

## THE "SPOTLIGHT-ON-LAST-EVENTS" SECTIONS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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The book of Revelation is a remarkably well-crafted literary piece, with an intricate design of intertwining literary patterns of various scopes and types that aid in conveying the book's theological message—a fact called to attention heretofore through a variety of studies covering various of the significant patterns.<sup>1</sup> In my own recent two-article sequence in *AUSS* treating broad structures in the book of Revelation, I first presented an overview of the basic literary pattern that embraces the eight major visions of the Apocalypse, and then I analyzed more specifically the individual scenes that introduced those eight visions.<sup>2</sup> To each of these introductory sections I gave the general designation of "Victorious-Introduction Scene."

<sup>1</sup>Among studies in *AUSS* that have set forth a variety of such literary patterns are several by William H. Shea: "Chiasm in Theme and Form in Revelation 18," 20 (1982): 249-256; "Revelation 5 and 19 as Literary Reciprocals," 22 (1984): 249-257; and "The Parallel Literary Structure of Revelation 12 and 20," 23 (1985): 37-54. Also the following by Kenneth A. Strand: "Chiastic Structure and Some Motifs in the Book of Revelation," 16 (1978): 401-408; "Two Aspects of Babylon's Judgment Portrayed in Revelation 18," 20 (1982): 53-60; "Some Modalities of Symbolic Usage in Revelation 18," 24 (1986): 37-46; "The Eight Basic Visions in the Book of Revelation," 25 (1987): 107-121; and "The 'Victorious-Introduction' Scenes in the Visions in the Book of Revelation," 25 (1987): 267-288. The pioneering work on the Apocalypse's broad chiastic structure as this emerges directly from the text itself is K. A. Strand, *The Open Gates of Heaven* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1970), and now represented with slight revision and additional material in idem, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 2d ed. (Naples, FL, 1979). The two articles mentioned above that were published in 1987, however, provide still further refinement and furnish some additional diagrams of structure not published earlier. N. W. Lund, *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Chicago, 1955), had considered chiasm in the book of Revelation prior to my earliest publication on the matter, though my "detailed study of the Apocalypse" did antedate "by several years this major publication of Lund's," and also is based more directly "on the text itself rather than on an interpretation of the text [as seems to be the case with regard to Lund's schema]" (Strand, *Interpreting*, p. 76).

<sup>2</sup>Strand, "Eight Basic Visions" and "'Victorious-Introduction' Scenes," respectively.

Visions I and VIII contain one section beyond their respective introductory scenes, but visions II through VII all contain three further sections beyond their inaugural sections. The purpose of the present brief essay is to set forth certain correlations among three of the third sections in the sequence: namely, those for visions II, III, and IV. For the reader's convenience, figure 1 on the next page provides a reprint of my earlier-published diagram of the basic structure and content of the book of Revelation. In this diagram, the three sections to which I wish to call special attention in the present essay are designated by the caption "Interlude: Spotlight on Last Events."

The term "Interlude," which is commonly used by commentators and expositors for these particular sections, must not, however, lead one to view them (as is too often the case) as being disruptive or interruptive of the vision sequences in which they occur. Rather, they contribute meaningful and pertinent expansions, elaborations, and heightened focuses on certain crucial happenings, conditions, or particulars that relate to the final portion of the immediately preceding sections of their respective major-vision sequences—namely, the sections designated in figure 1 as "Basic Prophetic Description in History."

One further matter highlighted in figure 1 should be noted here: The three "Spotlight" sections under consideration in this article (as well as the broader vision sequences of which these sections are a part) fall within the first of two major divisions of Revelation, a major division to which I have given the title "Historical-Era Visions."

### 1. *Content of the "Spotlight" Interludes*

From a literary standpoint, each of the "Spotlight" interludes not only shows an integral relationship to the content of the rest of the vision sequence in which it occurs, but it actually provides its own unique contribution in a *bipartite pattern*. An overview of all three bipartite interludes is first given below, followed by a discussion of each of the interludes.

#### *Overview of the Interludes*

The interlude for the 7-seals vision of 4:1-8:1 divides neatly into a first part in 7:1-8 and a second part in 7:9-17. The first tells of John's *hearing* about the sealing of 144,000, and the second

		HISTORICAL-ERA VISIONS			
		I	II	III	IV
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)	
	BASIC PROPHECIC DESCRIPTION IN HISTORY (Chaps. 2 & 3)	BASIC PROPHECIC DESCRIPTION IN HISTORY (Chap. 6)	BASIC PROPHECIC DESCRIPTION IN HISTORY (8:7-9:21)	BASIC PROPHECIC DESCRIPTION IN HISTORY (Chaps. 12 & 13)	
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)		
	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-JUDGMENT-ERA VISIONS			
		V	VI	VII	VIII
A	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	BASIC PROPHECIC DESCRIPTION IN FINAL JUDGMENT (16:2-14,16)	BASIC PROPHECIC DESCRIPTION IN FINAL JUDGMENT (17:3b-18:3)	BASIC PROPHECIC DESCRIPTION IN FINAL JUDGMENT (19:11-20:5)	BASIC PROPHECIC DESCRIPTION IN FINAL JUDGMENT (21:11b-22:5)
C	INTERLUDE: EXHORTATION OR APPEAL (16:15)	INTERLUDE: EXHORTATION OR APPEAL (18:4-8,20)	INTERLUDE: EXHORTATION OR APPEAL (20:6)		
	D	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)	

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

reports John's *seeing* a great multitude clothed in white, plus his learning the identity of this group.

