
And he \emph{measured} the city with his rod, twelve thousand stadia; 
it's length and breadth and height are equal.

\textsuperscript{17}He also \emph{measured} its wall, a hundred and forty-four cubits\textsuperscript{24} by a man's \emph{measure}—that is, an angel's.

\textsuperscript{18}The wall was built of jasper,\textsuperscript{25} while the city was pure gold, clear as glass.

\textsuperscript{19}The foundations of the wall of the city\textsuperscript{26} (were) adorned with every jewel:
the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, 
the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, 
the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprasus, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.

\textsuperscript{20}And the twelve gates were twelve pearls,\textsuperscript{27} each of the gates made of a single pearl, 
and the street of the city was pure gold, 
transparent as glass.

\textsuperscript{22}The initial nominative participle (ἔχουσα) suggests the beginning of a new sequence here (cf. v. 11a), one that highlights the “wall,” its 12 “gates,” and 12 tribal (OT)—apostolic (NT) “names.” The emphasis created by the reiterated number “twelve” (a significant \emph{seven} times, including \emph{3+3+3+3} in v. 13) underscores this reference to the whole and complete Church of God—the elect from the OT as well as the NT.

\textsuperscript{23}Reference again to the angelic speaker signals the onset of a new paragraph (cf. v. 9), which is concerned with “measuring” the holy city.

\textsuperscript{24}Multiples of numbers with symbolic import, i.e., signifying perfection and completeness with reference to the “new Jerusalem,” continue (from Vc) in this section: \emph{12,000} (12 x 10 x 10 x 10) and \emph{144} (12 x 12) (cf. also sections Vf and Vg to follow).

\textsuperscript{25}This short transitional segment serves as a Janus-like “hinge”—looking backward to the construction of the city, its walls and gates, and their measurement (Vc, Vd), while also anticipating a description of their precious bejeweled construction (Vf, Vg), which reflects the glory of God (v. 11).

\textsuperscript{26}The \emph{asynedeton} (no \emph{καὶ}-s!) throughout verses 19-20 suggests that they are to be regarded as a distinct sub-unit.

\textsuperscript{27}From the “foundations” (v. 19), the description now moves to the 12 pearly “gates,” with a final reminder that the city itself was of “pure gold, clear as glass” (cf. v. 18).
And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. 

By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it. 

And its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there. 

They shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 

But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the book of life of the Lamb. 

And he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 

through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 

There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. 

And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever!

4.0 Guidelines for evaluating a structural analysis

A final observation is in order with regard to one’s delimiting these numbered structures in Revelation and defining their discourse function. The exegetical danger here is obvious, namely, that of wrongly identifying their presence or position in the book and/or overestimating their

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22 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 
23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. 
24 By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it. 
25 And its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there. 
26 They shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 
27 But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the book of life of the Lamb. 

22:1 And he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 
3 There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. 
5 And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever!

31 “And he showed me…” (Καὶ ἔδειξέν µοι), the correlate of “And I saw…” (21:1, 2) initiates the 7th segment of the seventh major vision of Revelation. Seven utterance units express the nature imagery of vv. 1-2.

32 Semantic parallels structure the final two verses of this vision, as shown by the different levels of indentation.

33 Note the chiastic lexical arrangement that links sections VI and VII of Vision Seven: Lord God (21:22) – God (21:23) = God (22:3) – Lord God (22:5). Segments VI and VII arguably constitute the theological climax of Vision Seven, perhaps even that of the book of Revelation as a whole.
importance to the author’s intended message. Therefore, the analyst who proposes some rather elaborate topical arrangement for the book must be prepared to defend it exegetically, that is, on the basis of clear literary signals in the original text. The following are several other principles\(^{34}\) that may be helpful when evaluating one structural proposal in comparison with another:

a) Structural outlines based on concrete lexical iteration are more credible than those derived from semantic content alone.

b) The more, formal features found in support of a given structural proposal, the more plausible and convincing it will be.

c) Structural arrangements will normally cohere or coincide with the content of the text under consideration; in other words, formal and semantic mismatches or clashes are probably in error.

d) Linear structures that follow the diachronic flow of the discourse, are generally more reliable and defendable than chiastic/introverted arrangements.

e) One facet of a larger proposed organization must credibly relate to or harmonize with other aspects, especially surrounding sections, and it should ideally support the overall meaning of the composition as a whole.

