

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MACROSTRUCTURE OF REVELATION IN
IDENTIFYING THE WOMAN ON THE SCARLET
BEAST IN REVELATION 17

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ABSTRACT

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This paper reexamines the structure of the Book of Revelation in order to infer insights about the identity of the “woman” and the “scarlet beast” in Revelation 17. Recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of understanding the overall structure of Revelation for its interpretation. Scholars have often proposed chiasmic macro-patterns, dividing the book into seven (but not only) sections. However, determining coherent units, particularly in chapters 12-22, has posed challenges.

This study proposes the “revelatory literary device” as a key literary feature for determining the overall structure of the book. The study is divided into two parts. The first part demonstrates the presence of the revelatory pattern throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. This pattern consists of a series of three followed by a fourth narrative constituent. However, a closer analysis of the examples suggests that the primary function of this device is to prepare the reader for an important, surprising, and/or terrifying “disclosure” or “revelation.”

The second part of the paper demonstrates the presence of this pattern at the macro-level of the Book of Revelation. Instead of identifying sevenfold sections, the study suggests that Revelation is structured as a series of three sets of ‘sevens’ (1:9-11:19), followed by a fourth ‘seven’, the literary unit of the seven bowls (chs. 12:1-22:15). Given its climactic position in the structure, the last unit is more elaborately developed, incorporating additional series of revelatory devices. This proposed structure confirms the coherence of chs. 12:1-22:15 as a literary unit and as the fourth narrative constituent of the book, revealing the terrifying fate of those who harm God’s people.

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Preliminary Remarks

This study continues the analysis of the Revelatory Literary Device proposed as a “key” for interpreting the books of Daniel and Revelation. While in a previous study I demonstrated the presence of the $x(x+1)$ pattern in the literature of the Old Testament,¹ including the book of Daniel, where the variable x represents a series of three elements within a biblical literary unit, in this study we will highlight the presence of this device in New Testament literature, particularly in the book of Revelation. The emerging structure of the book of Revelation, shaped according to the Revelatory Literary Device, provides a significant clue regarding the identity of the woman in chapter 17.

The tone of this study is constructive, with the primary aim not being to deconstruct or critique the flaws in other structural proposals for the book of Revelation. Such efforts are kept to a minimum. As a result, this study won’t engage extensively with other literature. Instead, it focuses on offering a fresh approach that reflects my independent thinking on the subject, with the goal of presenting as clearly as possible a new perspective on the structure of the book.

¹Daniel Olariu, “Revelatory Literary Device: Towards a New Hermeneutic Key for Interpreting the Book of Daniel” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the SBL, Book of Daniel Unit, San Diego, CA, Nov 25, 2024), 1–40.

In harmony with this aim, we have set up a few methodological limitations to this study that would otherwise have diverted us from our goal. In investigating the overall structure of the book, we deliberately left out certain literary markers such as καὶ εἶδον ("and I looked"), καὶ ἰδοὺ ("and look"), μετὰ ταῦτα ("after these"), and similar phrases. While these markers are generally useful in identifying paragraphs or scenes within an episode or smaller literary discourse, they are less effective in ascertaining the larger literary blocks of the book, including their sections and subunits. Given the nature of our goal—capturing the major structural components—we prioritized topical literary markers to delineate these units. Similarly, principles like repetition and/or recapitulation are acknowledged but not directly engaged in this study. These elements function best in interpreting parallel units and identifying recurring language patterns rather than in establishing the broader structure of the text.

This study proceeds by exemplifying the Revelatory Literary Device in the New Testament through a select number of cases. It will then discuss the major literary blocks of Revelation, with a particular emphasis on the unit spanning Revelation 12-22.

Revelatory Literary Device in New Testament

Simple

Parable of the Tenants (Luke 20:9-19)

Although the parable of the tenants is found in each of the Synoptic Gospels, only Luke presents the parable following the $x(x+1)$ pattern.² Mark depicts a greater number of instances in which the emissaries were sent during the harvest to receive the due share of the vineyard's

²Another parable formulated according to that pattern is the "Parable of Jotham" from Judges 9:7–21. The "Parable of Jotham" has been discussed in my previous study (see at n. 1).

produce: “he sent a servant to the tenants”; “he sent another servant to them again”; “then he sent another one”; “then he sent many others, some of whom they beat, and others they killed”; “finally, he sent him [the only beloved son]” (Mark 12:2–6).

Likely influenced by Mark’s account, Matthew also reports that the owner of the vineyard sent emissaries four times during the harvest, and on the fifth occasion, he sent his own son (Matthew 21:33–37).³

Unlike Mark and Matthew, Luke reconfigures the parable of the tenants, enumerating three attempts by the vineyard owner, followed by a fourth attempt, to recover the due share of the produce. The literary pattern of revelation is formally signaled by the explicit mention of the numeral “three,” i.e., “he sent yet a third servant” (Luke 20:12), foreshadowing the climax or what was to occur during the final attempt.

In Luke’s fourth and final attempt, according to his account, the vineyard owner sends his own son, who ultimately suffers death. The tragic fate of the son represents the culmination of the narrative’s development. Luke deliberately contrasts the fates of the other emissaries, who were merely beaten, with that of the son, who was killed.

The parable finds its resolution in the owner’s stated intention: “Now, what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come, destroy those tenants, and give the vineyard to others” (Luke 20:15–16).

³Matthew differs from Mark in certain aspects regarding the fates of those sent to bring the owner his share of the produce. An example of this can be seen in the order and description of the fate of one of the emissaries. In Mark, the first one sent was beaten, the second struck on the head and humiliated, the third mistreated, and so on. In Matthew, however, the first was beaten, the second killed, the third stoned to death, and so forth. Regarding the difference in the fate of the second emissary in Mark, Matthew likely clarifies that the head wounds mentioned were caused by stoning that led to his death.

Complex

A “complex” revelatory literary device involves repeated series of threes, each followed by a fourth element within a single literary unit. Often, but not necessarily, the fourth element of the first series may include another series of three, followed by a fourth element. Similarly, the fourth element of the second series may also incorporate another series of three, followed by a fourth. This intricate design enhances both the thematic depth and structural cohesion of the narrative.

The Transfiguration (Mat 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36)

The episode of Jesus’ transfiguration concentrates the presence of the $x(x+1)$ pattern in two instances. Through the time marker “after six days,” the event is exegetically connected to the moment of Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ (Mat 17:1; Mark 9:2).⁴ Peter’s confession represents a significant moment in the progression of events in the Synoptic Gospels, inaugurating both the revelation of Jesus’ identity and the foretelling of the sufferings He was to endure. However, Peter opposes the scenario of suffering, suggesting an alternative path without suffering, which prompts a severe rebuke from Jesus: “Get behind me, Satan! ... You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns” (Mat 16:22–23). Peter’s rejection of the scenario of suffering outlined by Jesus likely reflects different messianic expectations held by Peter and the other disciples.

The transfiguration episode complements Peter’s confession by offering God’s perspective on the two messianic scenarios proposed by Jesus and Peter.

