

THE "VICTORIOUS-INTRODUCTION" SCENES IN THE VISIONS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

KENNETH A. STRAND
Andrews University

This article is a follow-up to my earlier essay on the basic literary structure of the eight major visions of the book of Revelation.¹ For the sake of convenient reference, Diagram 3 of my previous article is here reproduced (on the following page) as Diagram 1 for the present article.

The blocs of text upon which our attention focuses in this study are those designated "A" in this Diagram; namely, those carrying the caption "Victorious-Introduction Scene with Temple Setting." We first take an overview of the content of these scenes for visions I through VIII, and then consider some of the specific phenomena and theological implications.

1. *Summary of the "Victorious-Introduction Scenes"*

In providing the following overview of the content of the eight victorious-introduction scenes, I furnish here both a summary of the textual material itself and a few preliminary comments concerning this material. It should be noted in these summaries that not all details of the scenes are included;² however, preceding the summaries themselves, the appropriate Scripture references are presented (as also set forth in Diagram 1), and the reader can go to the biblical text itself for a more complete picture.

¹Kenneth A. Strand, "The Eight Basic Visions in the Book of Revelation," *AUSS* 25 (1987):107-121.

²Herein the summaries are, nevertheless, in various instances more extensive than the paralleling, but generally very brief, summaries provided in *ibid.*, pp. 112-117 (which see also for summaries of the contents of blocs B, C, and D in the various visions).

DIAGRAM 1. AN OVERVIEW OF STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE APOCALYPSE

HISTORICAL-ERA VISIONS				ESCHATOLOGICAL-JUDGMENT-ERA VISIONS			
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
VICTORIOUS-INTRODUCTION SCENE WITH TEMPLE SETTING (1:10b-20)	VICTORIOUS-INTRODUCTION SCENE WITH TEMPLE SETTING (Chaps. 4 & 5)	VICTORIOUS-INTRODUCTION SCENE WITH TEMPLE SETTING (8:2-6)	VICTORIOUS-INTRODUCTION SCENE WITH TEMPLE SETTING (11:19)	VICTORIOUS-INTRODUCTION SCENE WITH TEMPLE SETTING (15:1-16:1)	VICTORIOUS-INTRODUCTION SCENE WITH TEMPLE SETTING (16:18-17:3a)	VICTORIOUS-INTRODUCTION SCENE WITH TEMPLE SETTING (19:1-10)	VICTORIOUS-INTRODUCTION SCENE WITH TEMPLE SETTING (21:5-11a)
B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
BASIC PROPHETIC DESCRIPTION IN HISTORY (Chaps. 2 & 3)	BASIC PROPHETIC DESCRIPTION IN HISTORY (Chap. 6)	BASIC PROPHETIC DESCRIPTION IN HISTORY (8:7-9:21)	BASIC PROPHETIC DESCRIPTION IN HISTORY (Chaps. 12 & 13)	BASIC PROPHETIC DESCRIPTION IN FINAL JUDGMENT (16:2-14,16)	BASIC PROPHETIC DESCRIPTION IN FINAL JUDGMENT (17:3b-18:3)	BASIC PROPHETIC DESCRIPTION IN FINAL JUDGMENT (19:11-20:5)	BASIC PROPHETIC DESCRIPTION IN FINAL JUDGMENT (21:11b-22:5)
C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
INTERLUDE: SPOTLIGHT ON LAST EVENTS (Chap. 7)	INTERLUDE: SPOTLIGHT ON LAST EVENTS (10:1-11:13)	INTERLUDE: SPOTLIGHT ON LAST EVENTS (14:1-13)	INTERLUDE: SPOTLIGHT ON LAST EVENTS	INTERLUDE: EXHORTATION OR APPEAL (16:15)	INTERLUDE: EXHORTATION OR APPEAL (18:4-8,20)	INTERLUDE: EXHORTATION OR APPEAL (20:6)	INTERLUDE: EXHORTATION OR APPEAL
D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
ESCHATOLOGICAL CULMINATION: CLIMAX TO HISTORY (8:1)	ESCHATOLOGICAL CULMINATION: CLIMAX TO HISTORY (11:14-18)	ESCHATOLOGICAL CULMINATION: CLIMAX TO HISTORY (14:14-20)	ESCHATOLOGICAL CULMINATION: CLIMAX TO HISTORY	ESCHATOLOGICAL CULMINATION: THE JUDGMENTAL FINALE (16:17)	ESCHATOLOGICAL CULMINATION: THE JUDGMENTAL FINALE (18:9-19,21-24)	ESCHATOLOGICAL CULMINATION: THE JUDGMENTAL FINALE (20:7-21:4)	ESCHATOLOGICAL CULMINATION: THE JUDGMENTAL FINALE

Introduction to Vision I

Text: Rev 1:10b-20

Summary: On the island of Patmos (1:9), the resurrected, heavenly Christ appears in glorious vision to John, revealing himself as the one who was dead, now lives, is alive forever, and has the keys of *hades* and death. John sees Christ holding seven stars in his right hand and walking among seven golden lampstands. The seven stars are defined as “the angels of the seven churches” (vs. 20), and the seven lampstands are defined as “the seven churches” (ibid.)—namely, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (vs. 11).

Comment: The fact that the lampstands are temple imagery is generally recognized by the exegetes, though there has been difference of opinion as to the precise background. The question usually raised is whether that background is the *one* lampstand in the “Holy Place” (outer or first apartment) of the ancient wilderness tabernacle (Exod 26:35; in Herod’s temple there was also one lampstand) or the *ten* lampstands in that first apartment of Solomon’s temple (1 Kgs 7:49). A third alternative, generally missed by the commentators, is the lampstand symbolism of Zech 4, which plays a very obvious role as background for a later vision in the Apocalypse—Rev 11, “the temple and two witnesses.”³ Or there may be intentional multiple backgrounds.⁴ The