An example might serve to clarify what is involved in this structural assessment process. Wilson proposes a “part two” of Revelation that agrees in some measure with my own; however, there are also some significant differences, including his broad concentric framework (1997:291):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act 1—7</th>
<th>scenes in heaven (4:1-5:14)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Act 2—scroll with 7 seals (6:1-8:1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act 3—7 trumpets (8:2-14:5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act 4—7 messengers (14:6-20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act 5—7 bowls of judgment (16:1-21)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act 6—fall of Babylon (17:1-19:10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act 7—7 scenes; triumph of God (19:2-22:9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below I will simply list the main problems that I have with the preceding proposal—that is, in comparison with my own given earlier (2.0):\(^{35}\)

- Wilson describes 15:1-8 as an “interlude” entitled “the song of Moses” (1997:288). But surely this “song” applies only to vv. 2-4 as the center (B) of a ring construction (A = v.1, A’ = vv. 5-8), which must then be incorporated somewhere else within the series of visions (e.g., as part of the “sign” series begun at 12:1).

- What corresponds to the “triumph of God” (Act 7) in Act 1? And do the saints not also “triumph” with God (e.g., 20:4-6, 21:1-4, 22:1-5)? Furthermore, why should Act 7 end at 22:9, thus cutting off the conversation between John and the angel (cf. vv. 10-11)? 22:5 is much more likely to be a major concluding boundary, with the book’s “Epilogue” then beginning at v. 6 (contra Wilson ibid.:289).

\(^{34}\) Note those given at the beginning of this course, such as the need for a coherent, contextually-based strategy for the interpretation of the figurative and symbolical language that permeates the book of Revelation.

\(^{35}\) Readers must comparatively critique both of these structural-thematic outlines, based on their own research and discourse analysis of Revelation, and then come to their own conclusion as to which one is more convincing.
• Wilson construes 14:6-20 as the chiastic center and hence the high point of the “drama” of Revelation and interprets Christ to be the speaker of the blessing in v. 13, based on the identification of “one like [the] son of man” in v. 14 (ibid.:300; cf. 1:13). However, most commentators either do not specify the speaker in v. 13, or they identify the voice as that of God or an angel. In any case, most scholars clearly distinguish v. 14 as the beginning of a separate Christological vision (e.g., Beale 1999:767-770).

• Wilson’s arrangement does not call attention to “the great and wondrous sign” of 12:1 and 15:1. The crucial prophetic narrative of 12:1-17, which is arguably a more likely candidate as the book’s central, hence highlighted pericope, is therefore ignored, being subsumed within “Act 3” and the vision of seven trumpets. Moreover, the “war of heaven” is strangely designated as covering verses 7-17 of chapter 12 (ibid.:299), whereas the text itself calls for a break at v. 13, when the dragon is “hurled to the earth.”

• Wilson’s “Act 6” dealing with “the fall of Babylon” is extended to 19:10, thus again crossing (and thereby confusing) a principal vision boundary by introducing the Beast of Babylon into the heavenly celebration at “the wedding (supper) of the Lamb” (19:7, 9).

• Wilson’s Act-internal divisions are also debatable at times, for example, “Scene 5” of “Act 1,” which encompasses vv. 6-10 of ch. 5 (ibid.:294), thus merging two distinct discourse segments, i.e., depiction of the “slain Lamb” receiving the scroll (6-7) and the joyous acclaim (“new song”) of four heavenly creatures and the 24 elders (8-10). A similar mismatch occurs in the corresponding “Scene 5” of “Act 7,” which covers vv. 4-10 of ch. 20 (ibid.:294), hence obscuring the clear temporal boundary marker at v. 7: “And when the 1000 years are completed…”

5.0 Conclusion: The theological significance of literary form

Revelation is a demonstrably well-constructed literary text of Scripture—aesthetically and purposefully shaped to communicate its theology more effectively, that is, with dramatic impact and persuasive appeal. I have surveyed just a few of the literary devices that permeate the text of this book,36 serving to give it cohesion, coherence, progression, and verbal “pointing” with