⁴Although the time marker differs in the Gospel of Luke—i.e., “about eight days after these words” (Luke 9:28)—the event of the transfiguration is also exegetically connected to the episode of Peter’s confession (vv. 18–27).

The first instance of the literary pattern of revelation emphasizes Jesus' central role. This is indicated by Jesus' decision to be accompanied on the mountain by only three disciples—Peter, James, and John—narratively suggesting that attention should be focused on the fourth figure, Jesus. Unsurprisingly, He undergoes extraordinary transformations: "His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light" (Matthew 17:2); "His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them" (Mark 9:3); "As He was praying, the appearance of His face changed, and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning" (Luke 9:29).

Although the first series culminates with Jesus' transfiguration, the episode includes a second series built on the same principle, culminating with the voice of the Father. In this regard, we learn that two other figures join Jesus in glory: Moses and Elijah. Additionally, we are told that the subject of their conversation during this glorious meeting was about "His departure, which He was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31).

The disciples' disoriented reaction formally signals the new group formed by these three figures: "Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'" (Matthew 17:4). Whereas in the previous episode Peter was personally rebuked by Jesus, in the transfiguration episode, Peter's suggestion receives a direct response from the Father: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; listen to Him!" (v. 5).⁵

⁵The significance of the Father's intervention can be inferred by analogy with Jesus' stern rebuke of Peter's attempt to dissuade Him from accepting the scenario of suffering (Mat 16:22–23). The voice from the cloud most likely discourages another initiative by Peter that was contrary to the scenario of suffering. The Father's words, "...listen to Him!" encourage the disciples' adherence to the possibility of suffering presented by Jesus.

Cornelius Calls for Peter (Acts 10:1-11:18)

The episode of Cornelius calling for Peter is shaped according to the revelatory literary device, which may further elucidate the hermeneutical question regarding the meaning of Peter's vision about clean and unclean animals. The sequence of events indicates that God is in control of the lives of both Cornelius and Peter, orchestrating even the smallest details.

The narrative begins with Luke's interest in counting days. On the first day, the precise timing of Cornelius's angelic visionary experience is provided: "about three in the afternoon" (v. 3). He quickly summoned three men—two servants and a soldier—and sent them to Joppa to find Peter. The second day is again narratively marked. Luke emphasizes that the three men reached their destination "about noon the following day" (v. 9). At the same time, another intriguing experience was unfolding. Peter was shown a vision of something like a sheet descending to the earth, containing all kinds of unclean animals. The author highlights that this happened "three times" (v. 16), and each time Peter declined the invitation to kill and eat, arguing that he had never done so before.

At the very moment Peter was reflecting on the meaning of the vision, the three men knocked at the door. In this way, the fourth person for the visitors—Peter—was the solution to their needs, just as the three men were the answer to Peter's search for understanding. The meeting is explicitly described as orchestrated by the Holy Spirit: "While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them'" (vv. 19–20).

The narrator resumes tracking time, specifying that Peter, the three emissaries, and others set out on their journey to Caesarea, to Cornelius's home, on the third day ("next day," v. 23b).

The group arrives on the fourth day,⁶ suggesting that something surprising and unconventional is about to happen. And indeed, on the very fourth day, at three in the afternoon (v. 30), just as on the first day, God pours out the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles, enabling them to speak in tongues. This unexpected revelation plainly demonstrates that, as far as people are concerned, God does not show favoritism but loves people from every nation (vv. 34–35, 47).

The examples above have demonstrated the presence of the Revelatory Literary Device in New Testament literature as well. Its occurrence is, to some extent, expected, given that all New Testament writers shared Jewish roots and Hebrew ways of thinking. We will now focus on identifying the device in the book of Revelation and exploring how it contributes to our understanding of its structure.

Structure of the Book of Revelation

There are many competing theories regarding the structure of the book of Revelation, a fact that invites criticism for their subjectivity. A widespread expectation, both in scholarly and popular circles, is that Revelation may contain seven literary units. In Adventist circles, though not exclusively, there is the belief that these seven units are arranged concentrically or as a chiasm. This approach traces back to Kenneth Strand's early observation that the eight parts of the book's content were shaped concentrically. Later, Paulien (and independently, or in parallel, Davidson) reduced Strand's segmentation to seven literary units, excluding the Prologue and Epilogue. According to Paulien, the center of the concentric arrangement is reflected in Revelation 11:19–15:4, a unit whose center is Revelation 14. Within this chapter, the three

⁶ V. 30 reads: ἀπὸ τετάρτης ἡμέρας μέχρι ταύτης τῆς ὥρας ἤμην τὴν ἐνάτην προσευχόμενος (...); "Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon (...).

angels' messages are considered to reflect the heart of the text. This structuring has been further revisited by other SDA theologians. For instance, Stefanovic placed Revelation 11:19–13:18 at the center of the construction. These shifts in identifying the center are not limited to the authors mentioned above, suggesting an ongoing conversation among proponents of the concentric model.

My investigation into the revelatory literary device led me to the conclusion that the structure of the book of Revelation reflects this device at multiple levels. The most basic and immediate criticism of the idea of a sevenfold division of the book, which supports the thesis advanced here, is that Revelation does not contain seven series of seven elements but only four! This observation aligns well with the revelatory literary pattern, which projects the expectation of a series of three elements followed by a fourth one. Taken at face value, the main sections of the book would be as depicted in the diagram below.

[See diagram.](#)

THE OVERARCHING STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION¹
(The Four Literary Building Blocks)|