³There are theological overtones which favor looking upon the Zechariah “lampstand” as at least *one* probable source for the imagery. See Kenneth A. Strand, “The Two Witnesses of Rev 11:3-12,” *AUSS* 19 (1981):127-135, especially pp. 131-134; and cf. idem, “The Two Olive Trees of Zechariah 4 and Revelation 11,” *AUSS* 20 (1982):257-261. Not only should certain theological affinities be noted, but also consideration should be given to the further backgrounds (beyond Zech 4) for the olive trees/lampstands imagery of Rev 11:4—namely, the Jachin-and-Boaz temple pillars (cf. 1 Kgs 7:21; also 2 Kgs 11:12-14 and 23:1-3), and beyond them the “pillar of cloud” in which the Lord appeared to Moses and Joshua at the “entrance” to the wilderness tabernacle (Deut 31:14-15). If the background for the seven lampstands in vision I of Revelation lies in this direction, it is the court, rather than either of the two rooms of the tabernacle/temple proper, that would be in focus here (a possibility which is enhanced by a consideration of the theological implications of Rev 11:2 regarding the “outer court” of the temple). However, we must not overlook the possibility that there are *multiple* backgrounds for this seven-lampstand symbolism, as well as for other imagery in the book of Revelation; cf. n. 4, below.

⁴Paul S. Minear, “Ontology and Ecclesiology in the Apocalypse,” *NTS* 13 (1965/66):96, has called attention to this multiple-background type of phenomenon in what he refers to as a “trans-historical model” and “a comprehensive rather than a disjunctive mode of seeing and thinking.” Both in that article and in his *I Saw a New Earth* (Washington, DC, 1968), p. 102, he makes reference to Rev 11:8, where there is a coalescing of several entities—Sodom, Egypt, and Jerusalem—into one

main point for us here, in any case, is that the setting of this vision and its temple imagery is *on earth*, not in heaven. This fact is clear from two main considerations: that the heavenly Christ meets John on earth (at Patmos), and that the “lampstands” among which Christ manifests his presence are churches on earth. The fact that the next vision indicates a transition to heaven, as we shall see in our attention to that vision, may be considered a third evidence pointing in the direction of the earthly venue of this first introductory scene.

A further noteworthy point is that this victorious-introduction scene functions to provide comfort and assurance to Christ’s faithful followers: His presence is among them as they face the mighty forces of deception and persecution.⁵ A *positive* aspect of this sort is indeed characteristic of all eight of the introductory scenes for the major visions of the Apocalypse.

Introduction to Vision II

Text: 4:1-5:14

Summary: John sees an open door “in heaven” and hears a voice beckoning him to “come up hither.” He then is immediately “in the Spirit” and sees “a throne” “in heaven,” with one seated upon the throne (namely, God, as the context itself and also further visions of Revelation make clear [cf. 4:9-11; 7:10; 19:1-5]). Surrounding the throne were twenty-four elders seated on thrones; before the throne were “seven lamps of fire” and a crystal-like “sea of glass”; and “in the midst of” and “around” the throne were four living creatures. After

image, the “great city.” Minear suggests that this “one city had become in prophetic terms all cities—Sodom, Tyre, Egypt, Babylon, Nineveh, Rome . . .” (*I Saw a New Earth*, p. 102).

In various papers and essays I have further elaborated the phenomenon, referring to it as the “blending” or “merging” of images. See, e.g., my “An Overlooked Old-Testament Background to Revelation 11:1,” *AUSS* 22 (1984):318-319, where I not only refer to Minear’s perceptive remarks (especially n. 6 on p. 319) but also furnish some added examples. Cf., as well, the discussion in Strand, “Two Witnesses,” pp. 130-131, where still another illustration has been provided.

⁵Deception and persecution are the two basic weapons manifested by the adversarial forces throughout the book of Revelation, just as in the Gospel of John these same two evil characteristics summarize the attitude of the devil and his followers (e.g., in John 8:44 the devil is called “a murderer from the beginning” and “the father of lies”). We find prominent illustration in the Apocalypse in the messages to the seven churches, where there is warning against *deception* (whether external or self-imposed) in the letters to Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea; and where the danger of *persecution* is particularly highlighted in the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia. The activities of the antidivine trinity in Rev 12-13 further forcefully exemplify these demonic weapons (notice, for instance, the *deceptive* “signs” and the *death and embargo* activities mentioned in 13:13-17).

an anthem of praise to God for his Creatorship, the scene turns to a seven-sealed scroll in his hand—a scroll which “no one” in heaven, on earth, or under the earth was able to open. However, in the progression of the drama, one being was found worthy to open that scroll—namely, the Lamb “as though it had been slain.” As the Lamb took the scroll from the right hand of the one sitting on the throne, a series of anthems of praise ensued.

Comment: The first striking feature that confronts us in this scene is the double reference to a new venue—heaven, as contrasted to the earthly setting of the introductory scene to vision I. This heavenly setting is, in fact, emphasized by the double reference to “heaven”—the open door “in heaven” and the throne “in heaven.” The “seven lamps of fire” would locate the setting more specifically as the “Holy Place” or outer apartment of the temple in heaven (the term “temple in heaven” is used specifically in 11:19 and certain other texts).⁶ If the “sea of glass” is imagery based on the “laver” of the wilderness tabernacle (Exod 30:18; 38:8) or the “molten sea” and/or ten lavers of the Solomonic temple (1 Kgs 7:23-39), as various commentators suggest, we appear to have “outer-court” imagery rather than “first-apartment” imagery. This in itself would not pose a problem with respect to the sea’s being designated as “before the throne,” for all facets of the temple construct could be considered from that perspective. More likely, however, the symbolic background for this “sea of glass” is the “firmament” over the heads of the living creatures and under God’s throne in Ezek 1:22-28 and 10:1.⁷

⁶The temple-furniture imagery furnishes clues to locale and to movement that were touched upon in the summaries in my previous article (“Eight Basic Visions,” pp. 112-117), but which will become more apparent as we continue here to proceed through the victorious-introduction scenes. Although two apartments are not specifically mentioned in conjunction with this “temple-in-heaven” archetype of the ancient Israelite tabernacle and temple, the “furniture” that is mentioned does relate to two such “rooms”—as known not only from the OT and traditional Jewish sources but also from the description in the NT book of Hebrews (see Heb 9:1-5; cf. Exod 25:8 and 26:30-35). It may appear that the presence of the throne in the context of “outer-apartment” imagery in Rev 4 reduces the heavenly temple to but one room “architecturally” (even though not functionally), but such is not necessarily the case (or in any event, is not of prime importance). See further in n. 11, below. For a very helpful discussion of “heavenly temple” imagery in the book of Hebrews (a discussion which has a considerable degree of relevance also for the Apocalypse), see Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical ΤΥΠΟΣ Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 2 (Berrien Springs, MI, 1981), pp. 336-367.