For the 7-trumpets vision of 8:2-11:18, the interlude first depicts, in chapter 10, a mighty angel with an open scroll giving an important prophetic proclamation (v. 6: "that there should be time no longer" [KJV] or "that there should be no more delay" [RSV]<sup>3</sup>). Then it treats, in 11:1-13, the vision of the measuring of the temple (vv. 1-2) and the mission of the two witnesses (vv. 3-13). In this chapter, temple imagery is a unifying thread, for the two witnesses are introduced in terms of the temple imagery of "the two olive trees, even the two lampstands, that stand in the presence of the Lord of the earth" (v. 4).<sup>4</sup>

Finally, in the vision of the great conflict engendered and fought by the antidivine trinity against Christ and his people, set forth in 12:1-14:20, the "spotlight" interlude divides quite clearly into two parts as follows: First, there is a description in 14:1-5 of the 144,000 with the Lamb on Mt. Zion. Then follows a subsection in 14:6-13 setting forth the proclamation of three warning messages by three angels flying in heaven (vv. 6-11) and depicting God's loyal followers who heed the message (vv. 12-13).

This bipartite structure and the basic content of these three interludes for visions II, III, and IV are summarized briefly in outline form in figure 2.

### *Revelation 7: (1) The 144,000 and (2) the Great Multitude*

Inasmuch as the central theme of vision II is the Lamb's (Christ's) breaking the seals of the seven-sealed scroll, the use of a *seal* in Rev 7 as the mark of God's ownership and assured protection

<sup>3</sup>Whenever a specific translation is used in this article, that translation will be indicated.

<sup>4</sup>The *kai* in this statement is epexegetical, as is clear from the context; hence my rendition of it as "even" rather than as "and." That the lampstands represent temple imagery is obvious; but as S. Douglas Waterhouse has shown in as-yet-unpublished material, so also is the symbolism of "two olive trees," one of whose backgrounds is the temple-pillars Jachin and Boaz mentioned in 1 Kgs 7:21. See my earlier reference to Waterhouse's research in "The Two Witnesses of Rev 11:3-12," *AUSS* 19 (1981): 135, n. 14; and cf. my own brief further attention to the Jachin-and-Boaz background in "The Two Olive Trees of Zechariah 4 and Revelation 11," *AUSS* 20 (1982): 259.

INTERLUDE  
SECTIONS  
PROVIDING  
"SPOTLIGHT  
ON LAST  
EVENTS"

<p><b>Vision II The Seals Septet</b></p>	<p><b>Vision III The Trumpets Septet</b></p>	<p><b>Vision IV The Antidivine Trinity Against God and God's People</b></p>
<p><i>Scripture Passage Chap. 7</i></p> <p>1. 144,000 Sealed (John <i>hears</i> the number), 7:1-8</p>	<p><i>Scripture Passage 10:1-11:13</i></p> <p>1. Angel Holding Open Scroll and Giving Prophetic Proclamation, <i>Chap. 10</i></p>	<p><i>Scripture Passage 14:1-13</i></p> <p>1. 144,000 with the Lamb on Mt. Zion, 14:1-5</p>
<p>2. Great Multitude Arrayed in White (John <i>sees</i> this multitude that "no man can number"): a. John's Vision of the Multi- tude, 7:9-12 b. Elder's Expla- nation as to the Identity of This Multitude, 7:13-17</p>	<p>2. Judgment Motif and Prophetic Proclamation: a. Measuring of Temple, Altar, and Worshipers, 11:1-2 b. Mission and Testimony of the Two Wit- nesses, 11:3-13</p>	<p>2. Messages of 3 Angels: a. The Prophetic Proclamation Entailing Judg- ment Motif, 14:6-11 b. Result for God's People, 14:12-13</p>

**FIGURE 2. THE BIPARTITE "SPOTLIGHT-ON-LAST-EVENTS" INTERLUDES**

for his servants is indeed appropriate.<sup>5</sup> As for the number 144,000, we must keep in mind that there are certain “stylized” numbers in Revelation and that the use of such numbers tends to be highly symbolical.<sup>6</sup> This is particularly so when we find a number of the sort we have here: namely, a combination of the stylized numerals  $12 \times 12 \times 1000$ .<sup>7</sup> Essentially, the picture is that of a protected group of God’s servants in terms of completeness and vastness. As John *heard* the number 144,000 (*he did not see* the sealing of the 144,000), he would have recognized that the group so depicted must indeed be a massive one—precisely what he next *saw* in vision: the “great multitude” that no one could number.

That the 144,000 and this great multitude are but two descriptions of the same end-time corps of God’s faithful servants may be deduced from several considerations, including their juxtaposition within an end-time interlude. It is made clear elsewhere in Revelation that at this particular time the loyal followers of the Lamb are a unit group that contrasts with the sole other group, the beast-worshippers (cf. 13:8-17).<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the very presentation pattern in chapter 7, with John *first hearing* of something under one symbol and *then seeing* it under another symbol, parallels exactly the presentation style in Rev 5. There he first hears that the “Lion of the tribe of Judah” can

<sup>5</sup>Regarding various implications of the use of seals in the ancient Near East, reference should be made to good Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, and lexica (e.g., *IDB*, *TDNT*). The two closely related significations of ownership and protection seem basic for the context in Rev 7, and especially so when account is also taken of the description of the 144,000 in Rev 14:1-5.