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36 Other stylistic features that would suggest that John’s Apocalypse is not only “literary” in character, but also an example of artistic, well-crafted writing are these (all eight of the following examples are found in chapter 19 alone):

(1) **structural shaping**, e.g., *inclusio* as in “Hallelujah!” (Ἁλληλουϊά), which demarcates (begins and/or ends) the initial set of praise songs in this unit (19:1, 3, 4, 6);

(2) **genre diversity**—“the wedding (supper) of the Lamb” is referred to in both *hymn* (v. 7) and *beatitude* (v. 9);

(3) **morpho-syntactic rhetoric**, including *deictic usage and word ordering*, e.g., the fronted qualifiers ἀληθιναὶ καὶ δίκαιαι “just and true” (v. 2; cf. 15:3); emphatic αὐτὸς “he himself” in v. 15, κύριος κυρίων “Lord of lords” (v. 16);

(4) **semantic density**, e.g., τὴν µαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ “the testimony from/about Jesus” (v. 10), “white (pure-holy and/or victorious) horse” (v. 11);

(5) **contrastive imagery**, e.g., the “smoke” of the burning “great prostitute” (vv. 2-3) versus the “bright and clean linen” that clothes the Lamb’s “Bride” (v. 8), which is paralleled (another distinctive feature) in reverse order by the visions of the two “banquets”—that of the Lamb with his redeemed saints (v. 9) versus that of God devouring the two Beasts with their followers (vv. 17-21);

(6) **engaging enigma**, e.g., the hidden “name” of the Messianic Lamb (v. 12), which may be actually revealed in other passages: “Faithful and True” (v. 11), “Word of God” (v. 13), and “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (v. 16);

(7) **dramatic direct discourse**, from short snatches (4c, only two words) to much longer quotes (vv. 1b-2); and
respect to certain internal peaks of thematic salience (Wendland 2004:123-130). Thus, the 
artistry to be found in the Apocalypse is eminently functional—an outstanding case of art 
created in support of the divinely intended “message” (form as well as content) that it was 
designed to serve. I will conclude by listing and further illustrating some of the principal 
theological purposes that have been suggested in the preceding literary-structural study:

5.1 Perceiving the text’s manifold thematic structure

The thematic organization of any biblical book will always have certain important theological 
implications of a dogmatic and/or exegetical nature. But how one interprets the structure of a 
prophetic-apocalyptic book like Revelation (or Daniel) will also be profoundly influenced by 
one’s hermeneutical frame of reference. This becomes evident in the case of the controversial 
“millennium” chapter 20, which, according to the book’s general outline presented earlier, 
includes four of the seven “sights” that occur as part of the “Sixth Vision” of part two (19:11- 
20:15).

A literary approach, which informs an idealist interpretive method, recognizes both the 
figurative-symbolical nature of the text of Revelation, and also its distinctive compositional 
style, which features recursive, progressively developed, multi-perspective parallelism within 
the book’s overall structure. Thus, the first three scenes of ch. 20 (1-10) parallel the three earlier 
scenes of this same sixth vision (19:11-21), but whereas the latter set highlights the defeat of 
Satan’s two diabolical associates—“the [sea] beast” and “the false prophet” [land beast]—the 
corresponding three visions of ch. 20 foreground the activities of Satan himself and his ultimate 
defeat and imprisonment in the shameful lake of fiery sulfur. This is the divinely decreed 
punishment for the two beasts (19:20b), the Devil (20:10)—plus, as noted in the seventh and 
final vision of this set, all those spiritually “dead” human beings, who were disciples of Satan 
(20:15), as well as “death and Hades” (20:14). Note that these judgments are declared at the end 
of the scenes in which they occur, thus marking closure (structural epiphora). The larger literary organization of ch. 20 may therefore be summarized as follows (in alternating parallel structural panels):

A. Satan is bound for 1000 years—the NT “Church age” (1-3). 
B. The saints (alive and dead) reign with Christ during the same 1000 years (4-6). 
A’ Satan is loosed for a short time before his final defeat and judgment (7-10). 
B’ All the wicked (spiritually “dead”) are judged and thrown into the fire (11-15).