⁷Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT, vol. 17 (Grand Rapids, MI, 1977), pp. 136-137, has aptly noted this, and has also called attention to 2 Enoch 3:3 and Ps 104:3 (p. 136), though it is not clear whether Mounce himself actually considers the imagery of these passages as background for the “sea of glass” in

This heavenly scene in Rev 4-5 obviously has a positive thrust. The twin themes of creation (4:11) and redemption (chap. 5) give hope and assurance to Christ's followers, especially as they recognize that the Lamb is adjudged worthy to break the seals and open the scroll—a scroll which has appropriately been called a “scroll of destiny.”⁸

Introduction to Vision III

Text: 8:2-6

Summary: Seven angels with seven trumpets are seen by John; but before they proceed from the temple (in heaven) to sound their trumpets, another angel appears with a censer before the golden altar of incense. Mingled with the prayers of saints is incense ascending before God on the throne. Then the censer is thrown onto the earth, followed by typical symbols of divine presence and judgment: “peals of thunder, voices, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.”⁹

Revelation. For a recent detailed and comprehensive analysis of the imagery of Rev 4-5, see R. Dean Davis, “The Heavenly Court Scene of Revelation 4-5” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1986).

⁸“Scroll of destiny” and “book of destiny” are terms applied by various exegetes and commentators to this seven-sealed document. Many who do not use this exact terminology indicate the same concept in their discussion of the scroll. Edwin R. Thiele, *Outline Studies in Revelation*, rev. ed. (Berrien Springs, MI, 1959), p. 97 (pagination may vary in other editions), specifically utilizes the term “book of destiny.” Charles M. Laymon, *The Book of Revelation: Its Messages and Meaning* (New York, 1960), p. 77, refers to the scene in Rev 5 as the “preparation for destiny”; and Mounce, p. 142, speaks of the scroll as containing “the full account of what God in his sovereign will has determined as the destiny of the world.”

However, a fundamental question remains: What is *meant* by the term “destiny”? Is it earth's future history from John's perspective? On the other hand, is it the eschatological rewards that are meted out at the termination of earth's history? Or is it possibly a combination of both? William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1940), p. 109, seems to have opted for the third possibility: The scroll, if left unopened, would suggest to him “no protection for God's children in the hours of bitter trial; no judgments upon a persecuting world; no ultimate triumph for believers; no new heaven and earth; no future inheritance!” Mounce, p. 142, has opted for the first alternative. Along with Thiele, pp. 97-98, I adopt the middle alternative. My basis for this is the distinct probability (in my view) that the background for the seven-sealed scroll is to be found in one of the forms of an ancient Roman will or testament and also in Jeremiah's title-deed (Jer 32). Thiele, pp. 95-96, has called attention to documentation for the concept of the Roman-will background; and in addition, we may add here a specific reference to one such will that has been put into English translation by Naphtali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold, *Roman Civilization*, vol. 2, *The Empire* (New York, 1955), pp. 279-280.

⁹RSV. Hereinafter Scripture quotations in English are from the RSV, except for occasional short phrases.

Comment: The setting in this vision is once again that of the temple in heaven, and is still also within the outer apartment or “Holy Place.” But the activity has now moved closer toward the inner shrine, for the golden altar of incense is where the action occurs.¹⁰ This scene, like the ones for visions I and II, contains the typical element of assurance—in this case, the portrayal of the saints’ prayers mingled with incense ascending before God. However, now in addition to this *positive* aspect, there is for the first time also a *negative* one: the use of the judgmental symbols of voices, thunderings, lightnings, and earthquake, as the censer with burning coals is thrown onto the earth.

Introduction to Vision IV

Text: 11:19

Summary: John sees “God’s temple in heaven” opened, with the ark of God’s testament or covenant in view. Then there are “flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.”

Comment: This victorious introduction scene takes us to a new setting within the “temple in heaven”: namely, into the inner shrine or “Most Holy Place.”¹¹ There John’s focus is on the ark of God’s testament or

¹⁰For a study of the NT perspective of the relationship of this golden altar to the innermost apartment (“Most Holy Place”), see, e.g., the discussion by Harold S. Camacho, “The Altar of Incense in Hebrews 9:3-4,” *AUSS* 24 (1986):5-12.

¹¹Regarding the possible “architecture” of the “temple in heaven,” the following observations may be made (cf. also n. 6, above): (1) It is a typical notion among exegetes that God’s throne is confined to the temple’s Most Holy Place, so that the outer-apartment imagery in Rev 4 would signal that in the heavenly archetype of the ancient Israelite tabernacle/temple the latter’s two-room structure is coalesced into one room. An example of this general line of thought is the excellent study by Mario Veloso, “The Doctrine of the Sanctuary and the Atonement as Reflected in the Book of Revelation,” in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Studies*, ed. A. V. Wallenkampf and W. R. Leshner (Washington, DC, 1981), pp. 394-419. (2) On the basis of a *possible* analogy with the thought expressed concerning the “veil” or “curtain” in Heb 10:20 (with its too-frequently overlooked historical backdrop of the rent-asunder veil in Matt 27:51) there *could* be in Revelation an underlying concept of one room in the heavenly temple, but the *functional* significance of the two-room model is nevertheless present in Revelation in the dynamic that is evident from scene to scene. (3) An alternative suggested by C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares*, vol. 2, *The Message of Revelation for You and Your Family* (Boise, ID, 1985), p. 171, deserves notice: “The assumption that God’s celestial throne is located only in the heavenly most holy place overlooks the fact that in Old Testament times God’s presence was not always confined to the most holy place but was sometimes represented in the holy place.”

covenant. On the basis of analogy from the tabernacle on earth, the two most significant aspects relating to this ark would be the ten-commandment law and the mercy seat (cf. Exod 40:20). It is therefore interesting to note that in the following “prophetic description” the significant struggle that the “remnant” has with the Dragon is over what is represented by these two features of the ark: the “commandments of God” and the “testimony of Jesus” (Rev 12:17).

