

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

In our study together of Revelation last week, we talked about three principles of interpretation that we must follow if we are to rightly understand the meaning and the message of the book of Revelation.

We said that to rightly understand the meaning and the message of the book of Revelation, we had to first of all understand the literary style of this book. We said that it was primarily written in the form of highly symbolic, visual imagery. It presents its message in symbolic pictures that are not meant to be taken literally, though these pictures do convey, of course, a very specific and literal message.

The general rule of the interpretation of the entire rest of the New Testament is this: Interpret what you read literally, unless you are forced to interpret it symbolically. But in the book of Revelation, that rule has to be turned on its head. In Revelation chapter 1 and verse 1, we are told that the message in this book is going to be communicated by means of signs. Therefore, the rule in the book of Revelation is this: Interpret what you read symbolically, unless you are forced to interpret it literally.

The main method of communication in this book is that of symbolism, and we need to start with a presupposition that what we are reading is symbolic. We start with a presupposition that we're expecting symbolism unless there are compelling reasons to say that it's not symbolic. This is a very crucial principle that we have to understand if we're going to rightly interpret the book of Revelation. We have to understand that it was primarily written in the form of highly symbolic visual imagery, and therefore, we must interpret it symbolically, unless we're forced to interpret it literally.

The second principle of interpretation that we looked at last time was that we need to look into the Bible *itself* in order to gain an understanding of this symbolic language that Revelation contains. When you read about all these beasts and their heads and the crowns and all these really strange symbols, where are we going to go to gain an understanding of what those symbols stand for? Well the answer is, we're going to go to the rest of the Bible to find the answers.

We're going to look elsewhere in the Bible itself to gain an understanding of Revelation's symbolic language and pictures. We're going to look at the clear nonsymbolic passages elsewhere in the Bible that address these same issues—passages like First Thessalonians 4 and 5, Second Thessalonians 1 and 2, Second Peter 3, Matthew 24. These are all ordinary prose passages; they are nonsymbolic; they are literal passages—not that they don't contain some symbolism, but they're not primarily symbolic, they are primarily literal and be taken literally. So you interpret symbols in light of literal passages.

We're also going to look elsewhere, and in particular in the Old Testament, to see how these symbols are used there, because there are hundreds and hundreds of allusions to Old Testament

stories, events, and symbols in the book of Revelation. So what we're going to do, then, is we're going to look in the Old Testament to discover the meaning of the symbols that are contained in the book of Revelation.

All we need to understand the Bible is the Bible itself. Understand, the Bible is a self-interpreting book. It will give you all the answers you need as to the meaning of the symbolic language in the book of Revelation. If you understand the other 65 books of the Bible, understanding the sixtysixth one isn't a problem. So all these strange figures, these symbolic creatures, these puzzling statements, this unusual numerology—all of it finds its meaning and its interpretation as we see how it is used elsewhere in the Bible.

Then we looked last time at a third principle of interpretation, and that was we need to understand the nonconsecutive nature of the structure of the book of Revelation. We said last time, this book has a cyclic structure, not a linear structure. This book is not a consecutive, chronological prophecy; instead, this book has a parallel structure, where the same period of time is traversed over and over and over again, each time from a different perspective. So in the book of Revelation, we are repeatedly taken on a journey from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ, over and over and over and over again.

Now it is our purpose today to further examine this cyclic structure of the book of Revelation and to look at this structure in much more detail. In order to help us do so, I have prepared a printed outline of the structure of the book for you to look at so that you can easily follow along as I survey the book with you. And for those of you who are listening on SermonAudio, there is a pdf file of this outline you can download right below the green "play" button so that you can have what the people have as they listen to this sermon.

Notice first of all the two major divisions of the book. The book of Revelation can be divided into two halves. Page 1, Part 1A, is "The Physical Conflict Between Believers and Unbelievers." The physical conflict between believers and unbelievers is chapters 1 through 11.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

1A THE PHYSICAL CONFLICT BETWEEN BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS chap 1-11

1B The **first** parallel section of the book chap 1:1-3:22

1C The introduction to the book chap 1:1-20

1D The source of the revelation is God the Father chap 1:1a

2D The messenger of the revelation is John chap 1:1b-3

3D The recipient of the revelation is the seven churches chap 1:4-9

4D The focus of the revelation is the glorified Christ chap 1:10-20

2C The letters to the seven churches chap 2:1-3:22

1D To Ephesus chap 2:1-7

2D To Smyrna chap 2:8-11

3D To Pergamos chap 2:12-17

4D To Thyatira chap 2:18-29

5D To Sardis chap 3:1-6

6D To Philadelphia chap 3:7-13

7D To Laodicea chap 3:14-22

2B The **second** parallel section of the book chap 4:1- 8:5

1C The vision of the throne in heaven chap 4:1-5:14

2C The vision of the seven seals chap 6:1-8:5

3B The **third** parallel section of the book chap 8:6 - 11:19

-The vision of the seven trumpets-

In this first group of visions that John has, the world attacks the church and the church is persecuted by the world. But in the end, God's wrath falls upon the world, the church is avenged by God, and the church is made victorious over the world. So chapters 1 through 11 tell us what visible human history has looked like and what will be seen on the surface of things between the first and the second coming of Christ. For 2,000 years now, the church has gone out into the world and preached the gospel, and the world has pushed back against the church and tried to persecute her and to crush her. So what you have in chapters 1 through 11 is the visible, physical conflict between the church and the world, portrayed in symbolic form.