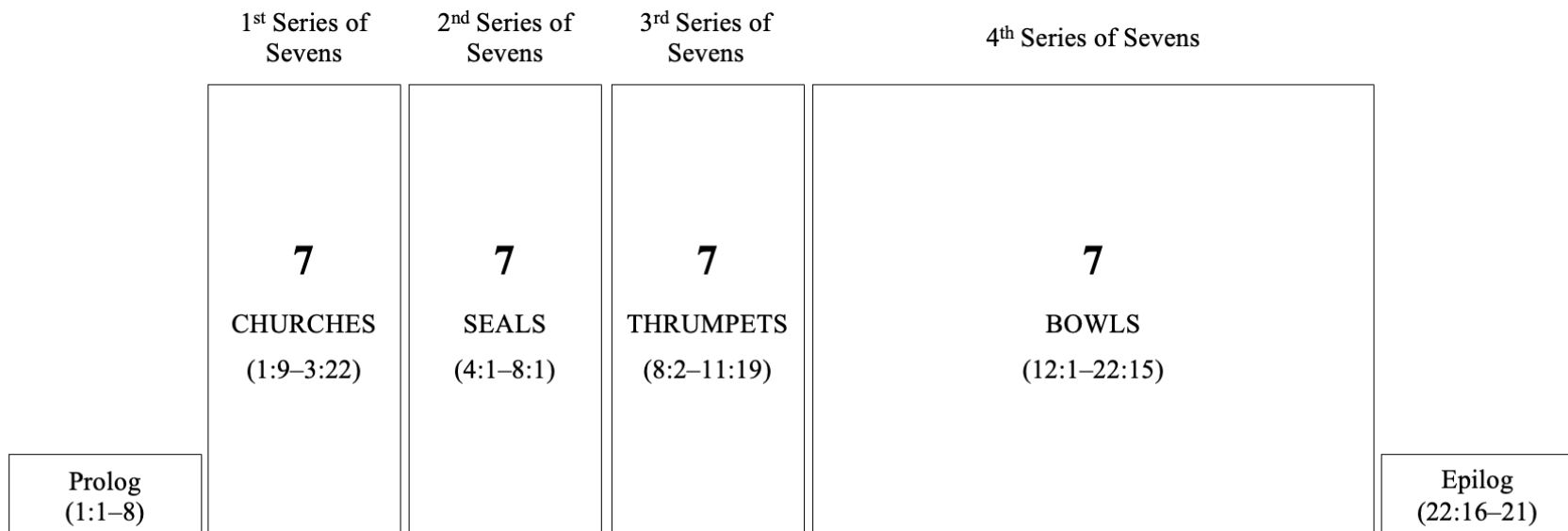


Diagram 1. The structure of the Book of Revelation, shaped according to the Literary Revelatory Device. The exegetical emphasis is placed on the last of the four series of sevens, namely the seven bowls.

Two observations are worth noting here. First, the identification of the first three literary blocks is not a contentious issue among exegetes. One point of certainty is that these first three units are clearly marked in the text. Even the bracketed, inserted material within the second and third series of septets finds its place and is held together within their respective units, followed by the seventh seal and trumpet, respectively. This literary procedure binds them within their corresponding septets.

The second observation concerns the nature of the fourth unit, which encompasses chapters 12–22. There is a consensus regarding its complexity and the challenge it poses for structural analysis. Indeed, while the literary blocks of chapters 1–11 are easily identifiable and generally agreed upon by scholars, from chapter 12 onward, interpreters differ in how they delimit the units. I suggest that the revelatory literary device can further aid in resolving this issue.

Revelatory Literary Device and the Eschatological Evil Entities

It is immediately noticeable that starting with chapter 12, both the form and content of the book change. Not only are the three series of sevens no longer followed immediately by the final series, the seven bowls, but thematically the focus shifts as well. The attention turns to the catalog of evil actors who play significant roles in opposing God and His plans in history. Intriguingly, this catalog includes a series of three, followed by a fourth: the dragon, the sea beast, the land beast, and the icon to the beast. The final plagues mark a fateful turning point in the flourishing of these evil entities.

If we trace the plot of the book by following these evil actors, we see that after the pouring out of God's final wrath, each of the "bad actors" meets their judgment and fate. Notably, the order of their annihilation is reversed. Thus, the icon to the beast, introduced last as the fourth

and constituting the apex of the theophany of evil, is judged and destroyed first. The icon to the beast is identified under the name "Babylon the Great," and this judgment is given the longest narrative space, detailing its context, judgment, and aftermath, particularly in Revelation 17:1–19:10.

Next in reverse order are the sea beast and the land beast. Their fate is presented as resulting from the actions of the Rider on the white horse, symbolizing the second coming of Jesus. Both are captured and "thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur" (Rev 19:20). The narrative continues by detailing the fate of the last evil entity in reverse order: the dragon, Satan. His destruction is revealed to occur after the 1,000 years of symbolic imprisonment. Along with the nations, he is devoured by fire coming down from heaven. It is particularly noted that Satan shares the same destiny as the land and sea beasts: "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev 20:10).

[See diagram.](#)

[THE LAST SECTION OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION¹
(Four Eschatological Entities)]

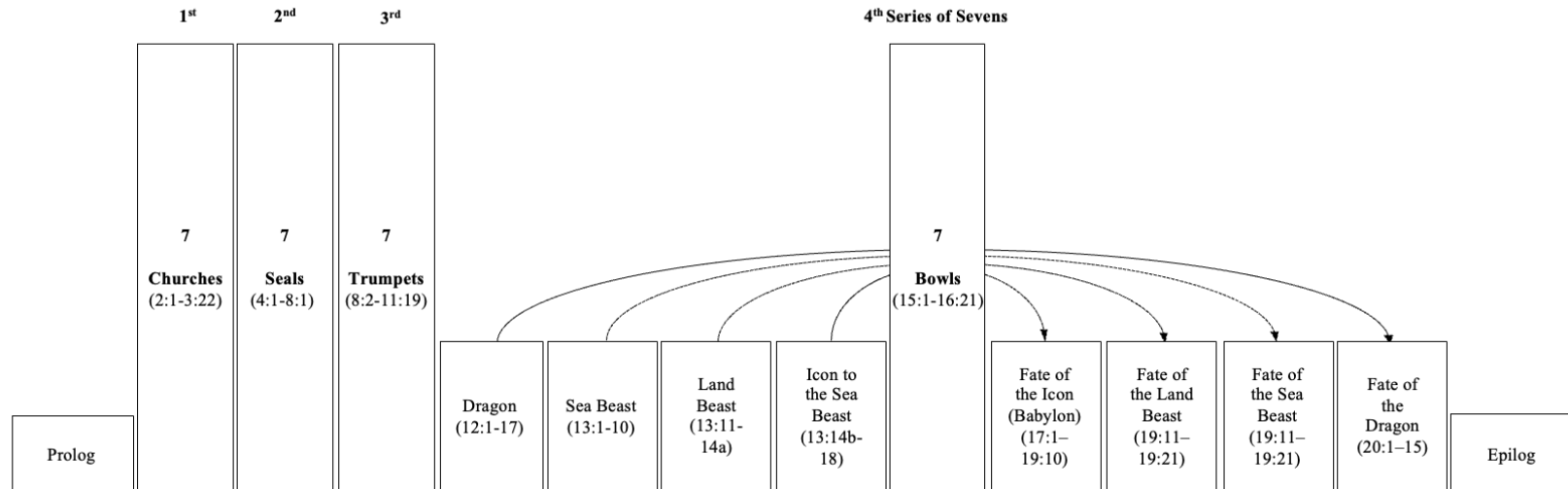


Diagram 2. The four eschatological entities and their fate presented in the last section of the Book of Revelation, according to the Literary Revelatory Device.

According to this interpretation, there is a conceptual explanation for the delay in introducing the fourth series of sevens. Without first presenting the end-time coalition of evil actors, the seven bowls, which feature God's wrath, would not be fully understood. However, by detailing their opposition to God's people and their malevolent acts of deception, the reader is then positioned to properly grasp the nature of God's wrath. It is directed against those who harm His faithful followers and who destroy the earth.

Structural Unity of Revelation 12-22

We have argued above that, thematically, the fourth series of sevens—the seven angels with the seven bowls—dominates the fourth complex section of Revelation. The seven bowls are consequential in sealing the fate of the four eschatological entities introduced before the last series of sevens, which are judged in reverse order. Now, it is time to discuss other aspects that are important for further elucidating the complex nature of Revelation 12–22.