Introduction to Vision V

Text: 15:1-16:1

Summary: John sees seven angels having the seven last plagues of “the wrath of God.” In a first section of this scene he observes on a “sea of glass mingled with fire” those who had gained the victory over the beast, over his image, and over the number of his name. This group sing “the song of Moses . . . and the song of the Lamb.” In the second section of this scene, John observes “the temple of the tent of witness in heaven” opened, and seven angels with the bowls of wrath exiting therefrom. The temple became “filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power,” so that “no one could enter the temple” till the seven plagues were over. Then a voice from the temple commanded the seven angels to go and pour out on earth the bowls of the wrath of God.

Comment: Once again the setting for the vision is that of heaven—or more specifically, the temple in heaven. From that temple the seven angels with the bowls of wrath emerge. It is in conjunction with that temple that a “sea of glass” had earlier been seen (Rev 4). And it is that temple which is now filled with smoke. There is a positive emphasis in the fact that the saints on the glassy sea sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb, just as ancient Israel had sung the song of Moses after deliverance from ancient Egyptian bondage (Exod 14 and 15). And there is a twofold negative aspect in the scene: first, in that the angels

Maxwell cites Exod 33:9 and Ezek 9:3, and also refers to the bread of the Presence in the outer room. (Elsewhere in the present essay I call attention to Exod 40:34 and Deut 31:14-15, which broaden the location of God’s presence even further.) (4) It must be recognized that localizing the “throne” symbol in the Apocalypse flies in the face of that book’s own use of the symbol as a *pervasive* sort of symbol (e.g., the usage represented in Rev 6:16 and 22:3 as compared and/or contrasted with that which is set forth in Rev 4-5). (5) The point of prime importance is that the “throne-of-God” motif in Revelation signifies the divine presence and authority, and is not basically an indicator of a specific locale (and certainly not of “geographical” *confinement!*). The concept is not that the “throne” fixes God’s location, but rather the reverse: *Where God is, there is the throne!* (6) Finally, the background from chaps. 1 and 10 in Ezekiel, with a *moving* throne of God, should not be overlooked when interpreting the scene of Rev 4-5.

carry forth bowls of wrath from the temple in order to throw them upon the earth; and second, in that the temple is filled with smoke during the time of the plagues, so that “no one could enter the temple”—a suggestion, undoubtedly, that no ministration of mercy would proceed from the temple at that time.¹²

Introduction to Vision VI

Text: 16:18-17:3a (with 16:17 as background)

Summary: After the seventh angel has poured his bowl of wrath into the air, a loud voice “out of the temple, from the throne,” declares, “It is done” (16:17). (This can be considered as a sort of transitional or “swing” element which concludes the seventh plague and introduces this new victorious-introduction scene.¹³) Then immediately the signs of divine judgment follow: “And there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as had never been since men were on the earth, so great was that earthquake.” The city of Babylon is split apart, the cities of the nations collapse, and great hail falls from heaven, with every hailstone as “heavy as a hundredweight” (or “about the weight of a talent” [KJV]). Thereafter one of the seven angels having the seven bowls of wrath talked with John, taking him to see the judgment of the great harlot (Babylon, as the ensuing prophetic description makes clear).

Comment: At first sight, it would appear that solely a *negative* aspect is emphasized in this victorious-introduction scene, for it utilizes immediately the judgmental symbolisms—in this instance heightened again, with an emphasis on the exceedingly fierce nature of both the earthquake and the hail. Although there is only negative judgment in the devastation to come upon Babylon because of the “cup of the fury of his [God’s] wrath” (16:19; see also 17:1-2), nevertheless, there is implicitly a positive assurance for God’s saints in this scene—in that

¹²This conclusion is fortified also by the facts (1) that the seven plagues themselves are described in 15:1 as the “last” and as completing the “wrath of God,” (2) that the description in chap. 16 of the outpouring of this divine wrath in the bowls themselves reveals no salvific effect, but rather the very opposite (cf., e.g., 16:6, 9, 10, 14), and (3) that Babylon’s judgment is described in 16:19 as being a “remembrance” by God that makes her “drain the cup of the fury of his wrath.”

¹³The more clearcut division between sequences in the first major part of Revelation (visions I-IV) gives way in the second major part of the book (visions V-VIII) to the presence of “swing” elements. This, interestingly enough, seems to parallel the fact that the recapitulatory nature of the sequences themselves in both major parts also differ somewhat in that the “chronological” or “succession” frames are less distinct in the second main part. Notice, e.g., the implications that flow from the brief overviews given in Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation: Hermeneutical Guidelines, with Brief Introduction to Literary Analysis*, 2d ed. (Naples, FL, 1979), pp. 48-49.

Babylon's nefarious activity has now been terminated, with her herself undergoing the divine judgment for her misdeeds. (Cf. 18:20 for a call to "rejoice.")

Introduction to Vision VII

Text: 19:1-10

Summary: In the setting of the throne, the twenty-four elders, and the four living creatures (cf. chap. 4), John hears the voice of "a great multitude in heaven" praising God for having judged the great harlot and having avenged the blood of his servants upon her. Further anthems of praise are sung, and announcement is made that the marriage of the Lamb has come and that "his Bride has made herself ready." A blessing is pronounced upon those invited to "the marriage supper of the Lamb."

Comment: The scene here is one that is obviously parallel to that of Rev 4-5—with the throne, four living creatures, twenty-four elders, and anthems of praise being basic to both.¹⁴ However, whereas in Rev 4-5, there was a "scroll of destiny" still to be opened, and whereas also during the actual breaking of the seals of that scroll in chap. 6 there was a cry of "How long" until the vindication for God's martyrs would come (see 6:9-11), there is in chap. 19 a striking reversal: there is here praise and acclamation to God for his having now brought about that vindication.