<sup>6</sup>Such as 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 100, and 1000. They may, of course, be used “literally” to designate entities of the particular designated quantity, but there is a tendency in highly symbolic contexts (and in some other contexts) to feature these numbers as representing greater or expanded realities. H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 3d ed. (London, 1909; reprinted in Grand Rapids, MI, 1968), pp. cxxxv-cxxxviii, furnishes a good brief overview of number symbolism used in Revelation; but a more detailed (and therefore more helpful) discussion of numbers used symbolically in the Bible may be found in Walter L. Wilson, *Wilson’s Dictionary of Bible Types* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1957). Unfortunately, Wilson does not treat the numeral “1000.”

<sup>7</sup>A comparison may be made with Rev 14:20, where the stylized “ $4 \times 4 \times 100$ ” yields “1600 stadia”—symbolic of the completeness of destruction in the earthly realm when the unsaved of earth meet their doom in the symbolic grape vintage.

<sup>8</sup>The same picture is given elsewhere in the NT: e.g., Matt 13:24-30; 25:31-46; and Luke 17:26-37. Also cf. Rev 14:14-20.

take the 7-sealed scroll and break its seals, and then he sees a "Lamb as it was slain" taking the scroll and breaking those seals (5:6-7; 6:1-17; 8:1). In a somewhat similar manner, though perhaps not as strikingly obvious, the pattern appears, as well, in the Apocalypse's very first vision: There John first hears behind him "a loud voice like a trumpet" and then turns and sees the glorified Christ (1:10-16).

It is also noteworthy that in Rev 7:1-8 there is no description of the characteristics of the 144,000 "servants of God" who are being sealed and that that kind of information comes only in the latter part of the chapter, in the depiction of the "great multitude." This fact should be considered in conjunction with the subsequent portrayal of the 144,000 in Rev 14:1-5, where this number which John heard sealed in 7:1-8 is described as having character attributes of the kind that inhere in the multitude which he saw in Rev 7:9-17. (This is a matter to which we will return below, in our treatment of Rev 14:1-5.)

One further matter should here be noticed; namely, the relationship of the number symbolism to antecedents in the history of ancient Israel. The numerical term of "1000" (*elep*) represented a military unit in Israel's wilderness encampment and journeyings in the Sinai. Tribal military contingents consisted of multiple "1000s," with subunits of 100s and 50s (cf. Num 2:2-26). Interestingly, whenever Israel broke camp, Moses would say "Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered; and let those who hate you flee from your presence"; and then, when camp was pitched, Moses would declare, "Return, O Lord, to the myriad thousands of Israel" (Num 10:35-36). In an attack of reprisal against the Midianites, Moses ordered that a thousand soldiers from each tribe be sent for a total of 12,000 (Num 31:2-5); also, 12,000 was the number of Israelites dispatched against Jabesh-gilead (Judg 21:10); and further examples utilizing the numbers 12 and 1000 (and on occasion 100) in martial settings could be cited.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, the number 12 and its multiples were used in conjunction with the temple service during the monarchy period of Israel's history and onward—for instance, 24 courses or "families"

<sup>9</sup>Those mentioned here, plus several others (including examples at Qumran), have been suggested by James Valentine, "Theological Aspects of the Temple Motif in the Old Testament and Revelation" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1985), p. 313.

of priests (1 Chron 24:1-19)<sup>10</sup>—and this usage suggests a further major background source that very likely informs the number symbolism 144,000 in the book of Revelation. In this connection, it should not be overlooked that the Christian addressees of the book are at the very outset referred to as a “kingdom of priests” (Rev 1:6; cf. 5:10). Indeed, the “holy-war” and temple motifs are pervasive throughout the Apocalypse.<sup>11</sup>

*Revelation 10:1-11:13: (1) The Mighty Angel and  
(2) the Temple and Two Witnesses*

As we move ahead now to the next “spotlight” interlude—the one in 10:1-11:13—we have already briefly noticed that in terms of its basic imagery it too divides neatly into two parts. The complete content of chapter 10 consists of but one main unit, a unit in which the mighty angel with his open scroll and prophetic proclamation is central and provides the basic undergirding. In the sequence, and as an integral part of it, are two further items: John’s eating of the scroll (vv. 7-10), and the commission to John to “prophesy again” (v. 11).

We would expect that the second major section of this particular interlude would parallel its first section in somewhat the same way as the scene depicting the great multitude parallels the reference to the 144,000 in chapter 7; and indeed, this is the case. The theme of prophetic proclamation which is so basic and central to chapter 10 continues, under different imagery, in chapter 11: namely, the imagery of a temple setting. Here we find, as already observed, a temple-measuring scene (the measuring of the temple and altar and worshipers, with the court excluded [vv. 1-2]), followed by the pericope concerning two prophetic witnesses (vv. 3-13) who are introduced in terms of the temple imagery of two olive trees that are also two lampstands (vv. 3-4).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 315-316, gives a good array of illustrations.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 306-323, provides a useful survey of both aspects. A basic and comprehensive work on the “holy-war” motif in Revelation is Adele Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, MT, 1976); and Hans K. LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation: The Biblical Drama of Armageddon* (Washington, DC, 1987), gives a helpful treatment of the topic indicated in the subtitle, but does so with the inclusion of considerable valuable background from both OT and NT regarding the “holy-war” concept. For further information concerning the pervasive temple imagery in Revelation, see, e.g., my two articles cited in n. 2 above.

<sup>12</sup>See n. 4 above regarding expegetical *kai*; cf. also Strand, “Two Witnesses,” pp. 127-135, including the rather extensive footnote references given there.



There is, however, another important way in which the interlude of 10:1-11:13 is *twofold*: It carries two basic intertwining themes: (1) the prophetic word of warning, and (2) judgment. The content involved in these two themes and the relationship between them are of such basic importance as to deserve further attention, and this will be given in the next main section of this essay (section 2).