The first question concerns the coherence and unity of Revelation 12–22 as a whole. In other words, do we have any formal indication that chapters 12–22 are structurally tied together? We contend that Revelation 15:1 provides such a clue. The verse reads: “I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed.” This verse connects chapters 12–13 with chapters 15–22. The formal literary marker Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν recalls the very beginning of the fourth literary block, which changes in style compared with the first three series of sevens. At the transition in chapter 12, John uses similar wording twice to signal the shift: Καὶ σημεῖον μέγα ὤφθη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ (“A great sign appeared in heaven,” v. 1); καὶ ὤφθη ἄλλο

σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ (“then another sign appeared in heaven,” v. 3). The natural explanation for repeating this phrase at the beginning of chapter 12 is to mark the start of a new unit. As is well acknowledged, these phrases are part of the woman and dragon episode, which forms a single literary unit or discourse.⁷

The use of the same wording in Revelation 15:1 is not coincidental. I argue that John, through this deliberate maneuver, ties the last series of sevens to the preceding chapters, emphasizing their unity.

John also intentionally connects the “great and marvelous sign” with the “seven angels with the seven last plagues” in the same verse. By this maneuver, he successfully links the previous chapters with the upcoming ones, which are dominated by the presence of the angelic beings involved in completing God’s wrath. After chapters 15–16, which comprise the fourth series of sevens, certain angels appear again: εἷς ἐκ τῶν ἐπτὰ ἀγγέλων τῶν ἐχόντων τὰς ἐπτὰ φιάλας (“One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls,” 17:1); Καὶ ἦλθεν εἷς ἐκ τῶν ἐπτὰ ἀγγέλων τῶν ἐχόντων τὰς ἐπτὰ φιάλας τῶν γεμόντων τῶν ἐπτὰ πληγῶν τῶν ἐσχάτων (“One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues,” 21:9).

The use of both of these phrases at the very beginning of the last series of sevens is not incidental. I suggest that these repeated phrases provide clues that support the reading of chapters 12–22 as a coherent literary unit.

⁷ To put it differently, since the language is clustered in three verses within the same discourse, it is not intended to mark subdivisions but rather to serve as transitions between paragraphs or scenes within that discourse. It should not be interpreted as a prompt to count or categorize divisions (as some have done, reaching up to seven!). Instead, it acts as a delineation signal, allowing John to later connect these sections to the seven angels. By doing so, he signals that chapters 12–22 are structurally connected and should be analyzed as a unified whole. This is different from the method found in the Gospel of John, where the author invites the reader to tabulate Jesus’s miracles after formally cataloging the first two (in John 2 and 4).

Revelatory Literary Device in Revelation 15:1-22:16

Earlier, we argued that from a thematic perspective, the chapters preceding and succeeding the seven bowls literary discourse introduce the 3+1 evil actors and present their terrible fate, respectively. However, the mere presence of these entities does not necessarily indicate clear-cut literary divisions, particularly in the material following chapter 16. Consequently, we must address a new, crucial question from a structural point of view: Does the material after the seven bowls discourse provide clearer clues for identifying subdivisions? We contend that the answer is yes. We will present fresh evidence in support of this claim, arguing that from chapter 15 onward, the material is structured into three subunits, followed by a fourth, in accordance with the revelatory literary device.

We propose that these four subunits are as follows: (1) Revelation 15:1–16:21; (2) 17:1–19:10; (3) 19:11–21:8; (4) 21:9–22:16. For each of these subunits, we will address the methodological questions of whether their beginnings and endings are formally delineated, and whether the topics they cover are thematically homogeneous.

Revelation 15:1-16:21

This subunit is robust and clearly delineated. It begins by introducing the central theme: the completion of God's wrath, instrumented by the seven angels with the seven bowls. The subunit progresses coherently from the heavenly temple scene, setting the stage for the consecutive outpouring of the seven bowls. Its content follows the same pattern as the other series of sevens. Like the seven trumpets literary unit, it concludes with a description of "flashes of lightning," "rumblings," "peals of thunder," "an earthquake," and "huge hailstorm." The introduction, development, and conclusion are comparable to the other series of sevens, making this subunit confidently qualify as a unified section.

Revelation 17:1-19:10

This subunit is marked at the beginning by the clustering of two important markers: (1) the reference to one of the seven angels with the seven bowls, and (2) an invitation by the angel to experience a new visionary disclosure: “Come, I will show you (...). Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit (...)” (17:1-3). While the first marker recalls Revelation 15:1, the second alludes to three other instances of similar wording, each of which introduces significant literary blocks (1:10; 4:1-2; 21:9). The content of this subunit is unified around the theme of the judgment of Babylon, presented first as a prostitute woman and later as a great city. The doxologies at the end of the unit celebrate Babylon’s destruction, thematically connecting with the rest of the content. These doxologies also recall the similar praise at the conclusion of the seven trumpets, which celebrates God’s power, His salvation of the oppressed, and His judgment of evil actors (19:1-8; cf. 11:16-18). However, the conclusion of this subunit (17:1–19:10) is more elaborated, introducing two new elements:

(1) The angel’s invitation to write, which is followed by the confirmation, “These are the true words of God” (19:9).

(2) The first recorded instance of the prophet’s physical reaction to worship the angel, an act that is immediately rejected.

These two new elements are consistently found at the conclusion of the next two literary subunits, further strengthening the hypothesis that this subunit has reached its conclusion.

Revelation 19:11-21:8

This subunit is robustly delineated. Its beginning clusters two important markers, which together justify the start of a new subunit. The first marker is the phrase *Καὶ εἶδον τὸν οὐρανὸν ἠνεῳγμένον* (“I saw heaven standing open,” 19:11). This phrase finds its functional counterpart

in Revelation 4:1, where it introduces a major division in the book and signals a new literary block. The second marker concerns the depiction of the Rider, which echoes language used to describe Jesus in the opening literary block of the book, namely, Revelation 1:9–3:22. Among other commonalities, Jesus is depicted “with a sharp sword coming out of His mouth” (1:16; 19:15).

The presence of both markers provides a satisfactory explanation for the absence of the phrase “one of the seven angels with the seven bowls”—a recurring signal for the other subunits in the latter part of the book. Since the events presented in this subunit presuppose the second coming of Jesus, none of the seven angels with the seven bowls would fit the opening. Instead, John uses language that links this section to other openings that introduce God’s actions.

The content of the subunit is thematically homogeneous, focusing on the fate of God’s adversaries: the sea beast, the land beast, the dragon, and the nations. All share the same punishment: the lake of fire. This powerful imagery of the “lake of fire” is found only in this subunit, unifying its internal structure.

An analysis of the unit’s conclusion reveals strong similarities with the ending of the previous subunit (17:1–19:10). Both subunits conclude with imagery of a wedding banquet, including depictions of the bride and her attire. Both share the call from the angel to write down the revelation, emphasizing the credibility of the words in similar language. Finally, the blessing for those invited to the wedding banquet parallels the distinction between the victorious, who will inherit the New Jerusalem and be His children, and those who will be punished.