In the introduction to vision VII, there is, moreover, an emphasis on the "marriage supper of the Lamb" (vs. 9) and reference to the Lamb's "Bride" (vs. 7). The white clothing (vs. 8) is reminiscent, of course, of the similar imagery in vision II with regard to the martyrs of the fifth seal and the great multitude of the "Spotlight" section (6:9-11 and 7:9-17, respectively). It should also be noted that the sequence in vision VII concludes, interestingly enough, with a further reference to the "bride"—namely, John's view of the Holy City, New Jerusalem, descending from God out of heaven "as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev 21:2).

Introduction to Vision VIII

Text: 21:5-11a (and reference to vss. 1-4 as background)

Summary: In the context of the "new heaven" and "new earth," with "the holy city, new Jerusalem," having come down from God out of heaven, John now beholds the one sitting upon the throne. This divine being—God himself in

¹⁴For a valuable study on the anthems in both passages, see William H. Shea, "Revelation 5 and 19 as Literary Reciprocals," *AUSS* 22 (1984):249-257.

previous visions—declares, “Behold, I make all things new.” Then he speaks to John, saying, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true,” and further declares to John, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega. . . .” A twofold judgment is declared: inheritance of all things for the conqueror; but destruction in the lake of fire, “which is the second death,” for those who are not conquerors. Then one of the angels with the seven bowls of wrath takes John to a high mountain, showing him the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God and having the glory of God.

Comment: In contrast to the introductory scenes for visions II-VII, where the setting was in each instance clearly still in heaven, now there is a backdrop that has an earthly setting—a parallel to the situation with respect to vision I. In vision VIII, this introductory scene deals indeed with a tabernacle or temple setting, but whether the scene itself as given in 21:5-11a is intended to be basically from the earthly perspective or to be a *transitional* one from heaven to earth is not absolutely clear (nor is it of material importance to our study). In 21:3, the declaration is made, of course, that God’s tabernacle is on earth after the descent of the Holy City (vs. 2), and this final portion of vision VII would seem to provide the setting for our opening scene in vision VIII (which itself, however, also replicates a description of the descent of the New Jerusalem [21:10]). In any case, the main point is that the focus of this introductory scene has shifted from the temple in heaven in such a way as to place emphasis once again on an earthly venue. The actual temple imagery utilized will be treated more fully later in this article.

2. *Some Implications of the Structure*

The summaries provided in the preceding section of this article have brought to attention several elements concerning the introductory scenes to the eight main visions of the Apocalypse. Prominent among these features are the following: (1) the pervasiveness of temple imagery in the settings of these scenes; (2) positive and negative thrusts within the scenes; (3) a certain dynamic or movement both in the temple imagery throughout and in the negative judgment symbolism that appears in visions III-VI; and (4) a special similarity structurally and contentwise between the first and eighth visions. We will now give somewhat further attention to these elements, but as a preliminary step will first take brief notice of the kind of relationship that the introductory scenes hold to their own prophetic sequences.

*The Introductory Scenes and Their
Respective Prophetic Sequences*

In any analysis of the introductory scenes for the eight major visions of the book of Revelation, the logical and basic first consideration is the fact that there is a close relationship between these scenes and the remainder of the prophetic sequences which they introduce. Thus, for vision I the portrayal of Christ as walking among the seven lampstands/churches fittingly precedes his counsels to those churches, and for vision II the scene with the Lamb proclaimed worthy to open the seven-sealed scroll and then actually taking that scroll from the hand of the one seated on the throne provides an appropriate backdrop for the Lamb's actual breaking of the seals.

These introductory scenes provide in this way a positively oriented setting—a message of assurance, as it were—that relates to the sequence that ensues. In the first instance, Christ assures his people of his presence with them in their struggles against deception and persecution—struggles which require from him words of counsel and encouragement, and frequently rebuke (chaps. 2 and 3).

Likewise, in the second vision there is assurance that the forces released by the breaking of the seals are within the redemptive framework of the slain Lamb's work in heaven that will eventually result in opening the book of eternal destiny for the Lamb's faithful ones.¹⁵ The seals are successively opened in chaps. 6 and 8:1, intensifying at each step the progression, until a dramatic silence occurs as the scroll itself is finally to be opened. The "interlude" in chap. 7 is very visibly an appropriate "Spotlight on Last Events" for this particular sequence. By its highlighting of the *sealing* of God's servants, there is in this "Interlude" a sort of play on the "seal" terminology. But the whole concept of ownership and preservation inherent in the symbolism of "seal" also very directly connects this scene in chap. 7 with the breaking of the seals:¹⁶

¹⁵Cf. n. 8, above.

¹⁶The lexica and theological dictionaries (such as *TDNT*) and similar reference works (s.v. σφραγίς or *sphragis*) have amply elucidated the significance of the "seal" and of the "sealing" process or practice in the ancient world. For a succinct reference to six possible significations, see J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, AB 38 (Garden City, NY, 1975), pp. 116-117. Cf. also the somewhat detailed treatment of "Seals and Scarabs" in *IDB* 4:254-259.

God's 144,000 sealed ones are protected from the ravages of the horsemen of the first four seals,¹⁷ and even in the sort of martyrdom portrayed in the fifth seal they can rest in full assurance of God's care.¹⁸ This emphasis on God's care is highlighted further in the depiction in sections b and c of chap. 7 (vss. 9-17) of the great multitude coming out of great tribulation (these, like the martyrs in the fifth seal, have white robes!).

The foregoing illustrates the manner in which there is close correlation between the victorious-introduction scenes and the remainder of the respective visions which these scenes introduce, and it will not be necessary to elaborate here beyond these two samples. In fact, a quick review of the main content of each vision may be obtained by consulting section 2 of my previous article in this series. The one additional observation that should be made here is that although all the victorious-introduction scenes have a positive note of assurance for Christ's loyal ones, some—especially those for visions III-VI (the twofold series with the "Exodus-from-Egypt"/"Fall-of-Babylon" motif)—also portray negative aspects. This matter will receive further attention below.