*Revelation 14:1-13: (1) The 144,000 and  
(2) the Three Angels' Messages*

As briefly noted earlier, the bipartite nature of the final of the three "spotlight" interludes here under consideration (14:1-13) entails first a further description of the 144,000 and then a report of three angels with messages warning of judgment. The 144,000 are now described, not in their process of being sealed, but as standing victoriously with the Lamb on Mt. Zion. Their victory and their perfection of character in loyalty to the Lamb and in following him "wherever he goes" (v. 4b) are emphasized through several descriptive phrases, such as their having the Lamb's and Father's names "written on their foreheads," being "redeemed from the earth," being "chaste" (or "virgins"), being "firstfruits for God and the Lamb," having "no deceit [or "lie" or "guile"] in their mouths," and being "spotless."<sup>13</sup>

This sort of description is reminiscent of the character attributes and activities of the great multitude depicted in Rev 7. For instance, those who comprise that multitude are clothed in white, having "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:13-14)—imagery which embodies several of the characteristics applied to the 144,000 in Rev 14:1-5, such as "chaste," "no deceit," and "spotless." And the references to the multitude's "coming out of great tribulation" and the Lamb's being their Shepherd who guides "them to springs of living water" (7:14) convey the same sort of concepts as indicated in 14:4 by the expression "these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup>The terms "virgins" and "firstfruits" have been especially puzzling to many commentators. An excursus dealing with these terms appears at the close of this article.

<sup>14</sup>This expression can only be understood in the light of the motif as illuminated by other expressions in Revelation itself (in addition to 7:9-17, notice the implications of 1:17-18; 2:3, 10, 13; 3:8b, 10; 12:11; 14:12) as well as elsewhere in the NT (cf., e.g., Matt 10:24-27, 38-39; John 13:36b; 15:20; 17:14-18, 24-26).

In the second part of the bipartite interlude of Rev 14 the first angel's message contains an appeal to worship the Creator, an appeal that is set in the context of a proclamation that "the hour of his [God's] judgment has come" (vv. 6-7). This message is then followed by one which declares that "Babylon is fallen, is fallen" (v. 8). And finally, a most severe message is given by the third angel, who warns in most urgent terms against worship of the beast and the beast's image and against reception of the mark of the beast (vv. 9-11)—an allusion to the coercive activity of the earth-beast of Rev 13:11-17. Those who heed these warning messages are described as having "the patience of the saints" and receiving divine blessing in the face of martyrdom (vv. 12-13).

Inasmuch as in the end-time crisis there is a clear demarcation between two groups—(a) those loyal to God and the Lamb, and (b) those choosing allegiance to the sea-beast of 13:1-10, 18 (the "beast" whose worship and mark the earth-beast promotes)—we can find in this interlude of Rev 14, as in the case of the two preceding ones, a close connection between the subdivisions of the bipartite structure: Those persons who heed the messages of the three angels are indeed the same victorious ones that are pictured in 14:1-5 as followers of the Lamb wherever he goes. The first section of chapter 14 thus sets forth the character and victory of these loyal ones, and the second part of this "spotlight" interlude relates to the method and the cost involved in becoming a part of this victorious group.

While an exegesis of both sections of the interlude in chapter 14 would be of great interest, to provide such is beyond the scope of our treatment here. We shall, however, return to this particular bipartite interlude briefly again in the third main section of this essay, where we provide a comparison of the content and relationships that exist among the three interludes.

## 2. *Twin Themes: Prophetic Warning and Judgment*

The essential focus of Rev 10:1-11:13 has been brought to attention in two previous articles in which I have dealt more specifically with the two-witnesses and the "measuring-of-the temple" passages of Rev 11.<sup>15</sup> The subsections below will include

<sup>15</sup>Strand, "Two Witnesses," and idem, "An Overlooked Old-Testament Background to Revelation 11:1," *AUSS* 22 (1984): 317-325.

some of the highlights from those two articles, but for complete data the reader must refer to the articles themselves.

### *The Prophetic Word-of-Warning Motif*

The trumpet septet of 8:2-11:18 develops its symbolism on the basis of a double theme: the Israelite Exodus from Egypt and the Israelite deliverance from ancient Babylon. The first five trumpets (8:7-9:11) have as their background the plagues on ancient Egypt, but with the sixth trumpet the scene shifts this background from the land of the Nile to the Euphrates River, the river of Babylon (9:14). In this context of an "Exodus-from-Egypt"/"Fall-of-Babylon" motif,<sup>16</sup> the trumpet blasts—one of whose main uses was the sounding of an alarm (cf. Jer 4:5 and 6:1)<sup>17</sup>—would most logically symbolize God's prophetic messages of warning. Such warning had indeed accompanied the plagues on Egypt, as Moses and Aaron repeatedly carried to Pharaoh God's call for release of the Israelites (cf. Exod 5:1; 6:10-11; 7:1-2, 15-20; 8:20-27; et al.). Babylon too had had its witness from God, a fact summed up in the comment that "we would have healed Babylon, but she was not healed" (Jer 51:9).<sup>18</sup>

Within the trumpet septet, however, the prophetic-witness motif unfolds the most clearly and the most directly in Rev 10:1-11:13—a passage whose contents have briefly been summarized above. Our focus now turns to implications of the passage.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. my diagram in "Two Witnesses," p. 129.