Turning to page 2, section 2A is “The Spiritual Conflict Between Christ and Satan.”

2A THE SPIRITUAL CONFLICT BETWEEN CHRIST AND SATAN chap 12-22

1B The *fourth* parallel section of the book chap 12:1- 14:20

1C The vision of the woman chap 12:1-17

2C The vision of the two beasts and the dragon chap 13:1-18

3C The vision of the victory of the Lamb chap 14:1-20

2B The *fifth* parallel section of the book chap 15:1-16:21

-The vision of the seven vials (bowls) -

3B The *sixth* parallel section of the book chap 17:1-19:21

1C The vision of the judgment of Babylon chap 17:1-19:6

2C The vision of the marriage supper of the Lamb chap 19:7-10

3C The vision of the Second Coming chap 19:11-21

4B The *seventh* parallel section of the book chap 20:1-22:21

1C The vision of the binding and loosing of Satan chap 20:1-10

2C The vision of the Great White Throne judgment chap 20:11-15

3C The vision of the New Heavens and the New Earth chap 21:1-22:7

4C The conclusion chap 22:8-21

1D The exhortation of the angel chap 22:8-11

2D The Proclamation of Christ chap 22:12-21

Each of these seven parallel sections of the book begins with the first coming of Christ, and ends with the second coming of Christ. Each of these parallel sections describes from various perspectives the spiritual warfare that will take place during that time period. And while each of these sections are parallel, they also progressively reveal with increasing clarity the nature of the Second Coming.

Section 1A was the physical conflict between believers, and in section 2A, we have the spiritual conflict between Christ and Satan, which is in chapters 12 to 22—all the rest of the book.

Here in this second group of visions, we see that behind the visible struggle of the church against the world is the invisible spiritual struggle between Christ and Satan. Beginning in chapter 12, we see Satan attacking Christ, and because Satan was repulsed and failed to destroy Christ, Satan then directs his fury against the church. What’s going on in chapters 1 through 11, where the

world attacks the church, is explained by what happens in chapter 12, when you see Satan attacking Christ. There are spiritual realities going on behind the scenes that explain why the physical realities that you can see with your eyes are taking place. The world isn't attacking the church for no reason. It's doing it because behind the scenes, Satan is attacking Christ, and it is manifested in the attack of Satan's people on Christ's people in the visible realm.

What we see, then, as the second half of Revelation develops, is that Satan, who is called the "dragon," employs the beast that arises out of the sea; and the false prophet, which is the second beast, that arises out of the land; and the harlot Babylon; and of course all those who have the mark of the beast, who are the helpers of the beast in his assault upon Christ and His church. We see the development of Satan's arsenal, fighting Christ and His people. Satan recruits the beast, the false prophet, the harlot Babylon, and of course all the people who have the mark of the beast. And they all, together, fight against Christ and His people.

However, we also see in this latter half of Revelation, each of these helpers of Satan—the beast, the false prophet, the harlot Babylon, and all those who have the mark of the beast—each of these helpers of Satan in the latter half of Revelation, are systematically destroyed by Christ. The Church doesn't destroy them, Christ destroys them!! And of course, at the last, Satan himself is destroyed, in chapter 20. The point is, we do not just fight against flesh and blood, chapters 1 to 11; we fight against principalities and powers, and Satan himself, chapters 12 to 22.

So here you are. I know that if you're living for Jesus, you have conflicts in your life with unsaved people. All those who live godly in Christ Jesus suffer persecution, right? What's behind that? Is it just misunderstandings, is it just personalities? No. There are spiritual forces behind these physical, visible conflicts. And what is playing out in your life is a behindthescenes battle between Christ and Satan himself.

What the book of Revelation tells us is that what you see is not all there is. You need to understand in *your* conflict, as the world assaults you in your effort to bring the gospel to the world, there's more to it than just that nasty person. There is Satan trying to devour Christ, and Christ *crushing* the head of Satan—all in due time.

Well having seen the two major divisions of the book, in the second place this morning, notice the seven parallel sections in the book. Page 1 of the outline, the Physical conflict between believers and unbelievers; page 2, the spiritual conflict between Christ and Satan. Now go to the bottom of the page. You'll see a little paragraph there, which I'll read to you:

"Each of these seven parallel sections of the book begins with the first coming of Christ, and ends with the second coming of Christ. Each of these parallel sections describes from various perspectives the spiritual warfare that will take place during that time period. And while each of these sections are parallel, they also progressively reveal with increasing clarity the nature of the second coming."