Taken together, the introduction, the unified theme, and the similar conclusion support the view that Revelation 19:11–21:8 constitutes a stand-alone subunit within the fourth literary block of the book.

Revelation 21:9-22:16

This subunit is initially marked as a new section by the presence of one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls and by the invitation from the angel to experience another visionary disclosure “in the Spirit” (21:9–10). The content is thematically homogeneous, focusing on a single topic: the Lamb’s bride, the New Jerusalem.

Its precise ending is difficult to pinpoint, as it overlaps with the conclusion of the book. However, by comparison to the endings of the previous subunits, we suggest that it extends up to 22:16. Revelation 22:6–16 shares several key concepts with the endings of the other subunits: (1) The angel’s confirmation that the vision is trustworthy (v. 6; cf. 19:9; 21:5); (2) The preservation of the prophecy’s written words, with a blessing attached to it (vv. 7, 10; cf. 19:9; 21:5); (3) Blessings (vv. 7, 14; cf. 19:9); (4) The refusal of the angel to accept worship (vv. 8–9; cf. 19:10); (5) A stark distinction between two classes of people—the righteous and the vile (vv. 11, 14–16; cf. 21:7–8); (6) The presence of Jesus’ voice and His names (vv. 7, 13, 16; cf. 21:6).

All four passages discussed above—Revelation 15:1–16:21, 17:1–19:10, 19:11–21:8, and 21:9–22:16—meet the criteria of a literary unit. Their beginnings and endings are clearly marked and can be corroborated with those of other well-established literary blocks. Additionally, the content of each passage follows a coherent, homogeneous theme. Consequently, they qualify as subunits within the structure proposed in this study.

DELINEATION INTO SUBUNITS OF REVELATION 15-22

	Rev 15:1-16:21	Rev 17:1-19:10	Rev 19:11-21:8	Rev 21:9-22:15
Beginnings	<p>(1) Seven angels with seven bowls.</p> <p>“I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God’s wrath is completed” (15:1).</p>	<p>(1) One of the seven angels with the seven bowls.</p> <p>“One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you (...). Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit (...)” (17:1-3).</p> <p>(2) “In the Spirit” (cf. 1:10; 21:9; 4:1-2).</p> <p>“After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this. At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it” (4:1-2).</p>	<p>(1) Open heaven (cf. 4:1).</p> <p>“I saw heaven standing open (...)” (19:11).</p> <p>“After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven.” (4:1).</p> <p>(2) Description of Jesus (cf. 1:12-18).</p> <p>“His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God” (19:12-13).</p> <p>“His eyes were like blazing fire” (1:14); “coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword” (1:16); “I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (1:18).</p>	<p>(1) One of the seven angels with the seven bowls.</p> <p>“One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (21:9).</p> <p>(2) “In the Spirit” (cf. 1:10; 4:1-2; 17:1-2;).</p> <p>“And he carried me away in the Spirit (...)” (21:10a).</p>
Content	Heavenly Temple Seven Bowls	Judgement of Babylon (“great prostitute,” “great city”)	Judgment of Sea Beast, Land Beast, Dragon, and the Nations.	Lamb’s Bride, New Jerusalem
Endings	<p>(1) Natural phenomena (cf. 11:19)</p> <p>“Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. (...) huge hailstones (...)” (16:18).</p> <p>“And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm” 11:19).</p>	<p>(1) Doxologies comparable with the ending of the seven trumpets (19:1-8; cf. with 11:16-19).</p> <p>(2) Writing, blessing, authenticity, worship.</p> <p>“Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb” And he added, “These are the true words of God” (19:9)</p> <p>“At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus” (19:10).</p>	<p>(1) Writing, blessing, authenticity, two polarizations, names.</p> <p>“(5) He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” (6) He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. (7) Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. (8) But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death” (21:5-8).</p>	<p>(1) Writing, blessing, authenticity, worship, two polarizations, names.</p> <p>“(6) The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.” (7) “Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.” (8) I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. (9) But he said to me, “Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!” (10) Then he told me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near. (11) Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile. Let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy.” (12) “Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. (13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. (14) “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city, (15) Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood, (16) “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star” (22:6-16).</p>

So far, we have argued that Revelation 12–22 constitutes the fourth literary block and the climactic section of the entire book. Specifically, this literary block extends from Revelation 12:1 to 22:16. Its climactic function is implied by the revelatory literary device and further corroborated by the presence of both the fourth series of sevens—the seven bowls—and the dominant presence of four eschatological evil entities.

We have also shown that the material within this last literary block is complex and carefully designed according to the same pattern. The eschatological negative actors are introduced as a series of three (i.e., the dragon, the sea beast, the land beast), followed by the fourth entity (i.e., the icon of the beast). All four entities are judged and condemned in the reverse order of their introduction: the icon of the beast, the sea beast, the land beast, and the dragon. They share the same fate—the lake of fire. Between the flourishing and damnation of the beasts, the seven bowls are poured out. Structurally, the seven bowls occupy a central position, and theologically, they signal the collapse of the vile eschatological entities.

Additionally, we have argued that the fourth literary block introduces another layer of complexity. After the four beasts are introduced, another series of three followed by a fourth prophetic discourse is presented. These four discourses are: 15:1–16:21; 17:1–19:10; 19:11–21:8; 21:9–22:16.

I have referred to these as literary subunits, given their clearly marked beginnings and endings. This new series of four judgment subunits escalates toward the fourth, which presents the glorious destiny of the Lamb’s true worshipers—His bride, the New Jerusalem.

With this brief review in mind, we can visually configure the components of our structure as shown in the chart below.