<sup>17</sup>The basic OT background passage relating to uses of the trumpet in both temple ritual and call to arms is Num 10:2-10. In the context of the "Exodus-from-Egypt"/"Fall-of-Babylon" motif, the function set forth in the Jeremiah references seems primary from the standpoint of message content, though imagery from the temple and worship forms a backdrop throughout the entire book (cf. my article on "Victorious-Introduction Scenes"), and the specific background here is the feast of "blowing of trumpets" ten days prior to *Yom Kippur* (cf. Lev 23:24-27). For a comprehensive review of the wide array of trumpet usages in ancient Israelite cultus and divine-summons contexts, see Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretations of Revelation 8:7-12*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 11 (Berrien Springs, MI, 1988), pp. 206-216.

<sup>18</sup>Just as the descendants of Jacob and their leaders (Moses and Aaron) bore witness to Egypt during the period of the Sojourn and Exodus, so captives from Judah, including prophets of Yahweh and other leaders, were a living witness to the Babylonians. We may, in this connection, readily think of the prophet-priest Ezekiel, who ministered to the Jewish exiles in Babylonia (Ezek 1:1-3 and 3:11-15); but most striking and relevant with regard to witness directly to Babylonian rulers themselves are the accounts given in the book of Daniel, chaps. 1-4.

The mighty angel who holds open a scroll brings to mind the sealing of the scroll of Daniel until the "time of the end," when it was to be unsealed (Dan 12:4); and this angel proclaims a message concerning a certain terminus pertaining to time, a message that is obviously in response to the "until when?" of Dan 8:13-14 and 12:6-9. (The "time-of-the-end" context throughout Dan 12, not just in vv. 1-4, should be given due consideration.) Next in Revelation 10 follows the scene concerning John's eating of the scroll (vv. 8-10), this being reminiscent of the prophet Ezekiel's similar eating of an inscribed scroll (Ezek 2:8-3:3). Finally, John is commanded to "prophesy again" (Rev 10:11), which calls attention to the similar commission to Ezekiel (Ezek 3:4).

Thus, the emphasis in Rev 10 on a prophetic proclamation that draws upon, attests to, and makes application of OT prophetic-witness backgrounds is so direct and transparent that even a most casual reading can hardly miss it. But that chapter itself is even more direct, as well, by supplementing the angel's proclamation regarding time (v. 6) with the clause "as he [God] declared to his servants the prophets" (v. 7). The time prophecy relates to the "mystery of God" as about to be fulfilled or completed (v. 7)—an allusion, once again, to the proclaiming of God's word, specifically the gospel message (cf. Eph 6:19; Col 1:25-28; and Rom 10:14-17). It is significant that the clause referring to "his [God's] servants the prophets" is set in the context of both *OT witness* and the proclamation now being made in the *NT epoch*. That there was a unity of testimony by OT prophets and the witness given by Christ and his apostles is, of course, a pervasive NT theme.<sup>19</sup>

The two-witnesses section in Rev 11:3-13 sets forth this same concept of proclamation of God's prophetic word (cf., e.g., v. 3). Here the testimony of the two witnesses is intensified by their ability to bring about plagues (vv. 5-7).

As pointed out in my earlier study on this passage, what is at the center of the two-witnesses symbolism is the OT Scripture proclamation and the apostolic testimony (the latter being what came later to be known as the NT).<sup>20</sup> These work together in total and perfect unity. Thus there is here a continuation of the two-

<sup>19</sup>Cf., e.g., Luke 24:27; Acts 2:29-32; 3:18; 1 Pet 1:10-12; and see my discussion in "Two Witnesses," pp. 131-133.

<sup>20</sup>See *ibid.*, p. 134.

witnesses emphasis that we already have noted in chapter 10. It is, as we have seen, a pervasive NT emphasis. Moreover, it is set forth as a basic motif elsewhere in the book of Revelation itself (see especially 1:2, 9; and 20:4<sup>21</sup>).

Indeed, it is the only application of the two-witnesses symbolism that is compatible with a number of elements in the description given in Rev 11. For instance, the fact that these two witnesses are not to be arithmetically computed as representing just two personages or two groups is clear when one considers that their activity draws upon the experience, not of just the two prophets Moses and Elijah (as is generally assumed), but of three prophets—Moses, Elijah, and *Jeremiah*. The allusion to fire proceeding from the witnesses' mouths and devouring their enemies (11:5) is an allusion to Jer 5:14, a background text wherein the emphasis is on the power of *God's word*: It is this word that is the fire in Jeremiah's mouth. When we consider that Rev 10 is also part of the basic context for the two-witnesses pericope of Rev 11, we can add the two further OT prophets whose prophetic testimony is called to attention there: Daniel (compare Rev 10:1-6 with Dan 12:4), and Ezekiel (compare Rev 10:8-10 with Ezek 3:1-3). Moreover, the very emphasis in Rev 11 on the united and unified way in which the testimony and every activity of the two witnesses were carried out jointly negates further the concept that these two witnesses were intended to be mathematically delimited to, and precisely identified as, two personages or two groups patterning after "Moses and Elijah," for Moses and Elijah labored under *differing* circumstances and with *differing* plagues.<sup>22</sup>

Paul S. Minear has captioned the 7-trumpets vision with the title "The Prophets as Victors."<sup>23</sup> Although he has not missed

<sup>21</sup>Considering the fact that in the Apocalypse the experience of Jesus, the faith of Jesus, the witness borne by Jesus, etc., are replicated in his faithful followers (cf. also this motif in the Gospel of John; e.g., 15:20; chap. 17; and 21:22), we may readily add these further texts to our list: Rev 6:9; 12:11; and 14:12.