So if you look at your outline, you notice all the “B” points: 1B, 2B, 3B. Notice the ordinal numbers are **bolded**: 1B, the **first** parallel section of the book; 2B, the **second** parallel section of the book; 3B the **third** parallel section of the book; and now on page 2, 1B, the **fourth** parallel section; the **fifth** parallel section, 2B; 3B, the **sixth**; and 4B, the **seventh**. This is to point out to you that, even though we have two major divisions, we have this continuity that flows through these parallel visions. The reason I say they’re parallel is, vision #1 takes us from the first coming of Christ, spiritual conflict happens, and then the second coming of Christ occurs. And then we go to vision #2, and we have the first coming of Christ, spiritual conflict happens, then we have the second coming of Christ, and so on.

Each of these sections takes us through the same time period; that is, what spiritual warfare is going to look like between the first coming and the second coming from this perspective, and then from this perspective, and then from this perspective. This is why we say the book of Revelation is not a linear prophecy. That is, the things that happen in chapter 8 don’t chronologically follow what happened in chapter 7, and what happens in chapter 20 doesn’t chronologically follow what happened in chapter 19. So what marks the beginning and the ending of each of these parallel sections? What marks the beginning is the first coming of Christ, and what marks the ending is the second coming of Christ.

In four of the seven parallel sections, the first coming of Christ is explicitly mentioned. In all seven of them, without exception, at the end of the parallel section, the second coming of Christ is explicitly declared. So you have seven declarations of the second coming of Jesus in the book of Revelation, and you have these declarations of the second coming of Jesus at the end of each of these sections. That’s why we know that the next section then goes back to the beginning again, because once you’ve gotten to the second coming, that’s the end, right? And if you’re going to keep going, you have to go back to the first coming and retrace that same journey to the second coming, and then you go back to the first coming and retrace that journey to the second coming. Thus we see the cyclic nature of the book.

Look if you will at page 1 of the outline: 1A, The Physical Conflict Between Believers and Unbelievers. In 1B, notice the first parallel section of the book. The first parallel section of the book goes from chapter 1, verse 1, to chapter 3, verse 22; that is, all of chapters 1, 2, and 3.

We then have 1C, the introduction to the book, and that’s in chapter 1. We have the source of the revelation, which is God the Father, and we have the messenger of the revelation, which is John. And what God the Father does is He gives the revelation to Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ gives it to the angel, and the angel gives it to John. That’s how it works. The Father gives the book to the Son, the Son opens the book, and the angel is John’s guide through the visions.

Keep your Bible open beside you on the pew, because we’re going to be going through the whole book today at rocket speed. Notice chapter 1, verse 1: “¹The Revelation of Jesus Christ,” that is, not the revelation of His person, but the revelation which Jesus gives, “which God gave unto him,…” So God the Father gives to God the Son a revelation. What’s the purpose of God the

Father giving to God the Son this revelation? "...to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John."

Do you see the four parties there? God the Father gives the revelation to God the Son, and God the Son gives it to the angel, and the angel gives it to John. So the source of the revelation is God the Father, 1B; 2B, the messenger of the revelation is John; 3B, the recipient of the revelation is the seven churches. Notice Revelation 1:4 "John to the seven churches which are in Asia." So the entire book is addressed to the seven churches, because when you get to Revelation 22, we see that the declaration is that these things are sent to the churches.

So this letter from start to finish is a church epistle. What's the focus of the revelation? It's to glorify Christ. Guess what the book of Revelation is about. It's about the same thing that every book in the Bible is about. It's about God, and in particular, it's about Jesus Christ. So what does chapter 1 open with? It opens with this glorious vision of Jesus, and that sets the framework for the entire rest of the book.

Now notice 2C, the letters to the seven churches. They're written to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea. So we have these seven parallel sections. The number seven has a very prominent role in the book of Revelation. In fact, the number seven occurs 54 times in this book, and if you've read it—and I hope you have, many times—you'll see that there's seven spirits of God, seven churches, seven vials, seven trumpets, seven seals. There are all these sevens.

The number seven symbolizes completeness. It is the number of days in the creation account in Genesis, in which God completed the creation of all things. The number seven always and everywhere is the number of completeness, and it's fitting that there would be seven parallel sections that would complete the book of Revelation.

But it's more than just fitting that there would be these seven parallel sections. This sevenfold division of seven parallel sections is set off with remarkable clarity by beginning with this first coming of Christ—at least four out of the seven do—and ending with the second coming of Christ, which seven out of seven do. So the first parallel section of the book is the one we're looking at now, chapter 1. Notice the mention of the first coming of Christ, chapter 1, verse 4:

"⁴John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; ⁵and from Jesus Christ..." Now notice what it says: "who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, ⁶and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Now what are verses 5 and 6 talking about? It's talking about the first coming, right? It's talking about Him washing us in His blood. It's talking about Him rising from the dead. Notice if you

will verse 17 of chapter 1. “And when I saw him,” John says, when I saw Jesus, “I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: ¹⁸ I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”

So this chapter opens with a vision of Jesus and a reminder of what? His first coming and the work he achieved—His death, His burial, His resurrection, and the cleansing power of His blood in the atonement He offered on the cross. It opens with clear reference to His first coming. And since this book was written about 95 or 96 A.D., these events were in the very recent past.