THE OVERARCHING STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION: THE REVELATORY LITERARY DEVICE MODEL¹

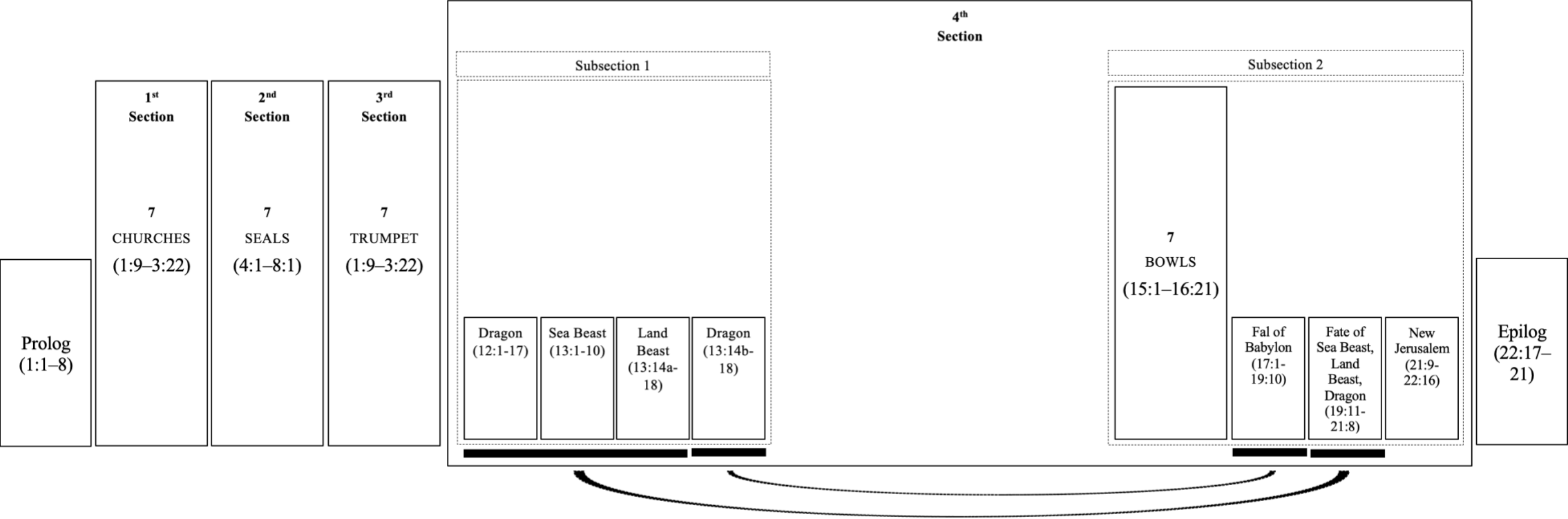


Diagram 3| The overall structure of the Book of Revelation, shaped according to the Revelatory Literary Device. Revelation 14 is not yet represented in this chart, as it will be discussed later.

Revelatory Literary Device in Rev 14:1-20 and Its Function ("Preview Model")

The chart above covers all the relevant literary units in the book of Revelation, except for one chapter: Revelation 14. We now turn to discuss its content and function within the overall framework of the book. As we shall see, the chapter's placement and structure contribute to the complexity of the fourth literary block.

As it stands, Revelation 14 brings together content that initially appears disconnected. While the three angels' messages convey a sense of homogeneity, the messages themselves seem to differ significantly from one another. Even more pronounced is the challenge of determining their relationship with the opening verses, which describe the 144,000, and with the closing imagery of the earth's harvest and the trampling of the winepress. Additionally, the chapter lacks clear formal markers of beginning and ending. Revelation 14 derives its status as a literary unit primarily from being bracketed by sections that are homogeneous in both form and content, namely 12:1–13:18 and 15:1–16:21.⁸

However, we have identified at least three factors that support the unity of Revelation 14 as a literary unit: (1) the presence of heavenly beings⁹; (2) programmatic similarities between this

⁸ An explanation can be found by considering the relationship between chapter 14 and its surrounding context. For instance, the 144,000 group may symbolize true worshipers who did not receive the mark of the beast imposed by the icon of the beast. However, the connection between the end of chapter 14 and what follows is more difficult to establish with certainty.

⁹ In Revelation 14, there is a series of three angels in vv. 6-13, followed by another series of three angels. After the first series, the Son of Man appears as the fourth heavenly being, positioned in the middle of the chapter. He serves as the central figure, whether reading the text from the beginning or in reverse. Additionally, Revelation 14 frequently uses the phrase ἐν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ ("with a loud voice"), which underscores the heralding nature of the entire passage, as it previews the events that are yet to come.

chapter and the subsequent subunits, and (3) the use of the revelatory literary device. These factors, when applied together, suggest that Revelation 14 functions cohesively.

The explanation we propose is the "preview model." Our working hypothesis is that John intended Revelation 14 to serve as a general survey of the content of the book up to its conclusion. The material in Revelation 15:1–22:16 is structured into four literary subunits, each corresponding to one of the four parts of the "preview" found in Revelation 14:1–20. The four parts we suggest are: (1) vv. 1-7; (2) v. 8; (3) vv. 9-13; and (4) vv. 14-20.

Verses 1-7 forms the first part of the chapter, with the first five verses providing an extended introduction to the 144,000. Intertextual links with 15:2-4 suggest that both passages refer to the same group.¹⁰ The two passages complement each other, each offering unique perspectives on the characteristics of the group. What is "covered" in one passage is "uncovered" in the other, and vice versa.¹¹ The introductory verses set the stage for the proclamation of the first angel in vv. 6-7.

¹⁰ It is likely that the principle at work in presenting the 144,000 first in Revelation 14:1-5 and then their message in 14:6-13 follows a Hebrew literary pattern, which presents first the results or consequences and then the cause. In this case, the 144,000 in 14:1-5 are depicted as those who have been saved as a result of the proclamation in 14:6-13. This structure emphasizes that their salvation is the outcome of the angelic messages warning against worshiping the beast and calling for the endurance of the saints. Similarly, in Revelation 15:2-4, the same group—the 144,000—is likely referenced again, in order to create an alignment with the beginning of Revelation 14.

¹¹ Revelation 14:1-5 and 15:2-4 share several common features, such as harp playing, singing, and the central presence of the Lamb. These features exhibit an implicit complementarity between the two chapters. In 14:3, the 144,000 sing a "new song" that no one else can learn, which contrasts with the "Song of Moses and the Lamb" in 15:3, where the content of the song is revealed. Another point of complementarity is found in the contrast between the "name of the Father" on the foreheads of the 144,000 (14:1) and the "number of its name"—666—associated with the beast (13:18). This marks a clear distinction between the faithful and the unfaithful. Additionally, the phrase "did not defile themselves with women" (14:4) refers to the purity of the 144,000, who resist idolatry and false worship, which is further echoed in Revelation 17 where the prostitute symbolizes the corrupting influence of idolatry. In Revelation 15, the reference to "its image" can be seen as the corresponding symbol of the prostitute in chapter 17, reinforcing the theme of faithful worship versus the corrupted worship of the beast and its image. These connections underscore the overarching contrast between the faithful and the unfaithful, culminating in the victory of those who remain pure and true to the Lamb. The parallelism between these two passages suggests that the 144,000 in 14:1-5 and the victorious throng in 15:2-5 represent the same group of faithful worshipers, who have been purified and preserved by God, ultimately standing triumphant in His presence.

Verses 6-7, the first angel message, are linguistically and conceptually linked to 15:4-16:21. The former features a positive call to "fear God," "give Him glory," and "worship Him," while the latter passage reveals the consequences for those who rejected this call to repentance. The domains of God's rulership—"heavens," "earth," "sea," and "springs of water"—are similarly affected by the angels of the first bowls, thus establishing a thematic connection.

Verse 8, the second angel message, announces the fall of Babylon, which conceptually and linguistically corresponds to 17:1-19:10, where the motif of Babylon's judgment and her intoxicating influence over the nations is further explored.

Verses 9-13, the third angel message, warns of the fate of those who, by aligning with God's adversaries, will be cast into the lake of fire. The strong language of God's fury here serves as a preview of the subunit in 19:11-21:8, where the same imagery of divine wrath is applied to the sea beast, the land beast, the dragon, and the nations. This language, emphasizing divine judgment, does not appear again in the same form elsewhere in the book, further reinforcing the thematic connection.