37 These two dimensions cannot really be separated: a church’s systematic creedal statements must be based upon solid biblical exegesis, while exegetical study is always carried out from a particular dogmatic perspective, e.g., on 
the nature of Scripture and its inspiration. 
38 As noted, these seven judicial “sights” (19:11), which highlight the victorious Messianic perspective on Satan’s 
39 The “last judgment” and end of the world is also depicted at or near the conclusion in each sequence of seven 
visions of “seals” (the 6th, 6:12-17), “trumpets” (the 6th, 9:13-21), and “bowls” (the 6th and 7th, 16:12-16, 17-21).
In this scheme, segment A’ essentially continues the prophetic narrative of A, while B’ does the same in relation to B, except for the contrast in perspectives—from blessed saints (B) to damned sinners (B’). A new vision set (Seven) then begins with a definite opening marker at 21:1—

Καὶ εἶδον οὐρανὸν καινὸν καὶ γῆν καινήν.

It is clear that a literary-structural analysis, along with its related features, supports the main theological message according to an amillennial interpretation of not only Revelation 20, but also the chapters (visions) which surround it as well—that is, in direct contrast to a diachronic, dispensational hermeneutical framework.

5.2 Highlighting specific thematic peaks and emotive climaxes within the text

Having established the boundaries of a biblical pericope, the external borders as well as the internal (sub-)sections, the structural analyst looks for areas of marked emphasis—the “peaks” of thematic content and points of possible emotive “climax.” Common literary indicators of such places within the text are features such as repetition, citations of direct speech, rhetorical questions, graphic figures of speech, concentrations of key theological terms, and as we have already noted, the medial and final segments of a sequence of structural elements—especially (but not always) the seventh item. For example, the “seventh trumpet” is completely different in content and tone from the previous six—being a compound doxology of praise to God (11:15, 17) and a prediction of the devil’s demise (11:18), rather than a word of woe to the wicked.\(^{40}\) In fact, all of the doxological insertions within the book probably also serve as climactic moments of communal rejoicing, assuring God’s people of ultimate victory—from first (1:6b) to last (19:6-7). In contrast, the series of seven beatitudes, which often suddenly intrude within an established structural pattern (e.g., 16:15-16), act as “pause points” that exhort faithful readers and hearers to remain steadfast and await the blessings in store when the Lord returns (19:9). As Bauckham has observed, “The seven beatitudes comprise a kind of summary of Revelation’s message” (1993:30).

As for a medial area of prominence that combines theological content with expressed emotion, perhaps the best candidate is the middle of the ring structure that encompasses chapter 12 at the very center of the book. The dramatic defeat of Satan and his diabolical earthly representation, “Babylon,” at the end of the Apocalypse (Vision Six) is prefigured in the original “casting down” of “the great dragon” by “Michael and his angels” (12:7). As a result, all believers throughout world history can “rejoice,” for they are, and ever will be, victorious “by the blood of the Lamb” (12:11). However, they too have an important part to play in this cosmic battle of the ages, namely, to faithfully proclaim in both word and deed “the testimony of Jesus” (12:17b; cf v.11b)—even in the face of death (11c)!

5.3 Using the text’s structure to subdivide and label a Bible translation

The preceding points relate to the analytical dimension of our investigation of literary structure and its theological significance. These may be applied now to the practical issue of Bible translation and how the various versions available today make use of this structural information.

\(^{40}\) The content of the 7th trumpet (praise of the saints, 11:15-18) also dramatically contrasts with that of the 7th bowl (curses of the damned, 16:21). There are other, parallels of correspondence that link the judgments of the seven trumpets with those of the seven bowls: first—affects the earth (8:7/16:2), second—affects the sea (8:8/16:3), third—affects the rivers (8:10/16:4), fourth—affects the sun (8:12/16:8), fifth—involves darkness (9:2/16:10), sixth—involves the Euphrates (9:13/16:12), seventh—involves heavenly thunder (11:19/16:18).
This is most evident in three major areas: introductory topical outlines, the wording of section headings, and the division of the text into paragraphs and larger units. The provision of such “reader’s helps” will only be as helpful as the analysis upon which they are based. To what extent is this of “theological” concern? It is, to that extent that these paratextual features pertain to organizing the “meaning” of the biblical text and thereby influencing its interpretation, especially for lay persons who probably have limited access to other exegetical tools or hermeneutical guides. To illustrate the importance of this concern, I will provide several examples of what I consider to be rather problematic structural and thematic decisions that appear in the “Outline” provided by The Lutheran Study Bible (LSB), which is based on the English Standard Version (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009, p. 2198).