Now he goes on and talks about the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3, which are indicative of all churches throughout the ages. These seven churches portray the virtues and the challenges and the deficiencies and the blessings that all churches all through the New Covenant era experience. So why are there seven churches and not six, or eight? Because seven, remember, is the number of completeness.

So these seven churches represent all churches through all ages, between the first and second coming, and all that they experience, because when Jesus left this earth, what did He do? He established His church on the Day of Pentecost. He says, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it, and that’s what He’s been doing.

So we see Jesus as the head of His church, standing in the midst of His church, giving directions to His churches. He commends them, He corrects them, He warns them, He issues challenges to them, and He gives them wonderful promises and declares blessings upon them.

At the end of chapter 3, we have the final church spoken of, which is the church at Laodicea, and notice in chapter 3, verses 20 to 21, the second coming alluded to. “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”

Now that word “sup” is a very interesting word. Does it remind you of anything? It should remind you of the marriage supper of the Lamb, spoken of in Revelation chapter 19, verse 7, which occurs when? After the second coming of Christ. He says in chapter 3, verse 21, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”

This is not a very strong allusion to the second coming, it’s not a very clear allusion to the second coming, but it is a reference to the fact that there is going to come a day when Jesus will sup with us at the marriage supper of the Lamb. And who will He do that for? He will do that for all who receive Him. So while this is a message to the churches, churches are made up of individuals, and He is saying to these churches, If you are faithful with me, you will sit down with me in my marriage supper of the Lamb, and you will dine with me in the kingdom to come.

So the first section opens with statements about Jesus' first coming—His death, burial, and resurrection. It closes with an allusion to the marriage supper of the Lamb that's going to occur after the second coming. Also in verse 21, He talks about sitting down with Him in His throne. When is that going to take place? Answer: When He comes back.

That brings us then to 2B, the second parallel section of the book. This is chapter 4, verse 1, through chapter 8 and verse 5. Here we have the vision of the throne in heaven, in chapters 4 and 5, and the vision of the seven seals, in chapter 6 through 8.

Now notice in this second parallel section of the book, the first coming of Christ. In chapter 4, we have the vision of the throne of God. It's just a description of heaven and God sitting on the throne and the angels around it. Then we come to chapter 5, and we have God the Father holding a book in His hand, and no one was found worthy to open the book—until Jesus comes. Notice if you will, chapter 5, verses 5 and 6:

“⁵ And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. ⁶ And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.” You see the sevens.

“⁷ And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; ¹⁰ and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”

So what is being discussed here in chapter 5 is the first coming of Jesus. Chapter 5, verses 5 and 6 and verse 9. The slain lamb who redeemed us to God by His blood—His work on the cross is what the section opens with. Here's the throne, here's the Lamb viewed in his first coming.

Then the Lamb takes the book and He opens these seven seals. Chapter 6: “¹ And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. ² And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.”

This is Jesus, sitting on the white horse. We see Him sitting on the white horse in Revelation 19. And what we have here is Christ riding forth, establishing His kingdom. And of course, this is what happened after the resurrection and the ascension, and the Spirit of God fell on the Day of Pentecost. What happens is Jesus, through His people, rides forth to spread the message of the

gospel over the whole world. {I changed my view on the meaning of the white horse, please see the message on Rev 6:1-17}

Well, as soon as He does that, opposition arises. We have the other horsemen. We have things like war and things like famine and things like plagues and diseases. All of these things are Satan's effort to oppose Christ and His people as they go out to build the kingdom of God. What we have in these other seals is a description of the opposition that will arise to the building of the kingdom of God.

And then with the sixth seal, we have—guess what?—the second coming. Chapter 6, verses 12 to 17: “¹² And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; ¹³ and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. ¹⁴ And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. ¹⁵ And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; ¹⁶ and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: ¹⁷ for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” What is that? That is the second coming. What chapter 6, verses 12 to 17, describes is the second coming and its effect on the lost.

Now we come to chapter 7. What chapter 7 describes is the second coming and its effect on the saved. Here we have the 144,000 sealed—12,000 per 12 tribes—all symbolic numbers with meanings, and these are the saved folks. Where are they? Chapter 7, verse 9:

“⁹ After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.” Verse 16: “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” What is that, but a vision of heaven?

So what we have in chapter 5 is the first coming of Jesus. He receives the book, He opens the seven seals, at the end of which the wicked are under the wrath of God and the righteous are in the heaven of God. Thus the second parallel section of the book. The first parallel section opened with the first coming and closed with the second coming. The second parallel section opened with the first coming and closes with the second coming.

Then we get to the third parallel section. This is in chapter 8. “¹ And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. ² And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.” So out of the seventh

seal, then, comes the seven trumpets. That's where the seventh seal wound up. He opens it—seven trumpets. So the seventh seal simply begins a new vision.

