

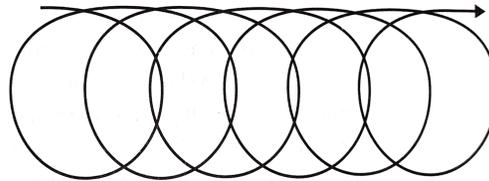
How To Study Revelation

Week 7: The Cycles of Sevens

Timeline Perspectives

- Linear
 - The divine judgment depicted in Rev 6-16 is linear and sequential.
 - The sequence of divine judgments will escalate until the return of Jesus. (Futurist: Dispensationalism)

- Spiral



- As far back as the third-century scholars have suggested that Revelation is not linear.
 - The oldest existing commentary on Revelation (written by Victorinus) suggests a spiral or series of overlapping loops
 - Each spiral consists of a series of visions
 - Messages to the churches (Rev 1-3)
 - Seven Seals (Rev 4-7)
 - Seven Trumpets (Rev 8-11)
 - Unnumbered Visions (Rev 12-15)
 - Seven Plagues (Rev 15-19)
 - Unnumbered Visions (Rev 19-22)
 - With increasing intensity, the visions at the bottom of the spiral threaten the reader's sense of security.
 - Each time the conflict becomes unbearable, the reader transports back to the presence of God, the Lamb, and the heavenly chorus.
- Nesting Dolls
 - The diving judgments in Rev 6-16 act more as nesting dolls representing different perspectives of simultaneously occurring events.

- Each cycle of seven comes out of the previous, and all end on the Day of the Lord

Seven Seals (Rev 6-8a)

- The reader should feel increasingly uncomfortable when they begin hearing about the divine judgment leading to the question, "Who is able to stand?" (Rev 6:17)
- The Four Horsemen
 - First Seal
 - White horse, armed with a bow, given a crown, representing conquest.
 - It would have alluded to images of the Parthia, mounted archers that repeatedly drove back the Roman Army, halting imperial expansion.
 - The implication for Christians in Asia Minor is that Christians who partook in the sacrifices to the Imperial Cult were vulnerable to outside (spiritual) forces. (Preterist, Historic, Idealist, Pastoral Prophetic).
 - Second Seal
 - Bright red horse, given a sword, represents the removal of peace.
 - Warns not to be lulled into a false sense of peace.
 - The *Pax Romana* lauded Rome as the supreme source of peace and prosperity. In contrast, churches in Asian Minor had experienced local persecution, and Nero perpetrated mass persecution (Pr., H., I., Pp.)
 - Third Seal
 - Black horse, holding a pair of scales, represents economic hardship
 - Brings financial hardship on wheat and barley but is instructed to leave oil and wine alone.
 - The Roman economic system is known for its ability to make grain and other foodstuffs widely available.
 - The attack is again on the Roman system warning Christians against placing security in the Roman Empire (Pr., H., I., Pp.).
 - Fourth Seal

- Sickly green horse, represents death, followed by Hades (the Greek name for Hell/death realm).
 - Possesses the escalated powers of previous horsemen to bring complete famine and death.
- The Martyrs and the People of Earth
 - The fifth and sixth scenes are contrasting scenes, one in heaven and the other on earth.
 - Fifth Seal
 - The martyrs are under the altar and ask the question, "How long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?" (Rev 6:10; Zech 1:12; Ps 79:5-10; Joel 2:11).
 - They receive white robes (Rev 6:11, Rev 1:10, Rev 4:4).
 - They are told to wait until the number of martyrs is complete
 - Sixth Seal
 - The sky shakes, the sun becomes dark, the moon turns to blood, stars fall, and the sky disappears.
 - People run and hide from the one on the Throne and the Lamb.
 - This depicts the Day of the Lord consistent with Isa 34:4; Joel 2:30-31; Amos 8:9).
 - The response from the mass of humanity is, "who is able to save us?" (Rev 6:17).
- The Multitude
 - An angel is charged to seal 144,000 for protection (Ezek 9:4-6).
 - John *hears* a list of 12,000 from the tribes of Israel (substituting Manasseh for Dan).
 - John sees a multitude from every tribe, language, and nation before the throne.
 - Two views
 - 1) There is one people of God that have been included (grafted) into Israel from every nation.
 - 2) There are two peoples of God, the 144,000 from the Tribes of Israel and the Church.