In comparison with the general outline of Revelation given above, one initial difference manifested by the LSB is that it does not indicate a basic twofold division of the book. Between “The Prologue” (1:1-8) and “The Epilogue” (22:6-21), the text is segmented into nine “Visions Given to John” (1:9-22:5). The first major division then is “The Glorified Son of Man and the Seven Letters” (1:9-3:22). In addition to the questionable lumping the seven letters together with the introductory materials of chapter one, there appears to be a rather serious issue of genre-mixing by designating these epistles as “visions.” Perhaps this was done to present a more unified outline of the book, but this seems to remove these letters from the historical realm (i.e., real churches in Asia Minor) and consign them to the timeless idealist perspective of the visions of ch. 6 and following. In the second major division, “The Heavenly Sanctuary and Divine Throne (chs. 4-5)” and its two sub-sections, nothing is mentioned in LSB’s titles about the scroll of seven seals, which is certainly in focus in ch. 5. The next, division three then is labeled “The First Scene of the End Times…(6:1-8:5),” which presents a problem in the phrase “end times.” Most ordinary readers would, I think, tend to associate this expression with the final period of human history, shortly before Christ’s Second Advent—rather than to view this as spanning the entire period of the NT Church Age, i.e., “the millennium.” Some of the other major debatable divisions or titles of the text found in LSB’s Outline are merely summarized below:

- The “seal”-opening and “trumpet”-blowing visionary scenes are grouped into sets, e.g., 1-4 and 5-6 in both cases, while the seven bowls are all listed as a unit covering chapters 15(?) and 16.
- Chapter 10 is treated as an individual section under the title: “The recommissioning of John.” There is no indication in previous chapters that John had ever been “decommissioned” from his original calling to “write” what he was told and showed (1:10-11, 19; 4:1). Could ch. 10 be a visionary recycling of ch. 1?
- The section entitled “The war in heaven and defeat of Satan” is referenced as 12:7-17, thus obscuring the clear break at 12:13, where the prophetic narrative concerning the Dragon and the woman resumes from 12:6.
- LSB’s “Fifth Scene of the End Times” is entitled “Babylon the Prostitute Overthrown,” but this section is extended to include all of ch. 19, thus again missing the break in topic at 19:6, where the scene shifts to “the wedding (supper) of the Lamb” (19:7, 9).
- “The Final Scene” concerning “The New Jerusalem as the Bride” is listed as beginning at 21:9. But what will readers then make of 21:2, where they are introduced to “the Holy City, the New Jerusalem…prepared as a bride…”? And there is no bridal imagery at all in the final scene of this unit, as we are shown “the (heavenly) river of the water of life.”

To be sure, all of these issues, large and small, may be debated on the basis of textual evidence and one’s own particular structural-thematic analysis of Revelation. My point in this section has

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41 All three areas also influence the explanatory and descriptive notes that many versions (“study Bibles”) now provide for their readers.
been simply to bring to our attention the importance of this exegetical exercise and how it can influence—whether rightly or wrongly—the reader’s perception of the book’s meaning and how it has been presented to us in the original text.