Now in this third parallel section of the book, we have tremendous judgments poured out on the unsaved in these seven trumpets. These seven trumpets describe what God does to the wicked—not to His people, but to the wicked. These seven trumpets are Christ's warnings to the wicked to repent. He makes things so hard for them and so difficult for them that, hopefully, they'll see that and they'll stop rebelling against Him, and they will repent and submit themselves to Him.

You've seen people do this. They live lives of profligacy, they wind up on Skid Row, a drunk in a gutter somewhere, and they finally say, You know what? I need Jesus. So all the pain and all the punishment for all of their sins finally, hopefully, turns them to Christ. So the purpose of these trumpets is to say to the wicked, The way of the transgressor is hard. Why don't you repent? Why don't you get right with God?

In this last section, we have these seven trumpets. Notice chapter 8: “⁷ The first angel sounded...⁸ And the second angel sounded...¹⁰ And the third angel sounded...¹² And the fourth angel sounded.” And chapter 8 ends saying there are three more to go. Chapter 9, verse 1: “And the fifth angel sounded...¹³ And the sixth angel sounded.”

What's the conclusion? Notice verse 20 of chapter 9: “²⁰ And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: ²¹ neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.” So guess what? The judgments didn't bring them to repentance. It should have, but they are hardened and hardhearted.

Then chapter 10, verse 7: “but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished.” That is, the seventh trumpet sounds—it's leading us up to the end.

In chapter 11, we have the two witnesses, these two who go around and preach the gospel. They are invincible. They are unstoppable. Anybody opposes them, boom! Down they go. These two witnesses represent the church, the Christians, preaching the gospel to the world throughout the entire period of time between the first and the second coming of Christ. When Jesus sent out His apostles, how did He send them out? Two by two, remember, constantly—Go two by two, Go two by two. You see that, for example, in Matthew chapter 10, and elsewhere. So these two represent the people God has sent into the world to preach the gospel, and they cannot be stopped until, when? The end. Notice it says in verse 7 of chapter 11: “And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.” But not till they're done.

So this speaks of the great tribulation that occurs at the end of the age, when the voice of the church is going to be silenced, because the transnational persecution that takes place against it is going to be so great in the persecution and in the great tribulation, that the voice of the church will all but be silenced. However, this silencing is only going to last a little time—three and a half days, spiritually speaking.

We'll talk about the meaning of those numbers. We've had periods of three and a half years—a longer time. Three and a half days—a short time. Three and a half years describes the whole time frame between the first and the second coming; three and a half days is the little bitty time period of the great tribulation, at the end of which, guess what? They come back to life. Jesus comes, the resurrection happens, and those who thought they had killed the church and wiped it off the face of the earth are blown away to see that the church is now resurrected all back to life again. And they are in trouble.

Notice if you will chapter 11, verses 11 to 18. ¹¹ And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. ¹² And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither—There's the rapture—“And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.” That's First Thessalonians 4:13-18 ¹³ And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand—notice the number “seven” is used symbolically there for completeness, they're all wiped out—“and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven. ¹⁴ The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.” This is of course the final trumpet.

“¹⁵ And the seventh angel sounded”—there it is—“and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” What's that? The second coming. ¹⁶ And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, ¹⁷ saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. ¹⁸ And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.” There's the second coming.

Now it's becoming increasingly clear about what's going to happen. In this third parallel section of the book, we don't have a distinct mention of the first coming. It's not there. But we do have a very clear mention of the unstoppable gospel preaching that was commissioned to be done at the first coming in Acts 1:8, and will go on until the end, and then—the second coming.

That brings us then to the fourth parallel section of the book. This now shifts the emphasis more to the spiritual conflict between Christ and Satan, and not so much on the conflict between the people of Satan and the people of God. In the fourth parallel section of the book we have,

chapter 12, the vision of the woman; chapter 13, the vision of the two beasts—the beast out of the sea and the beast out of the land, and the dragon; and then the vision of the victory of the lamb in chapter 14.

Notice if you will the first coming of Christ, chapter 12, verses 1 to five: “¹ And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: ² and she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.” So this is Israel bringing forth Jesus. “³ And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon,”—that’s Satan—“having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. ⁴ And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.” And how was that accomplished? Remember Herod wanted to kill all the babies in Bethlehem? That’s what this is talking about. Verse 5: “And she brought forth a man child,” that’s Jesus, “who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.”

So here we have the birth, life, death, and ascension of Jesus spoken of in one verse, verse 5. And what do we have in verse 5? The first coming of Jesus. Well, what happens is that the dragon is cast out of heaven and he’s really ticked off, because he knows he’s lost the battle. So what does he do? He goes out to persecute the church. Chapter 12, verse 9: “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan.” Verse 17: “And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

Now that Satan’s been defeated at the cross and cast out of heaven, what’s he doing? Well, for the last 2,000 years, he’s been persecuting the church, but not by himself. He gets helpers, which are described in chapter 13. We have the beast out of the sea, chapter 13, verse 1: “And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea.” And then we have a second beast that arises out of the land, verse 11: “And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.”