The Temple Imagery and Its Significance

As we have observed, temple imagery is pervasive in the introductory scenes to the eight main prophetic sequences in Revelation. For visions II-VII, the settings are in "the temple in heaven," and "furniture" in that temple comes to view. In vision I, however, the temple imagery is that of lampstands that represent "the seven

¹⁷Commentators generally miss this link because of a failure to take careful enough note of the OT background in Zech 6, where horses of various colors go out to "patrol the earth" (vs. 7) and where, in response to the prophetic inquiry as to the identity of the four groups of horses, an angel defines them as the four *ruhôt* ("winds") of heaven that go out from the presence of the Lord of the whole earth (vss. 4-5). Commentators who have made the connection include G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, New Century Bible (London, 1974), p. 142; and Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, Tyndale NT Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI, 1969), p. 113. Unfortunately, the RSV in this instance completely distorts the meaning of the Hebrew by its wording, "These [the groups of horses] are going forth to the four winds of heaven," when it is in reality the winds (=horses) that do the going forth.

¹⁸For a comprehensive study of the fifth seal, see now Joel Nobel Musvosvi, "The Concept of Vengeance in the Book of Revelation in the Old Testament and Near Eastern Context" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1986).

churches" on earth. And in vision VIII, there is again an earthly venue—but this time in the context of the holy city New Jerusalem and the "new earth," with God himself "tabernacling" directly with his people (21:3-4) and with "God and the Lamb" described as the "temple" of the new Jerusalem (21:22).

It is immediately apparent that all three of the main NT applications of temple imagery come into play in these introductory scenes. In the first vision, we have the NT concept of the Christian church as the "new temple." The classical *loci* for this concept are undoubtedly 1 Cor 3:16-17 and 2 Cor 6:16-17, but certainly there is reflection of it in 1 Pet 2:5, as well, and also in the proclamation of James to the Jerusalem council referred to in Acts 15:13-18. In the last-mentioned reference, James makes application of the prophecy of Amos 9:11-12 referring to God's returning to build again the "tabernacle of David," which had fallen down, as being directly applicable to the influx of Gentiles into the apostolic church.

The NT parallel closest to the usage reflected in the introductory scenes for visions II-VII in the book of Revelation is that which is found in the book of Hebrews. There Christ is spoken of as "a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven"—a "minister in the sanctuary and the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord" (Heb 8:1-2; see also vs. 5).¹⁹

Finally, what is undoubtedly the most basic and central application of NT temple imagery is that which is illustrated in the introductory scene and in the prophetic description in vision VIII of the Apocalypse: namely, a reference to the direct divine presence. In the prologue to the Gospel of John, it is stated that Christ "tabernacled among us" (John 1:14; cf. the situation in the "new earth" after the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem, in which it is stated that God now tabernacles with humanity [21:3]). Perhaps an even more forceful reference is that in which Jesus declared, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews understood this as referring to Herod's temple, but the Evangelist made the explanation that "he [Christ] spoke of the temple

¹⁹See again the excellent discussion in Davidson, pp. 336-367; also Davidson's "Excursus" on *tupos* structures in Exod 25:40, on pp. 367-388.

of his body” and that when therefore Jesus had risen from the dead, his disciples “remembered that he had said this” (John 2:19-22).

The divine presence was the central focus of the ancient tabernacle/temple economy in Israel.²⁰ Moses was given instruction to build “a sanctuary, that I [God] may dwell in their [Israel’s] midst” (Exod 25:8). And when the construction of the tabernacle was complete, “the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Exod 40:34). It is this fundamental thought—that of the divine presence—that likewise pervades the introductory scenes to all eight visions of the Apocalypse. The divine, ever-living Christ is, in the first instance, depicted as present with his people on earth, sustaining them and providing messages to them through his Holy Spirit (vision I);²¹ then the scene changes to the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ is actively ministering in behalf of his people (visions II-VII); and finally, when God and the Lamb dwell with redeemed human beings in the “new earth” and “New Jerusalem,” there is brought to earth the very ultimate in closeness and tangibility of the divine presence (vision VIII).

Positive and Negative Elements in the Introductory Scenes

As noticed earlier, the victorious-introduction scenes for visions I and II contain only a positive thrust, but the third introductory scene adds also a negative element. In this third scene, the positive emphasis is found in the mingled incense-smoke and prayers of the saints ascending to God, and the negative aspect is described in terms of the angel’s throwing a censer of live coals to earth, with the resulting judgment signs of voices, thunder, lightning, and an earthquake.

In the previous article in this series I pointed out that the visions from III through VI consist of a twice-repeated motif that may aptly be designated as the “Exodus-from-Egypt”/“Fall-of-

²⁰For a good overview of this fundamental theme, see Angel Manuel Rodríguez, “Sanctuary Theology in the Book of Exodus,” *AUSS* 24 (1986):127-145.

²¹It is interesting to observe that each of the seven messages is introduced by Christ and then is summed up in each instance as “what the Spirit says to the Churches”—paralleling the statements in the Fourth Gospel to the effect that the Paraclete will set forth Christ’s words (see, e.g., John 14:25-26; 15:26; 16:12-15).

Babylon” motif. (See Diagram 2 on the next page for illustration of the motif.) It is interesting that it is precisely in conjunction with these four visions that the strongest references to negative judgment occur. There is also a progression of intensity in the judgment symbolism, as we will observe shortly.