<sup>22</sup>Concerning the unity of action of the two witnesses, Paul S. Minear, *I Saw a New Earth* (Washington, DC, 1968), pp. 101-102, has aptly stated the following: "John makes no statement which applies solely to either of the two figures separately. Whatever is done, they do together; whatever is suffered, they suffer together. The time of their prophecy is a single time, beginning and ending simultaneously and having the same duration. The place is also the same, for although 11:8 mentions three separate places, it treats them as one."

<sup>23</sup>Used as a chapter title in *ibid.*, pp. 85-104.

the mark by far in using this description, I would suggest instead the term "Victory of the Prophetic Word," for it is the *word* of the prophets in speaking for God that is really the essential element in the 7-trumpets vision.

### *A Judgment Motif*

In my earlier treatment of Rev 11:1-2, I noted that the two OT passages most generally considered as root sources for John's temple-measuring vision—namely, Zech 2:1-5 and Ezek 40-48—actually stand in greater contrast to, rather than parallel with, Rev 11:1-2.<sup>24</sup> The sole common element in all three passages is their use of the "measuring-rod"/"measuring-reed"/"measuring-line" symbolism. As far as the entities to be measured are concerned, there is diversity, so that in the essential element the parallelism or affinities break down. John was commanded to measure three entities: the temple, the altar, and the worshipers. On the other hand, the "outer court" was to be excluded; and, as noted in v. 2, this "outer court" is also identified as the "holy city." Zechariah's passage deals specifically with the matter of measuring the *city* for walls, not the temple at all; and it was a measuring which, in fact, was called off, inasmuch as God himself was to be the city's protective wall ("a wall of fire around her" and "the glory within her" [Zech 2:5]). Ezekiel's vision of the temple measurements begins with the appurtenances to the outer-wall complex and with the outer court (Ezek 40:5-23), the very area excluded in John's vision; and there are also further contrasts.<sup>25</sup>

There is, in fact, only one OT passage to which Rev 11:1 does stand in very close parallel—namely, *Lev 16*.<sup>26</sup> This passage in Leviticus describes the "Day-of-Atonement" ritual in the ancient Israelite cultus. Except for the omission of the priesthood in Rev 11:1, the items to be measured by John are identical with the elements for which atonement was to be made on the Day of Atonement. In fact, not only are the entities identical, but the order in which they occur is also the same. Moreover, the sole difference—the omission of the priesthood in the Revelation vision—is what logically would be expected, inasmuch as there would be no need

<sup>24</sup>Strand, "Overlooked Background to Revelation 11:1," pp. 317-325.

<sup>25</sup>For further discussion, see *ibid.*, pp. 320-321.

<sup>26</sup>Discussion is provided in *ibid.*, p. 322.

for Christ, the perfect High Priest of the new covenant, to have any atonement or measuring made for himself.

*Relationship between the Word-of-Warning and Judgment Motifs*

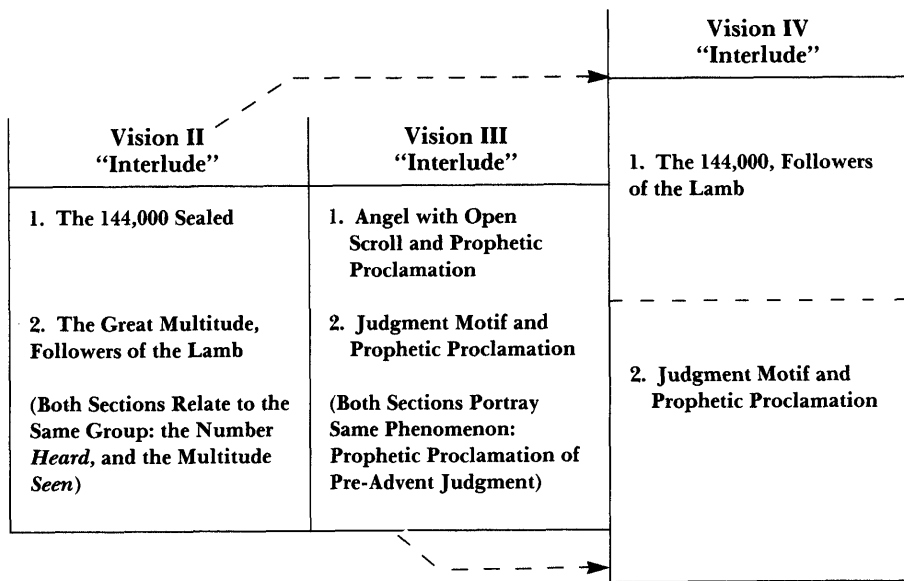
The two themes we have isolated as being the basic and foundational ones in Rev 10:1-11:13 intertwine with respect to both theological import and presentation pattern. As to theological significance, there is echo of what we find stated, for example, in John 12:48, where Jesus declares, "He who rejects me and receives not my words has one who judges him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." Thus the word-of-warning and the judgment themes go hand-in-hand.

With regard to presentation pattern, we may notice that Rev 10 places its primary emphasis on the prophetic word and that 11:1-2 stresses judgment ("measuring"). But when we come to the two-witnesses pericope of 11:3-13, we find that both themes merge in bold relief, for the testimony of the witnesses is accompanied by judgment plagues.

3. *Structural and Theological Relationships of the Three Interludes*

It remains now to notice briefly the manner in which the three "Spotlight-on-Last-Events" interludes interconnect. The very obvious link between the first interlude (chapter 7) and the third interlude's first subsection (14:1-5) has already been treated. What we must now observe, in addition, is that the twofold theme of the second interlude has a similar linkage to the third interlude's second subsection. The essence of this particular subsection is, of course, *messages*—specifically, messages of prophetic declaration and warning. But each of these messages embodies, as well, a judgment motif: The first angel calls attention to the "hour of God's judgment" having come, the second angel proclaims the judgment decree that Babylon is fallen, and the third angel warns in most urgent tones concerning the judgment that will be the fate of all those who are beast-worshippers.