So in chapter 13, we have the dragon, which is Satan, mentioned in verse 2. And then we have the beast out of the sea, verse 1, and the beast out of the land, verse 11. The beast out of the sea represents persecuting governments, and the beast out of the land represents false religions. We’ll prove all of this when the time comes, but for now I’m just telling you what these things represent. They all fight against the people of God. They deceive the people who dwell on the earth and they cause the people that dwell on the earth to worship the dragon and the beast. Then of course, there’s the mark of the beast.

Now if all this is describing what happens between the first and the second coming, what does that tell you? The mark of the beast has been in existence since the Day of Pentecost. It’s here now. It will always be here. The mark of the beast is not some tattoo on your forehead or on the back of your hand or some implanted computer chip. Remember we’re supposed to interpret all

this symbolically, unless we're forced to interpret it literally. It says the mark of the beast is in the forehead. That which is on your head is indicative of how you think. And that which is on your hand is indicative of how you act. So when Satan is guiding your thinking and your acting, you have the mark of the beast—in your thinking and in your actions.

So when you look at the unsaved, you can see Satan's mark on them by the way they think and the way they act. And if you have the mark of the beast on you when you die, you go to hell. So it's not something that's going to happen some day. It something that happens right now. And if you don't think like the world and you don't act like the world, the world doesn't want to do business with you, do they? They don't want to have interaction with you. We'll talk later about the direct application to that.

But then we have the second coming. Notice chapter 14, verse 1: “¹ And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand,” and that's all of God's elect—“having his Father's name written in their foreheads.” And what happens is, He returns. Verse 14: “And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. ¹⁵ And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. ¹⁶ And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.”

What is that? That's the second coming, when all the earth is gathered together for the final judgment. It goes on and talks further about that in the remainder of chapter 14. So this fourth parallel section of the book opens with the first coming of Christ—remember the woman brings Jesus to birth. And what does it close with? It closes with the second coming of Jesus when He reaps the earth upon the day of judgment, when the wheat and the tares grow up together, and then there is the—what?—harvest, at the end of the world. So we have this cycle starting at chapter 12 to chapter 14: First coming, all the spiritual warfare with Satan, second coming.

Then we come to the fifth parallel section of the book, which begins at chapter 15 and goes to then end of chapter 16. This fifth parallel section is the vision of the seven vials, it says in the King James, or “bowls,” it says in the New King James. The idea here is a container. We could talk about the seven containers that are poured out. Whether it's a bowl or a glass vial isn't important, both of them have an open top, and when you turn them upside down, stuff runs out. We don't need to get wrapped up on whether they're vials or bowls. They're a container with an open top that you turn upside down.

What we have here are seven vials or bowls of wrath being poured out, and these represent God's final punishment for the unrepentant. Now remember the purpose of the seven trumpets was to provoke them to repentance. But in the end, they did not repent. So now we have God's wrath poured out on the unrepentant. The purpose of these seven vials is not to bring people to repentance, it's to punish them. Once again, in this fifth parallel section, we have no mention of the first coming of Christ, but we do have a very clear mention of the second coming of Christ.

So we have this stuff being poured out, chapter 15, verse 1: “And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.” Verse 6: “and the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues.” Verse 7: “And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God.”

Chapter 16:2: “And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth;” verse 3: “And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea;” verse 4: “And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters;” verse 8: “And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun;” verse 10: “And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast;” verse 12: “And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates;” verse 13: “And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the”—notice the unholy trinity here—“the dragon,” that’s Satan; “out of the mouth of the beast,” that’s the beast that rises out of the sea, “and out of the mouth of the false prophet,” the beast that rises out of the land. So we have this unholy trinity that Jesus is doing war with. ¹⁴“For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.” So now we’re up to the Battle of Armageddon.

Verse 15: “Behold, I come as a thief.” We read about that in First Thessalonians 5, right? “Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. ¹⁶ And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.” So where are we now? We’re once again at the second coming. And we see, verse 17, “the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air;” verse 20: “And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.” So we see the destruction of the world, as described in 2 Peter 3:10-13.

Then we come to the sixth parallel section, chapter 17 to chapter 19, verse 21. Here we see the nature and the function and the identity of Babylon, the harlot. Chapter 17, verse 1: “And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters;” verse 5: “and upon her forehead was a name written, “Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.”

Chapter 17 just talks about Babylon the harlot. Babylon represents the seducing world, with all of its entertainments and honors and pleasures and wealth. Babylon represents worldliness. It represents the seduction of the world. When Jesus says, “Love not the world neither the things that are in the world,” that’s Babylon.

We see the destruction of Babylon the harlot in chapter 18. Notice verse 2: “And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen.” Go to chapter 19, verse 2: “For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.”

So we see the destruction of Babylon. And then what do we see? The second coming of Christ. The marriage supper of the Lamb, 19:7. “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.” That’s the supping that Jesus promised in Revelation 3:20.

And then we see in verse 11 of chapter 19: “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.” This is Jesus. Verse 14: “And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.” So First Thessalonians 4:14 says when Jesus returns, He’s going to bring His saints with Him. This is clearly the second coming. Verse 16: “King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.”