- The Multitude are clothed in white and celebrate the Lamb's victory by waving palm branches –the traditional symbol of victory (1 Macc 13:51).
- The promises to the Multitude are reflections of Old Testament promises.
 - God would make his "tabernacle" with his people in Ezek. 37:27. In Rev 7:15, the one seated on the throne will "tabernacle over them."
 - In Isa. 49:10, God promises that the redeemed "shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of living water will guide them." In Rev 7:16-17, the Lamb in the center of the throne is a shepherd that guards the Multitude against hunger, thirst, sun, and heat and guides them to springs of the water of life.
 - Isa 25:8 says that God "will wipe away the tears from all faces," while Rev 7:17 repeats the promise that "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."
- The Seventh Seal
 - This leads to silence and the beginning of the trumpet cycle

Seven Trumpets (Rev 8b-11)

- Seven angels receive trumpets, creating a sense of anticipation
 - The field of battle used trumpets to signify the beginning of a battle (2 Chron 13:13).
 - They also warned of a coming assault (Amos 3:6).
 - In worship, it was an offering of praise to God (2 Chron 5:13).
- Before the blowing of the seven trumpets, an angel is given the bowl of heavenly incense (which includes the prayers of the saints) and throws it to earth (Rev 8:3-5).
- First Four Trumpets
 - First Trumpet
 - Hail and fire mixed with blood fall on the earth and scorches 1/3 of the earth.
 - Second Trumpet
 - A blazing mountain is thrown into the sea, turning 1/3 of the water into blood.
 - Third Trumpet

- A start called "wormwood" falls into fresh water, turning it bitter
 - Wormwood is the name of a plant with an unbearably bitter taste.
- Fourth Trumpet
 - 1/3 of the sun, moon, and stars are afflicted, casting darkness on the earth.
- The trumpets are reminiscent of the plagues of divine judgment brought on Egypt (Exodus 7-11).
- The section concludes with an Eagle warning about the coming trumpets.
 - The Eagle and the Egyptian plague allusions should draw those who experience the first four trumpets to repentance.
 - The reader should understand that no one can find security apart from God.
 - The followers of the Lamb are promised a future where they are:
 - The redeemed are washed in the blood of the Lamb (7:14). Meanwhile, the world sheds the blood of the saints, which falls as fire from heaven and later finds itself awash in blood from the sea (8:7-9).
 - Do not suffer from scorching heat (7:16), contrasting the unfaithful who will be threatened by fire from heaven (8:7-10)
 - The Lamb will guide people to springs of the water of life (7:17) in contrast to the rivers and streams, which turn undrinkable and deadly (8:11).
- Creatures of Destruction
 - Abaddon/Apollyon
 - Fifth Trumpet
 - Grotesque demonic locust creatures that torture all unsealed on the earth
 - The locusts are under the rule of Abaddon/Apollyon, which means Death/Destruction.

- The figures parody the created order in Rev 4-5.
 - The winged creatures before the throne have their own distinct faces (lion, human, etc.). Still, the locusts have the amalgamation of lion teeth and a human face.
 - Where the elders in the throne room cast their crowns before God in praise (Rev 4:10-11), the locusts continue to wear their crowns.
- The fifth seal shows the result of God giving the world over to other powers to rule.
- Those afflicted by the locust no longer seek life but rather an escape from a painful life through death but will be unable to die (9:6)
 - Death and destruction rule the locusts, but people who seek death cannot find it, which is a sign of an imperfect rule contrasting God and the Lamb.
- The plague again mirrors the Egyptian plagues the prophet Joel uses as a sign of the Day of the Lord (Ex 10:1-20; Joel 1-2).
- The Cavalry of Destruction
 - Sixth Seal
 - The four angels restrained at the river Euphrates are released to kill 1/3 of mankind.
 - The cavalry of destruction is an army of 200 million grotesque horsemen of distorted creation that kill through plagues.
 - The power comes from lions' heads that breathe lethal fire, smoke, and sulfur from their nostrils.
 - They also have tails of serpents, the original sign of death and destruction (Gen 3)

- The Euphrates area was where the Parthians posed a threat, again drawing a connection to the calvary threat to the Roman Empire
- The sixth seal reflects the death plague in Exodus and similarly does not lead to ultimate repentance.

References

- Chip Ingram – Where is God in this Wicked World? (Futurist – Dispensationalism) - <https://youtu.be/-f2ymwncRZ4>
- The Reform Forum – The Tribulation (Idealist/Historic) - <https://reformedforum.org/podcasts/tsp34/>