Verses 14-20 constitutes the fourth part of the chapter, previewing the subunit found in 21:9-22:16.¹² This passage discusses the final harvest, depicting two categories of people emerging in the end times. The first category is represented by the true worshipers, symbolized by the harvesting of the earth, while the second is represented by the false worshipers, symbolized by the harvesting of the grapes.

¹² Revelation 14:14-20 is delineated from the previous unit (i.e., vv. 6-12) by verse 13, where a voice from heaven instructs John to write. This command, as seen in later subunits (e.g., 17:1-22:16), marks the end of a subunit and signals a transition between parts of the narrative.

Spatially, the true worshipers are gathered "inside the city," while the false worshipers are gathered "outside the city" (v. 20). These ideas are expanded upon in 21:9-22:16, where the division between the two groups is emphasized. The polarization is dramatically highlighted in 22:11: "Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy." Similarly, in Revelation 22:14-15, the groups are envisioned as being "in" and "outside the city," reinforcing this stark division.

The observations above make a compelling case for the "preview model" as an effective explanation for the fourfold structure, the placement, and the function of Revelation 14 within the broader structure of the book. Like the 15:1-22:16 literary block, Revelation 14 reaches its climax in the fourth part, pointing to the final harvest, which corresponds to the New Jerusalem.

[See diagram below.](#)

THE STRUCTURAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REVELATION 14:1-20 AND 15:1-22:16
(The “Preview” Model)

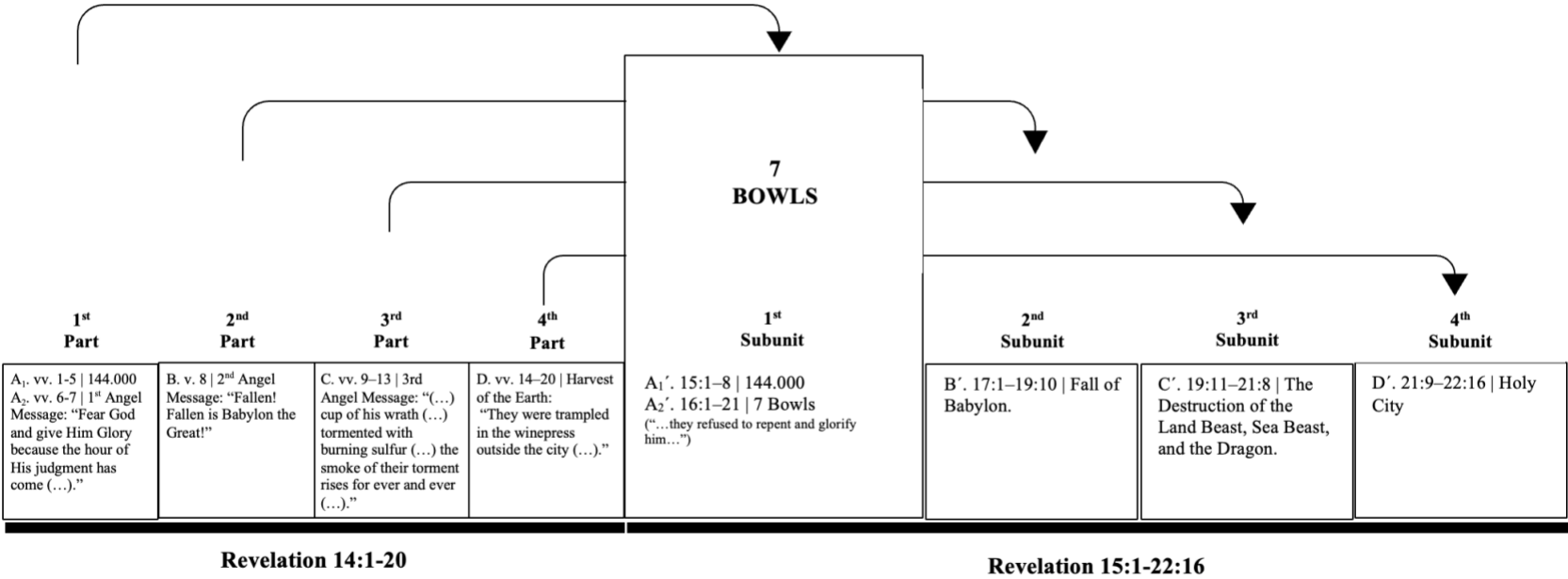


Diagram 3. An outline of the structure of Revelation 14:1–20 and its anticipatory function in relation to the content of Revelation 15:1–22:16.

Results and Implications

(1) Contribution to the Debate about the Structure of Revelation

This study advances our knowledge regarding the structure of the book of Revelation. By proposing the *Revelatory Literary Device* model, it offers a fresh perspective that enhances our understanding of the book's structure, particularly the complex sections in Revelation 12-22. The model suggests that the structure of these chapters is governed by a recurring literary pattern: each major section is organized as a series of three followed by a fourth division.

The model is developed within the framework of a biblical literary patterns and identifies 12:1-13:18 and 15:1-22:16 as distinct subunits. Additionally, it interprets 14:1-20 as a preview of the following chapters, setting the stage for the content to unfold in 15:1-22:16. This fresh approach offers a coherent and compelling framework for understanding the complex structure of one of the most challenging sections of the book.

Furthermore, the study provides more precise delineations for Revelation 15:1-22:16, identifying them as four distinct subunits: (1) 15:1-16:21; (2) 17:1-19:10; (3) 19:11-21:8; (4) 21:9-22:16. Each of these subunits is marked by clear literary boundaries at the beginning and end, and is unified by a consistent thematic thread.

Lastly, the study addresses Revelation 14, examining its role and placement within the broader structure of the book. It argues that Revelation 14 functions as a "preview" of the subsequent chapters (15:1-22:16), shaped into four parts that mirror the thematic and structural elements that follow. The presence of angelic beings in Revelation 14 further unifies the chapter's content and emphasizes its preparatory role for the climactic judgments that will unfold in the chapters that follow.