Then we have this terrible judgment that falls, verse 19: “And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.” The Battle of Armageddon, again. “²⁰ And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.” So clearly, the second coming and final judgment. In the fifth parallel section of the book and the sixth parallel section, we see no mention of the first coming in particular, but we do see clear mentions of the second coming.

Now we come to the seventh parallel section of the book, the final section. This is chapter 20 to the end of the book. Once again, here we see the first coming of Christ. Chapter 20: “¹ And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. ² And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, ³ And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should”—what?—“deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.”

So here we see the first coming of Christ in chapter 20, verses 1 to 3, when Satan was bound. Where was Satan bound? Answer: Satan was bound at the cross, in the first coming of Jesus. You remember in Matthew 12 and verse 29, Jesus said, You can’t spoil the strong man’s house unless you first bind the strong man, and then you can spoil his house. He talked about how His casting out of demons was the proof that He was having victory over Satan and over His people, and He’s going to bind Satan.

Now why do you suppose, from Genesis all the way to the coming of Christ, the kingdom of God was this tiny, ittybitty, little nation confined to a tiny ittybitty piece of real estate? Answer: Because Satan was deceiving the whole rest of the world. But then Satan is bound at the cross, and what happens to the kingdom of God? It explodes, and now covers the whole earth. The reason it didn’t cover the whole earth for the first 4,000 years is because Satan was loose and had all the rest of the world held in darkness.

So Satan became bound at the cross. He couldn't deceive the nations; the nations heard the gospel; the nations received the gospel; the gospel spread through the whole world. But at the end, he's going to be loosed, and what's he going to go back and do? He's going to go back and deceive the nations once again, gather them all together in a transnational coalition that will be directed at crushing and destroying the church, killing the two witnesses of Revelation chapter 11, and will succeed for three a half days—a very short period of time. And then they will be destroyed at the second coming.

Notice verse 7 of chapter 20. The thousand years are expired. The thousand years describes the time between the first and second coming of Christ. “⁷ And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, ⁸ And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth.” Notice, he can now deceive nations. He couldn't do it before, but he's going to do it now. The “four quarters” refer to north, south, east, and west. He's going to “gather them together to battle:”—What's that? The battle of Armageddon—“the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

“⁹ And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city.” And the church is just about to be wiped off the face of the earth. But Christ intervenes. “...fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. ¹⁰ And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. ¹¹ And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it...” So now we've come to the great white throne—the last judgment. Verse 14: “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵ And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

So chapter 20 opens with the first coming of Christ, when He bound Satan, and it closes with the final destruction of Satan, after this intervening period in which the church is severely persecuted. Notice verse 4 of chapter 20: “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were”—what?—“beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

So during this symbolic thousand year period, what's happening? Christians are being martyred. Christians are refusing to receive the mark of the beast. Christians are saying, “I will not follow and submit to Christ persecuting governments, perverse religious systems, or Babylonian worldliness—those who do and have the mark of the beast on them, they think like the world and the beast and the false religions, and they act in accordance with it—those aren't *my* people!”

What we see, then, is Satan bound at the cross and tremendous persecutions and beheadings of Christians—but they all wind up in heaven. And then Jesus comes back when the persecutors are just about ready to wipe out the last of them, and He wipes out Satan, and all those with the mark of the beast are all cast into the Lake of Fire and we have the great white throne of

judgment—and then what? The new heavens and the new earth, chapter 21: “¹ And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.”

So what we have here is a description of the first coming of Christ, in chapter 20, verses 1 to 3. Satan’s bound at the cross. In chapter 20, verses 4 to 6, we have the persecution the church receives throughout the age. In chapter 20, verses 7 and 10, we have the great tribulation at the end of the age and the defeat the Devil receives at the hands of the returning Christ. And then in chapter 20, verses 11 to 15, we have the second coming of Christ and the great white throne of judgment. Then in chapter 21 and 22, the result for the believers that flows out of that second coming—the new heavens and the new earth.

You remember in chapter 6, what were they saying? Rocks, mountains, fall on us! In chapter 7, what did we see? The saints in heaven. In chapter 20, what do we see? The great throne—people cast into hell. And what do we see in chapters 21 and 22? The saints in heaven. You see the parallelism. In four out of these seven parallel sections, there is an explicit opening with the first coming of Christ. And in all seven, they close with the second coming of Christ.

The third, fifth, and sixth parallel sections didn’t explicitly open with the first coming of Christ, but the other four others did, and all seven sections explicitly close with the second coming of Christ. And the implication is that they all occur over the same time frame, between the first and second coming, because they all close with the same thing. And there are other reasons to conclude that, which we’ll develop over time.

So each of these seven sections closes with the second coming of Christ, and that second coming is progressively revealed in more and more detail with greater and greater precision and clarity, until it’s revealed in all of its fullness in the final chapters. The second coming is not revealed in too great detail at the start of the book, and as you go through the book, you get more and more detail, until finally in chapters 20, 21, and 22, you see the full revelation of the second coming and all the implications that are going to occur out of it.