The introductory scenes for visions VII and VIII revert partly to the positive thrust of the comparable sections of visions I and II. However, there is at least an oblique (but nonetheless forceful) reference to negative judgment in each of these final two visions, even though their primary thrust is positive. For vision VII, there is acclamation to God for having judged the harlot and having vindicated the saints. Even so, the blessedness of salvation is the keynote of the anthems of praise; and especially in the references to the Lamb’s bride and to the wedding supper of the Lamb is there joy at its highest! For vision VIII, there is inserted within a generally felicitous picture (21:5-11a), one verse that describes those who will meet doom in the “lake of fire” (vs. 8)—a statement obviously presented so as to contrast with the reward of the conquerors or overcomers mentioned just previously (vs. 7).²²

Concerning this positive and negative thrust of the opening and closing victorious-introduction scenes, it appears that the totally positive thrusts of the scenes in visions I and II are not kept fully parallel or balanced in their chiasmic counterparts in visions VII and VIII, and this is for good reason: The former refer specifically to ongoing salvific processes, a major theological concern during the historical era; but the latter, by way of contrast, pertain to a time in the eschatological-judgment era when ultimate salvation and glorification await Christ’s saints, but where also there are “unsaved” whose doom has now been fully sealed. These “unsaved” cannot be ignored in presenting a complete picture, for as G. E. Mendenhall has pointed out in a different context, the vindication of God’s saints has two sides “to the coin”: The obverse

²²It should not be overlooked that just as 21:7 states broadly the ultimate reward for the overcomers in the seven churches of chaps. 2 and 3, 21:8 reflects comprehensively the doom of the “non-overcomers” in those seven churches. The terms “cowardly,” “faithless,” “polluted,” “sorcerers,” “liars,” etc., in 21:8 are reminiscent of the descriptions and counsels in the seven messages regarding faithfulness unto death (Smyrna), the danger of the wiles of Balaam and Jezebel (Pergamum and Thyatira), and the perjury against Christ’s faithful disciples (Philadelphia), etc.

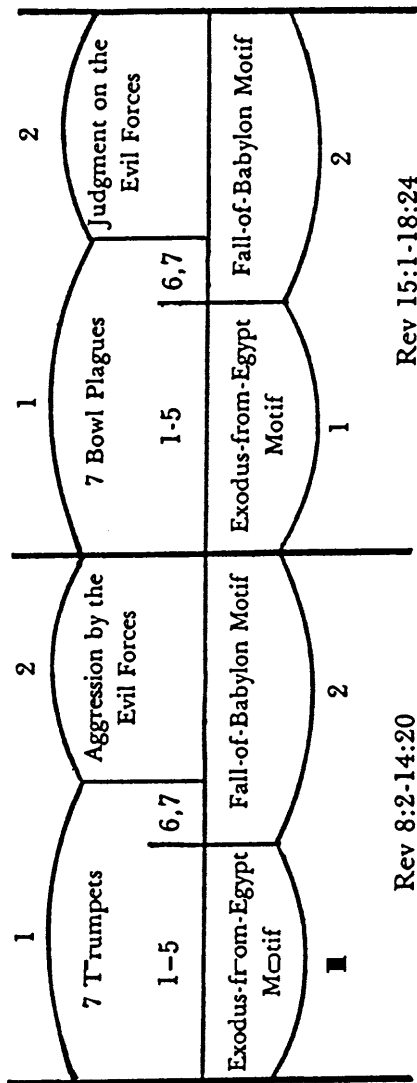


DIAGRAM 2. THE "EXODUS-FROM-EGYPT"/"FALL-OF-BABYLON" MOTIF IN REVELATION

(This diagram is an enlargement of the one in Kenneth A. Strand, "The Two Witnesses of Rev 11:3-12," *AUSS* 1.9 (1981):129. The discussion of this motif on p. 128 of that article should also be noted.)

that represents salvation for the saints has a reverse side that spells doom for those who have been the saints' oppressors.²³

*"Movement" in Portrayal
of the Imagery*

In addition to a striking vertical dimension manifest in the visions of the Apocalypse, there is a certain type of horizontal movement evident in the symbolic usage within the sequence of the eight "victorious-introduction" scenes. We have already observed, from another perspective, the movement in temple setting from an earthly venue to a heavenly venue and back again to a new earthly (i.e., "new-earth") venue. But the heavenly temple scenes themselves (in visions II-VII) show an interesting progression in the symbolism which occurs. This we shall briefly look at, followed by succinct notice also of a progression that occurs in the negative-judgment imagery utilized in visions III-VI.

Temple-in-Heaven Imagery. In vision II, the seven lamps or torches of fire suggest a first-apartment or Holy-Place setting. Next, vision III takes us to the golden altar of incense before the throne, and then vision IV opens to view the ark of God's covenant in the inner shrine or Most Holy Place.²⁴ Thus, for the visions pertaining to the historical era, we have movement *inward* in the temple. This appears to correlate with an increasing emphasis on the end-time in the respective "Basic Prophetic Descriptions" and "Interludes," even though all of these sequences span the era from the prophet's time onward to the end. (This phenomenon has been treated sufficiently in the previous article, and therefore need not be elaborated further here.)

After the chiasmic dividing line, the temple imagery no longer embraces temple furniture, for the functions represented by such furniture—or the salvific activities indicated thereby—no longer exist. Rather, smoke fills the temple so that no ministry of mercy continues (15:8); proclamations and/or judgmental signs occur, with only general reference to their source in the temple, from the throne, and/or in heaven (cf. 16:17ff.; 19:1-5; 21:5).

²³George E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore, MD, 1973), p. 83. This is in the context of an excellent study of *NQM* (the "vengeance"/"vindication" motif) in biblical and other ancient Near-Eastern literature.

²⁴Cf. again n. 11, above.

Negative-Judgment Imagery. The central four visions of the Apocalypse—namely, III through VI—have introductions that set forth strong negative-judgment symbolism. An interesting feature is the intensification of the negative thrust. The signs in vision III are thunder, voices, lightning, and an earthquake (8:5); to these, vision IV adds “heavy hail” (11:19); and finally, vision VI sets forth these same judgment harbingers but intensifies considerably both the earthquake (“such as had never been since men were on the earth,” 16:18) and the hail (each hailstone “heavy as a hundred-weight,” 16:21). Vision V omits this particular series of judgment symbols, possibly because in inaugurating its depiction of the eschatological judgment, its chief emphases already carry a heavy burden of doom: the fullness of God’s wrath being carried forth from the temple in the seven bowls and the temple itself as smoke-filled and unoccupied (15:5-8).

In any event, the first doublet of visions with the “Exodus-from-Egypt”/“Fall-of-Babylon” motif (visions III and IV) begins with introductory scenes that already show a progression of intensity of judgment. This intensity is then further enhanced by the symbolic portrayals in the second doublet (visions V and VI). The theological significance here appears to be the concept that increasing woe is commensurate with a pattern of continuing and more flagrant rejection of Christ’s offer of salvation. As such, it would be a sort of extended commentary on the principle that Jesus enunciated in declaring that the judgmental doom upon Bethsaida, Chorazin, Capernaum, and other rejecters of his mercy would exceed that of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf., e.g., Matt 10:14-15 and 11:20-24).