5.4 Serving as an aide-memoire for preserving and presenting the text

The various major and minor structural patterns, based on semantic, lexical, and syntactic recursion, make it much easier to memorize the text of Revelation (as no doubt frequently occurred during the early days of the text’s transmission) and to more precisely present it orally in public. The Greek text of Revelation was most likely (following the common procedure of that time) verbally constructed for oral proclamation, hence embodying not only a “literary” composition, but an “oratorical” one as well. The discourse was thus verbally “formatted,” as it were, in an oral-aural manner to make it easier to memorize, remember, and then reproduce accurately in public settings of worship and instruction. The following is a hypothetical example (giving the seven admonitions of the book’s conclusion in 22:6-21) to illustrate how the text structure may have functioned both to aid in its recall (even when one was reading the text from a scroll or codex) and to facilitate its vocal articulation:

6 Καὶ εἶπέν μοι,
Οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι πιστοί καὶ ἁληθινοί,
καὶ ὁ κύριος—ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευµάτων τῶν προφητῶν—
ἀπέστειλεν τὸν ἄγγελον αὐτοῦ
δείξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ
ἄ δεὶ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει.

7 καὶ ἰδοὺ ἔρχοµαι ταχύ.
μακάριος ὁ τηρῶν τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου!

8 Κἀγὼ Ἰωάννης ὁ ἀκούων καὶ βλέπων ταῦτα.
καὶ ὅτε ἤκουσα καὶ ἔβλεψα,
ἔπεσα προσκυνήσαι ἐµπροσθεν τῶν ποδῶν τοῦ ἀγγέλου
τοῦ δεικνύοντός µοι ταῦτα.

9 καὶ λέγει µοι,
"Ὅρα µή·
σύνδουλός σοῦ εἰµι
καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου τῶν προφητῶν
καὶ τῶν τηροῦντων τοὺς λόγους τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου·
tῷ θεῷ προσκυνήσον.

10 καὶ λέγει µοι,
Μὴ σφραγίσῃς τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου,
ὁ καιρὸς γὰρ ἔγγυς ἐστὶν.
ὁ ἀδικῶν ἀδικησάτω ἔτι
καὶ ὁ ρυπαρός ρυπανθήτω ἔτι,
καὶ ὁ δίκαιος δικαιοσύνην ποιησάτω ἔτι
καὶ ὁ ἁγιος ἁγιασθήτω ἔτι.

Ἰδοὺ ἔρχοµαι ταχύ,
καὶ ὁ µισθός µου µετ’ ἐµοῦ
ἀποδοῦναι ἑκάστῳ ὡς τὸ ἔργον ἐστίν αὐτοῦ.
οπρώτος καὶ ὁ ἐσχατος,
ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος.
Μακάριοι οἱ πλύνοντες τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν,
ἔνα ἐστιν η ἐξουσία αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς
καὶ τοῖς πυλῶσιν εἰσέλθωσιν εἰς τὴν πόλιν.

ἐξω οἱ κύνες
καὶ οἱ φάρµακοι
καὶ οἱ πόνοι
καὶ οἱ εἰδωλολάτραι
καὶ πᾶς φιλῶν καὶ ποιῶν ψεῦδος.

Ἐγὼ Ἰησοῦς ἔπεµψα τὸν ἄγγελόν µου
µαρτυρῆσαι ὑµῖν ταῦτα ἐπὶ ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.
ἐγώ εἰµι ἡ ῥίζα καὶ τὸ γένος ∆αυίδ,
ὁ ἀστὴρ ὁ λαµπρὸς ὁ πρωϊνός.

Καὶ τὸ πνεῦµα καὶ ἡ νύµφη λέγουσιν,
"Ερχοµαι.
καὶ ὁ ἀκούων εἰσάς τον ἔρχοµαι.
καὶ ὁ διψῶν ἐρχόµεθα,
ὁ θέλων λαβέτω ὕδωρ ζωῆς δωρεάν.

Μαρτυρῶ ἐγὼ παντὶ τῷ ἀκούοντι
tοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τού βιβλίου τούτου.
τὰς πληγάς ὡς γεγραµµένας ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ,
καὶ εάν τις ἀφέλη
ἀπὸ τῶν λόγων τοῦ βιβλίου τῆς προφητείας ταύτης,
ἀφελεῖ ὁ θεὸς τὸ µέρος αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς
καὶ ἐκ τῆς πόλεως τῆς ἁγίας
tῶν γεγραμένων ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ.

Δέχεται ὁ μαρτυρῶν ταύτα,
Ναί, ἔρχοµαι ταχύ.
Ἀµήν, ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ.

Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ μετὰ πάντων.

5.5 Supporting the doctrine of divine inspiration and design

Divine direction was continually manifested as the various biblical books in Hebrew (Aramaic) and Greek were composed by inspired human authors during the course of some 1500 years. God’s guidance was operational too as these books were scribally recorded, transmitted orally and in writing over time, canonized, and further conveyed ever more widely to culminate in the most attested and credible versions that we currently have available. This gracious process of preservation has furthermore brought the “original” texts (no longer in existence) in a highly stable and reliable form to church(es) today via translations in all of the world’s major languages and a host of minor ones as well (a process that may have begun already internally in the case of the Gospels and Christ’s teachings initially uttered in Aramaic). There can be no doubt, therefore, that the Scriptures in Hebrew and Greek express “God’s Word” in terms of form, content, and function. Clearly, the Bible itself attests to its own divine origin and meaning (1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21, 3:15-16, etc.). The divine source of John’s Apocalypse, too, cannot be contested (e.g., 1:1-2, 9-11, 19).

In addition to all this patent direct evidence, it is my contention that the very form or manner of composition of the biblical books also implicitly testifies to their divine origin and nature. “Patterns imply genre, style, and a single author—patterns are not created by committee, oral traditions, or collecting myths in an anthology” (Cascione 2012:13). I would further claim that these literary “patterns”—adjacent and remote parallelisms, terraced constructions, concentric introversions, a host of inter- and intra-textual connections, and so forth—such as we have abundantly manifested in Revelation (and all of the other books of Scripture), are so excellent, elaborate, and extensive (cf. Wendland 2004) that there can be little doubt that divine influence was also actively involved in their precise verbal creation and preservation in the canonical form that has come down to us.42 At least this is a thought worth pursuing as we examine and expound these biblical texts ever more carefully in future studies of God’s Word.

42 I am not here subscribing to the so-called “dictation theory” of inspiration, whereby the biblical authors and/or their scribes virtually “copied” on a word for word basis what was revealed to them by the Holy Spirit. Rather, my view is that the same dynamic divine inspiration that moved the minds of these authors with regard to content when composing their works also acted correspondingly with regard to the linguistic and literary form of the original text. A providential process of preservation then became active, which continued through repeated scribal copying, textual transmission, reception by successive faith-communities, and finally, canonical selection.
A concluding thought on the theological significance of literary form in Revelation: As amply noted, the principal compositional element is seven, the reiteration of which in the context of this prophetic work may be seen also to symbolize ultimate victory—the decisive and comprehensive triumph of the divine Christ over all human and demonic forces of wickedness on behalf of the sum total of his “144,000” saints (7:4, 14:1-3; chs. 19-20). Despite the apparent chaos and conflict that characterize the situation in which the Church (or, the symbolical seven churches” ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, 1:4a; 22:16) of all eras (past, present, or future) finds herself, the almighty God reigns majestically on his throne in complete sovereign control (1:4b; 22:3). Everything in the cosmos is in order. The Lord’s gracious plan, an amazingly perfect one, constituted by the life, death, and resurrection of the Messianic Lamb (e.g., 1:5; 5:6, 9-10), is presently being carried out towards the goal of its glorious fulfillment at the end of world time (20:4-6; 21:1-22:5). Implicitly, then, (but no less significantly) the recursive patterns of seven continually remind readers and hearers of this divine salvific design—as it is being revealed in every age, from Ἀλφα to Ω (1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13). These sagely arranged literary structures also serve to encourage the faithful to vigilant sanctified living in the sacred pursuit of their “first love” and “the open door” (1:6; 2:4, 19; 3:8; 20:12; 21:7; 22:3, 11b-12). Finally, the consummately constructed text functions to guide disciples in their interpretation of the sometimes admonitory and alarming, but more often wonderfully reassuring testimony of Jesus and his servant John to all those believing communities that ideally reflect, and dynamically anticipate “the Holy, Heavenly City” (21:2, 10; 22:19) throughout human history.

Ἀµήν, ἔρχου, κύριε Ἰησοῦ!
ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦµα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις!

7.0 References cited