This is the structure of the book. Each of these seven parallel sections takes us from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ, revealing the nature of that time period and revealing the spiritual warfare that goes on during it, first from one perspective, then from another and another. We thus have seven pictures in these seven parallel sections of what the time period between the first and second coming of Christ is going to look like, and what we ourselves can expect to experience during that time period, in our lifetime.

So it isn’t primarily about what happened in the past, and it isn’t primarily about what happens in the future, it’s primarily about the spiritual warfare you’re going through right now. What this does is help us understand the spiritual battles we are fighting *today* in our Christian lives. We are living these things described in these seven parallel cycles, and the book of Revelation helps us make sense of them.

Now I want you to turn to page 3 of your outline, and we're done.

THEME: Christ will triumph over Satan and his people, and will bring deliverance and victory to His faithful suffering saints, by His second coming and His establishment of the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Key verse: Revelation 17:14 These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him *are* called, and chosen, and faithful.

Notice the theme of the book: Christ will triumph over Satan and his people, and will bring deliverance and victory to His faithful suffering saints, by His second coming and His establishment of the New Heavens and the New Earth. That's the theme of the book.

What is the book about? It's about the fact that Christ is going to triumph over Satan and his people. What's the book about? Christ will bring deliverance and victory to His faithful suffering saints. How is He going to do it? By sustaining them *in* the battle and by delivering them at the end of the battle. And that's why it says in Matthew that he that endures to the end shall be saved; he won't go apostate and join the other side and take the mark of the beast.

I don't know if you've ever heard of Tony Campolo? He claims to be some kind of an evangelist. I think he's a heretic, but nevertheless, he supposedly preached the gospel. He had a son. The son was an evangelist who preached the gospel, supposedly. But I just read in *World Magazine* that the son has now become a minister of humanism on college campuses. He said he used to preach the gospel, but now he's thrown it all overboard because he realized it's really not true after all. He didn't endure to the end. He became an apostate. He took the mark of the beast. And he will be damned. It's sad. He didn't endure to the end.

How many people have you known that started out being Christians and they went along with a Christian profession for a while, but the world and the flesh and the Devil got to be too much, and they just caved? What the book of Revelation is saying to every one of you sitting in the pews is this: Don't cave. What you're going through is normal. Trust Me. I will give you victory. You may even be beheaded. Christ doesn't have a problem with His people being beheaded, by the way. You notice in chapter 6 and in chapter 20 that there's a whole bunch of beheaded people in heaven. Could God have stopped that? Sure. But you know what He says to us: Be faithful to death. I'll give you a crown of life.

And in God's mind, being killed is no big deal, and it needs not to be a big deal to us, either. If you're killed financially, if you're killed socially, if you're killed reputationally, or if you're killed physically. You know what? It's no big deal, because you're going to wind up in heaven with the rewards and the blessing of God, and God will say to you, Well done, you good and

faithful servant. And the sorrows of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.

Notice the key verse, Revelation 17:14: “These”—speaking of the Anti-christ, the beast, the false prophet, the dragon, Babylon—“These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him”—that’s us, folks—“are called, and chosen, and faithful.”

So there are two sides to this battle, people. There’s those that are with the Lamb, and those that are against Him. And we who are with the Lamb are those who have been effectually called because we were divinely, sovereignly elected, and the result of that election and that calling is that we are the faithful ones who endure to the end, who go through the tribulation, who stay faithful, and even if we’re killed, we’re not quitting. That’s the message of the book.

You know, it’s becoming increasingly relevant to us as we experience increasing persecution here in the good ol’ U.S. of A. You see the Muslim hoards coming. Afraid? Well, this book will tell you how to handle that. It will also tell you the outcome of it. The Muslims think they’re so cute, beheading the Christians. There’s going to come a day when Jesus returns and raises all the Christians from the dead that they beheaded, and they are going to be absolutely terrified.

When we read in chapter 11 about the resurrection of the two witnesses, it says, “¹¹ And after three days and a half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them.” And you know, when the Muslims see their beheaded victims rise up and be taken up to God, they’re going to realize they were on the wrong side of the battle. We don’t have anything to be afraid about, because Christ wins and His people win, even though we go through terrible things getting to that point of victory.

So mark it down, you’re going to go through terrible things, but the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. So don’t quit because you’re suffering. Just keep on keeping on. And in the end, we’ll be with Him in the new heavens and the new earth, and then everything that happened here won’t matter a snap of the fingers. Let’s keep that perspective as we suffer so that we keep on being faithful *in* our suffering. That’s what the book was designed to encourage the first century Christians to do, and for every century of Christians afterward to do. Shall we pray together.

Father, thank you for this wonderful book. Thank you for helping us to understand the structure of the book. And Lord, now as we proceed through the exposition of the book, I ask that you would give us wisdom in understanding the particular details of the book. Lord, we need wisdom. And you said, If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally and upbraids not, and it shall be given him. So Father, give it to us, we pray, according to your promise. In Jesus’ name. Amen.