The pattern of structural interrelationships among the three "spotlight" interludes may now be set forth diagrammatically, as in figure 3. From a theological perspective, it is important to observe that these elements of literary structure highlight certain prominent NT themes or motifs, on the one hand, and then also bring a



**FIGURE 3. CORRELATIONS AMONG THE  
THREE "SPOTLIGHT" INTERLUDES**



number of these motifs together into integral relationships, on the other hand. Although space limitations preclude any detailed theological analysis here, a few basic considerations may be set forth in concluding this article.

First of all, there is in the interludes an amplification of the magnitude and efficacy of God's activity in the end-time of earth's history. The positioning of these interludes within the literary patterns of their respective vision sequences bespeaks an end-time temporality. Moreover, the parallelism in this positioning (third section of each vision) suggests a bonding of the three "spotlight" sections, not only in the manner already described above, but also more broadly and comprehensively with respect to theological themes and motifs.

The first point to notice here is that the special activity by God at the end-time contrasts strikingly with what is portrayed as the concluding stance within the foregoing "Basic Prophetic Description in History"—a portrayal of an intensification of evil and/or of a stubborn refusal to repent on the part of the enemies of God and his saints. In the seals septet there is a crescendo of devastation, climaxed in the sixth seal by the cry of earth's multitudes, "The great day of his [the Lamb's] wrath has come, and who will be able to stand?" (6:17). The interlude of chapter 7 responds by portraying those who will indeed be able to stand, thanks to the work of God and the Lamb in their behalf and their own response of complete loyalty. In the trumpets septet, warning disaster after warning disaster leaves survivors of these plague warnings unrepentant of their idolatry, murders, and other sins (9:20-21)—much as in the case of the Exodus-era Pharaoh, who continually "hardened his heart" (cf. Exod 7:13, 22-23; 8:15, 19; etc.). To this bleak picture is juxtaposed the "spotlight" interlude revealing that the gospel message is nevertheless going to be finished (10:7, 11) and that the testimony of the two witnesses will ultimately triumph (11:3-13), for in the devastating earthquake that destroys a symbolic 7,000 there will remain a "remnant" who fear and give God glory (v. 13). The terminology here is akin to that in Rev 12:17 ("remnant") and also to that in 14:6, "Fear God and give him glory." The latter connection has been obscured in English translations and has been missed by most commentators except G. B. Caird.<sup>27</sup> In the next

<sup>27</sup>G. B. Caird, *Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York, 1966), pp. 139-140. Caird sees the last part of 11:13 as depicting *true repentance* in contrast to what is indicated in the foregoing clause and also in

vision sequence we find that the earth-beast places a death sentence and embargo on all who will not accept the mark of the sea-beast and worship that beast and his image (13:15-17). But this climax in the antidivine activity finds a contrasting divine counterpart in the following interlude—first, in the depiction of the victorious 144,000 with the Lamb on Mt. Zion, and then in the three messages that result in a people so loyal to God that they are described as keeping God's commandments and having the very "faith [or "faithfulness"<sup>28</sup>] of Jesus" (14:12).

Finally, we may just point out a few of the intertwining, interdependent motifs that are given prominence in the three interludes we have been investigating. Among these, we may first simply reiterate two combinations noticed earlier: (1) the relationship between the divine word and judgment, and (2) the military and temple-service imagery used in connection with the 144,000. But there are other significant thematic relationships that also deserve mention, three of which we notice here:

1. The close connection between "*holy war*" and *judgment* is a basic portrayal throughout the book of Revelation, including our three interludes and various other sections of the vision sequences in which these interludes are located.<sup>29</sup> As expressed in a later vision of the Apocalypse, the Coming-One, who is called "Faithful and True" (19:11) and "the Word of God" (v. 13), "in righteousness judges and makes war" (v. 11).

2. The pervasive activity of the Holy Spirit in both *sealing the saints* (cf. Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 Tim 2:19) and *proclaiming the divine*

contrast to the description of unrepentant persons in Rev 9:20-21. His own rendition for v. 13b is "in awe did homage to the God of heaven." English Bible translators have almost invariably done injustice to the text by such renditions as "were affrighted" (KJV), "were afraid" (New KJV), "became terrified" (RSV), and "were terrified" (TEV and NIV). The type of "fear" involved here is of the nature indicated by the term "God-fearers," not the terrifying or frightening negative kind generally thought of when the English word "fear" is used.

<sup>28</sup>*Pistis* may be rendered with either word, but the choice of "faith" by most translators may not make any significant difference, for the "faith of Jesus" consisted of his faithfulness in testimony by word and deed and even death.

<sup>29</sup>For just one example from a section other than an interlude we may notice the martial nature of the four horsemen of Rev 6. Besides conquest terminology ("conquering and to conquer," v. 2) and instruments of war (bow and sword, vv. 2, 4), there are such judgment allusions as "balances" (v. 5, reminiscent of Dan 5:27) and the fourfold death scourge of the rider on the pale horse (v. 8, reminiscent of God's "four sore punishments" in judgment on the sinners in Jerusalem, as given in Ezek 14:21).

*word* (10:1-11:13, including the "olive-trees" imagery in 11:4) brings together in a further significant way the interludes we have been treating. In this connection, the divine word itself is a sustainer of the saints (cf. John 17:17), and it is the Spirit who speaks that word (cf. 1 Pet 1:10-12; John 14:26) and who with and through it brings Christ to his faithful followers (cf. John 14:16-20).