THE OVERARCHING STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION: THE REVELATORY LITERARY DEVICE MODEL

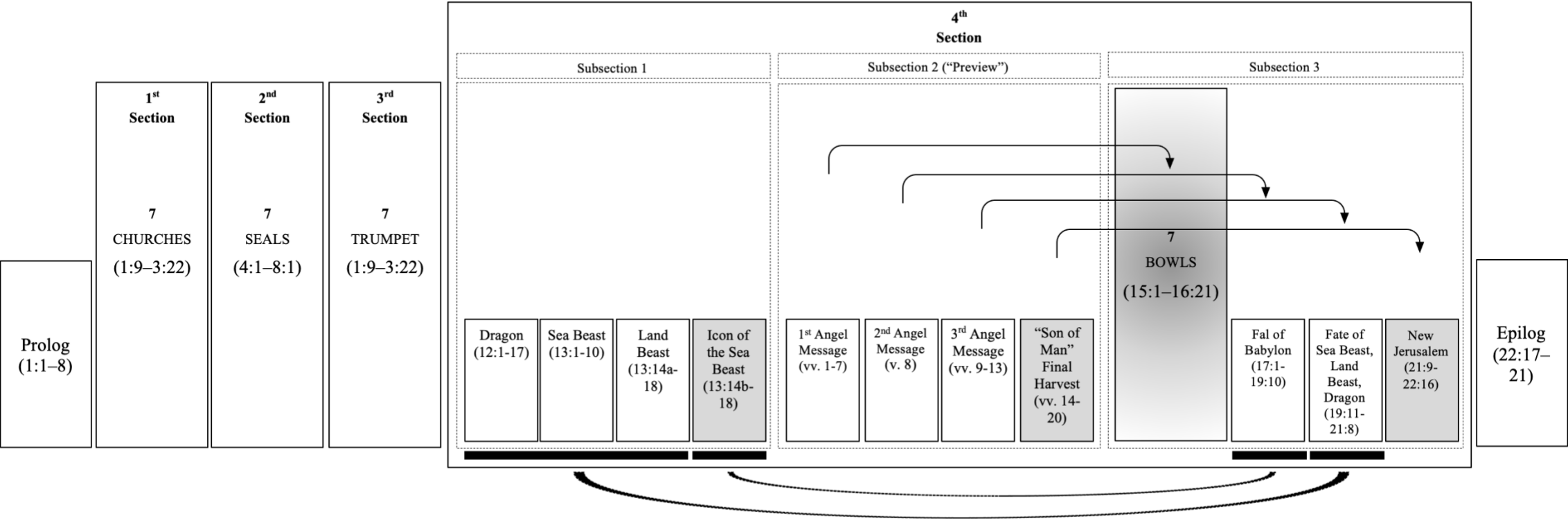


Diagram 5. The overall structure of the Book of Revelation, shaped according to the Revelatory Literary Device. The exegetical focus is placed on the last of the four series of sevens or the last of the four series of subunits. The focal points are highlighted in grey.

(2) Theological Focus(es) and Exegetical Center(s)

When examined through the lens of the *Revelatory Literary Device*, the structure of the Book of Revelation reveals multiple theological emphases, each underscored by the final element in a series, i.e., $x(x+1)$. At the macro level, the careful arrangement of the book's literary constituents shows a gradual escalation of events, culminating in the fourth series of the seven angels with the seven bowls (15:1-16:21). This series forms the thematic and structural centerpiece of the fourth literary block (12:1-22:16). The overarching theme of this section centers on God's judgment of the forces of evil, which not only afflict His people but also devastate the earth.

Within this climactic section, there are additional theological focal points, particularly related to the unfolding of evil in the last days. The epiphany of evil reaches its zenith in the introduction of the icon of the beast, which stands as the fourth global actor in the eschatological drama. This figure utilizes economic pressure (symbolized by the financial boycott) and ideological coercion to impose a false worship system for the sea beast. This powerful symbol amplifies the reach of evil and its pervasive influence over the world, marking a key moment in the book's depiction of spiritual rebellion.

Yet, even amid these troubling portrayals of evil, the book ultimately progresses toward a hopeful conclusion. This trajectory is reinforced by the structure and interrelationship between 14:1-20 and 15:1-22:16. Chapter 14, serving as a thematic and structural preview, concludes with the powerful imagery of the final harvest. Here, the righteous and the wicked are clearly separated: the righteous are gathered "inside the city," while the wicked are left "outside the city." This dual imagery, central to the final judgment, is further expanded upon in Revelation

21:9-22:16, the final subunit of the book, where the distinction between the two groups is fully realized in the glorious vision of the New Jerusalem.

The final imagery of Revelation 21:9-22:16, with the radiant New Jerusalem as the ultimate destination, underscores the bright future awaiting God's true worshipers. The splendor of this holy city, and the eternal communion with God it represents, forms the book's climactic, hopeful conclusion. Despite the pervasive threat of evil, Revelation's ultimate vision is one of redemption, restoration, and divine victory.

(3) Interpretation

The structure proposed in this study contributes to the interpretation of various exegetical challenges within the book of Revelation. It aids in identifying key entities and encourages a reevaluation of certain interpretations.

One example of identification is the structural correspondence between the icon of the beast and Babylon. It is my understanding that these two represent the same eschatological entity.¹³

A reevaluation is necessary for those interpretations that derive meaning based on the structure and its main divisions, particularly regarding chiasmic structures. There are many examples of this, but I will limit the discussion to two for the sake of illustration:

(1) Reevaluation of 11:19. Some interpreters regard 11:19 as the opening of a new literary unit. A rigorous analysis, however, compellingly indicates that it is part of the concluding verses

¹³ The feature of presenting entities by different names and imagery is widely accepted by interpreters of Revelation. The identification of Babylon with the icon of the beast in Revelation dates back to 2019, when I independently arrived at this conclusion based on other grounds. The macro-structure of the book supports this identification. Later, in a personal conversation with Jon Paulien, I shared this observation, and he directed me to the study by Theresa Lu, who reached a similar conclusion, focusing her analysis on the icon of the beast. To the best of my knowledge, Jon Paulien now also embraces this identification.

of the seven trumpets literary block (8:2-11:19). Therefore, deriving theological meaning from this problematic division is not the best exegetical praxis. While the imagery of the opening of God's temple and the viewing of the ark of the covenant does connect with subsequent material, I disagree that it anticipates the theology of chapters 12-13 (and for some, 14). Rather, I see its connection to what follows as derived from its inclusion in the ending of the seven trumpets. This ending serves to anticipate the fourth literary block of the book. Linguistically, thematically, and conceptually, the phrase "God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant" alludes to Revelation 15:5a: "After this I looked, and I saw in heaven the temple—that is, the tabernacle of the covenant law—and it was opened."

(2) Opening Temple Scenes and Structure. Related to the above observation, the structure advanced here also impacts the number and distribution of temple scenes as openings to the major sections of the book. The fourfold division confirms a consistent pattern: heavenly scenes occur at the beginning of each of the four series of seven. Structures based on sevenfold or eightfold divisions, or more are problematic, as they do not naturally open with temple scenes. For example, Revelation 19:1-10 is often detached from 17:1-19:10 to make it the opening temple scene for a subunit that starts with 19:11. Since other structures have dominated the interpretation of the book, the model I suggest calls for a reevaluation of those structures and the theological meanings derived from them.

(4) Further Research

The *Revelatory Literary Device* model, used to outline the structure and content of the Book of Revelation, opens several avenues for further research on the form and composition of biblical writings, including both Old and New Testament texts. This approach not only sheds

light on unexpected exegetical centers but also highlights significant theological motifs. One central theme brought to the forefront in this study is God's judgment—a theme that intricately connects both the gospel and eschatology. Both the first and second advents should be understood as part of God's ongoing acts of judgeship. In both, God's intervention is the "good news"—offering salvation from sin, as well as deliverance from Satan and the forces of global evil. Through judgment, God's love is made manifest. This perspective may help explain the connection between the "good news" in Revelation 14:7 and its correspondence with the series of the seven angels bearing the seven bowls. The judgment motif is rich in both testaments, and within Adventist theology, it holds profound implications. Its study clearly warrants further exploration.