Relationship of the Introductions for Visions I and VIII

We have already analyzed the theological significance of the temple imagery in the eight introductory scenes in Revelation. It remains here to call more specific attention to one particular feature—namely, the envelope structure in which the introduction to vision I and that to vision VIII enclose, as it were, the six intervening introductions. The primary feature of the enclosure schema is that of venue—earthly for visions I and VIII, and heavenly for visions II-VII. Thus, the emphasis at both the beginning and the end of the book is on an *immanence* of the divine presence.

Is there here a suggestion, perhaps, of the two advents of Christ and of their ultimate results? In the first introductory scene, John sees the Christ who had come as God incarnate in his first advent—who was killed and then resurrected, and who ascended to heaven after forty days. Now this same divine person appears to John as the one who was dead but lives forever (Rev 1:17-18) and is *present*, walking among his churches/lampstands. This first victorious-introduction scene thus evidences the continuing and close presence of this very Jesus with his church on earth. His own victory during his incarnation has assured the existence of this covenant community itself, and his own divine presence remains verily with his people throughout the historical era (by means of his Holy Spirit).²⁵ In the Fourth Gospel, the prologue refers to Christ's "tabernacling among us" (John 1:14), but the Discourse on the Paraclete indicates that even after Jesus' departure into heaven, both he and the Father would come to make their "home" with Jesus' faithful disciples (see John 14:15-21, 23).

The counterpart to this divine presence in the "here-and-now" is the fullness of experience of the divine presence contingent upon Jesus' second advent to bring rewards to all persons according to their deeds (Rev 22:12). In the final stages of those rewards—i.e., in the "new-heaven"/"new-earth"/New-Jerusalem experience—God and the Lamb again "tabernacle" with their people, but now this tabernacling is in an immediate and direct presence (see 21:3, 22; and 22:1-4).

Thus, in the beginning and closing victorious-introduction scenes we find, in a sense, an elaboration of the Apocalypse's twofold theme (called to attention in my earlier article): Christ's presence with his people in this present age as the "Alpha and Omega," and his return at the end of the historical era to usher in those events that will culminate in his presence with his people throughout eternity (cf. Rev 1:7-8 and 22:12-13).

But what function, then, do the introductory scenes for the intervening visions serve? Whereas *immanence* is the emphasis of visions I and VIII, including their victorious-introduction scenes, *transcendence* is the emphasis of the other visions. These six visions highlight activity in heaven, while God's people are on earth. But this transcendence is not by any means aloofness, nor is it any

²⁵Cf. again n. 21, above.

lack of concern and contact between heaven and earth. Rather, all of these visions (through their victorious-introduction scenes, and also their subsequent descriptive sequences) reveal a very decided *vertical continuity*. What is done in the temple in heaven is done for the benefit of God's people on earth, and therefore the heavenly activity portrayed in the victorious-introduction scenes finds an immediate counterpart in forces released on earth in order to accomplish God's purpose for his people.

Broad "Envelope Structures"

Brief mention should be made of the fact that in the foregoing analysis and discussion we have come upon two broad "envelope structures."²⁶ One of these we have already discussed in dealing with the venue of the temple imagery: for visions I and VIII, an earthly venue (present-historical and new-earthly, respectively); and for visions II-VII, a setting in the "temple in heaven." The other envelope structure relates to the "Negative-Judgment Imagery" and encloses the harsh negative-judgment thrusts of the introductory scenes for visions III through VI within the solely positive thrust of the paralleling scenes for visions I and II, on the one hand, and the predominantly positive thrust of the scenes for visions VII and VIII, on the other hand.²⁷ (These two broad envelope structures are set forth in sketch form in Diagram 3 on the next page.)

The two examples of *inclusio* are of interest from the standpoint of literary artistry, of course. But we must ever bear in mind that this artistry was not utilized as an end in itself; rather, it was incorporated because of, and in relationship to, its functionality for conveying forcefully the theological perspective and motifs that are foundational in the Apocalypse and that constitute the book's primary concern.

²⁶"Envelope structures" or "inclusios" are common in the literary patterns of the Apocalypse. See, e.g., William H. Shea, "The Parallel Literary Structure of Revelation 12 and 20," *AUSS* 23 (1985):37-54 (especially pp. 44-45), for two striking illustrations of this phenomenon.

²⁷With respect to the matter of positive and negative aspects, our reference is, of course, to only the victorious-introduction scenes—the blocs designated "A" in Diagram 1. In other blocs of material in visions I, II, and VII, there are indeed many negative elements, but this fact does not affect the distinctive pattern we have noticed in the introductory scenes.

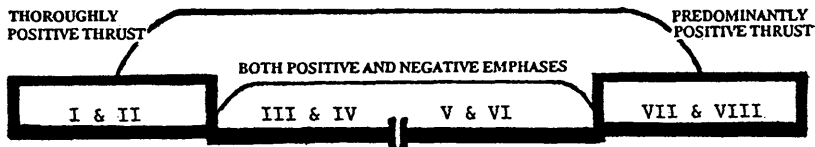
3. *Summary and Conclusion*

The previous article and the present one have outlined certain literary structures in the Apocalypse and given attention in particular to the victorious-introduction scenes for the eight main visions in the book of Revelation. It is obvious, in the first place, that Revelation is a very neatly organized literary piece. However, the literary patterns represent more than simply aesthetic taste and mnemonic concern; they highlight in a very real way certain major theological themes and motifs. These are themes and motifs that parallel and elaborate aspects of general NT theology, and that are especially valuable in speaking hope and assurance to Christ's loyal followers in their struggle against forces of deception and persecution.

DIAGRAM 3. TWO "ENVELOPE STRUCTURES" IN THE INTRODUCTORY SCENES OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION



1. EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY VENUES



2. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE JUDGMENT EMPHASES