3. The close connection between the saints' *faithful testimony* and their having had their robes "*washed in the blood of the Lamb*" is another thematic combination that finds prominence in our interludes as well as throughout the entire book of Revelation. The experience of the great multitude of Rev 7:9-14 and the characteristics of the 144,000 in Rev 14:1-5 highlight this combination, as does also the climactic conclusion to the third interlude by its reference to those who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus (14:12). In the portrayal of the saints' death-struggle with the great Dragon, the same theme had been enunciated: God's faithful followers gained their victory over the Dragon "through the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto death" (12:11).

Further interconnections of the aforementioned basic motifs, as well as other themes of theological importance, could be outlined. Furthermore, the foregoing discussion is by no means intended to imply that theological motifs in Revelation are necessarily always, or even primarily, dual in nature or relationship; for the paired themes we have noticed, together with further theological motifs (the role of the Lamb; the essence of becoming an "overcomer" or "conqueror"; the dynamics of persecution, deception, and self-deception; the nature of, and choice between, two worships; the marks of true discipleship; et al.), all work together into a unified whole.

To investigate this matter further is beyond the scope of this essay. In concluding it can be said that the paramount picture emerging in the "spotlight" interludes we have reviewed is that of a special activity on the part of God and the Lamb in enhancing their witness and safeguarding their followers during a period of earth's history which James Moffatt has expressed in a somewhat-interpretational translation as "the crisis at the close."<sup>30</sup> This safeguarding does not assume an escape from a martyr's suffering and

<sup>30</sup>Moffatt's translation in Dan 8:17 and 12:9 (cf. "the crisis at the end" in 12:4). The more usual rendition is "time of the end," as in KJV.

death; but even in the face of death, the Lamb's loyal ones have the assurance that the Lord they follow is the very one who "was dead," "is alive forever," and "has the keys of death and the grave" (1:18).

#### EXCURSUS: THE TERMS "VIRGIN" AND "FIRSTFRUITS" AS APPLIED TO THE 144,000

The term *parthenoi*, "virgins," in Rev 14:4 has been particularly puzzling to exegetes; and the term *aparchē*, "firstfruits," as used in the same verse has also caused some confusion for expositors. This excursus looks briefly at these terms in the context of their use in Rev 14:1-5.

A survey of commentaries reveals an almost incredible variety of opinions as to the significance of the term "virgins" as descriptive of the 144,000. Notions to the effect that John was a misogynist or even that he promoted celibacy out of concern for the exigencies of his time can be rejected as incompatible with the specific spiritual thrust of the Apocalypse. More appropriate are suggestions regarding the 144,000 as not having had adulterous relationships with the harlot Babylon of Rev 17-18 or with the Jezebel of Rev 2:20-23; as being a reflection of what is expressed in 2 Cor 11:2 and Eph 5:27 regarding the position of the church in relationship to Christ; or as derivative from the OT references to Israel as the "virgin daughter of Zion" and the "virgin of Israel" (cf., e.g., 2 Kgs 19:21 and Jer 18:13).<sup>31</sup>

An important point missed by most commentators, however, is the significance of the military imagery for the terminology used in this passage. An exception is G. B. Caird, who calls attention to the prohibition of marital cohabitation for Israelite men when they were to go into, or were engaged in, "holy-war" combatancy—directives set forth in Deut 20 and 23:9-11 and illustrated in 1 Sam 21:4-5.<sup>32</sup> The 144,000, as we have seen in the main discussion

<sup>31</sup>Especially concerning the last suggestion, see Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI, 1977), p. 270.

<sup>32</sup>Caird, p. 179. Caird's apt suggestion has been echoed by some later writers, such as G. R. Beasley-Murray; but the most recent comprehensive discussion of this martial background for the 144,000 and the use of the term "virgins" in Rev 14:4 has been provided by James Valentine, who has suggested, as well, a temple-ritual background in that preparations for the annual Day of Atonement had among their prohibitions the abstinence from marital intercourse (pp. 311-317). We can add here

above, are the Lamb's warriors who have come off victorious in their "life-and-death" struggle with the antidivine trinity of Rev 12-13.

The term *aparchē*, "firstfruits," has been confusing to a number of expositors in that it has led them to attempt to identify two groups of the saved, whereas the lines are tightly drawn in this end-time between the one group that is faithful to God and the Lamb and the other group that consists entirely of the beast-worshippers. But the term *aparchē* could probably better be rendered here as "choice offering," for that is essentially what it had come to mean in Roman Asia by or before NT times. In fact, even in the LXX *aparchē* renders *t'rûmāh*, "oblation or offering," twice as often as it does *rēʒšū*, "firstfruits"; indeed, in the total 66 occurrences of *aparchē* in the LXX, only 19 times does it translate from *rēʒšū*.<sup>33</sup> The point is that the 144,000 are a choice offering or oblation to God and the Lamb, for they are the very ones who have given themselves as a holy sacrifice (cf. Rom 12:1) and have come out of great tribulation (Rev 7:14).

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a possible further—and conceptually related—antecedent: namely, the fact that in conjunction with the three-day preparation for the Lord's descent on Mt. Sinai, the Israelite males were ordered, "Do not come near your wives" (Exod 19:15).

<sup>33</sup>For information on the LXX usage and on the meaning of the term in the *koinē* Greek of Asia Minor in John's day, see R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, ICC (Edinburgh, 1920), 2:6. Valentine, pp. 314-315, has called attention to the fact that "the area wholly consecrated to God and to be inhabited of [sic] priests is called, in the LXX, *aparchē*, the same word used in Rev. 14:4."