The Chiasm of Revelation

The first two verses of Revelation form a well-constructed and perfect chiasm.

It will be helpful to look at the following two points before considering the chiasm in detail.

## ‘Aggelos’ means messenger

Please note that I follow the lead of Robert Young in his literal translation of the Scriptures (YLT) where he consistently translates the Greek ‘*aggelos*’ as messenger. ‘*Aggelos*’ means messenger.

In Scripture in general, ‘*aggelos*’ is variously translated as either messenger, or angel.

It may be translated ‘messenger’ when it is understood to relate to a human messenger. For instance, in Matthew 11:10, Jesus calls John the Baptist ‘my messenger’ (*aggelos*). A further example may be seen in ‘Revelation chapters two and three’ where footnotes in many Bibles suggest ‘messenger’ as an alternative/correct translation.

When referring to heavenly beings, ‘*aggelos*’ is usually translated as ‘angel.’ See Revelation 5:11, ‘Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels numbering thousands upon thousands.’ These angels were around the throne, praising the ‘Lamb’ Jesus Christ. The angels mentioned here are ‘heavenly beings’ created by God.

Also note that in Acts 7:38, Yehweh is called the ‘*aggelos*’ (the angel) when his role was that of a ‘messenger.’ This verse refers to the occasion when God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, and gave his Ten Commandments to the people. (See Exodus 19:20 to 20:19) ‘They said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.”’ (Exo 20:19)

## Show and Tell (See and Hear)

While the Book of Revelation is purely a written narrative, it presents a massive amount of material that is ideally suited to a visual and sound presentation. In Rev 5:11, John said, ‘Then I looked and heard …’ Expressions such as this abound throughout the book. John received the revelation as a sight and sound experience.

While we are in Rev 5, look at verse 5, where John is told about ‘the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David.’ He hears about a lion, but in the next verse, he does not see a lion, rather he sees a lamb. ’Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain.’ (Rev 5:6)

Furthermore, the images are not motionless and static, rather they are active. Rev 13:1 describes ‘a beast coming out of the sea.’ It is in motion, it is active.

The narrative too, is full of loud sounds and loud voices. Revelation 10:3, 4 ‘and he (Jesus) gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.”’

Throughout its narrative, the Book of Revelation portrays frantic activity, thunderous sounds and loud voices. It has a narrative which is ideally suited to a modern-day audio-visual format. The narrative though, was written some 2,000 years ago.

The chiasm which we are about to consider, contains the fertile and living seed of an audio-visual presentation. Throughout the book, the seed germinates, and grows into many grand ‘audio-visual’ displays. As such, the chiasm is the ideal introduction to Revelation.

# The Chiasm (Revelation 1:1, 2)

A chiasm is a literary structure whereby the first line (first portion) parallels the last line (last portion), and the second line parallels the second last line. This format repeats over and over until all points are presented. Revelation 1:1, 2 has three parallel points.

A well-constructed chiasm may also have an important central line which functions (1) as a Title to the chiasm, and (2) as a Summary of the chiasm. The chiasm of Revelation includes this feature.

**Revelation 1:1, 2**

A 1. . . . . . The revelation of Jesus Christ,

B 1. . . . . . which God gave him

C 1. . . . . . to show his servants what must soon take place.

D. . . . . . He (God) made it known by sending his messenger (Jesus Christ) to his servant John

C 2. . . . . . his servant John testifies to everything he saw

B 2. . . . . . -- that is, the word of God

A 2. . . . . . and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

# God, Jesus Christ, and God’s servants

## Reference A.

Immediately we see the clear and distinct parallel between the first and last lines.

Jesus Christ is presented in both instances.

A 1 ‘The revelation of Jesus Christ’

parallels

A 2 ‘the testimony of Jesus Christ.’

Both lines relate to the person Jesus Christ.

## Reference B.

God is presented.

B 1 ‘which God gave him’

parallels

B 2 ‘that is, the word of God’

Both lines clearly relate to God.

## Reference C.

God’s servants are presented.

C 1 ‘to show his servants (PLURAL) what must soon take place’

parallels

C 2 ‘his servant John (SINGULAR) testifies to everything he saw’

Both lines relate to God’s servants.

C 1 In the top instance, it is ‘his servants’ (PLURAL) to which reference is made. The Revelation is given to and intended for ‘all of God’s servants.’ This reference is inclusive, it relates to all who will read the Revelation and seek to understand it.

C 2 We are told that Jesus gave it to ‘his servant John’ (SINGULAR). John was entrusted with receiving it, writing it, and sharing it by sending it to the seven churches. In Revelation 1:11, Jesus told John: ‘Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches.’ In this manner, it was given by Jesus to one servant to be shared with all servants.

# Show and Tell

The ‘first half’ of the chiasm primarily relates to sharing its visual aspect, while the ‘second half’ is concerned with verbally testifying to its truth.

## Reference A.

Two aspects are portrayed: (1) the Revelation -- which is visual, and (2) the Testimony -- which is verbal.

A 1 ‘The revelation of Jesus Christ’

parallels

A 2 ‘the testimony of Jesus Christ.’

A 1 In the first line, the ‘revelation’ refers primarily to what Jesus shows (that which he reveals visually).

A 2 In the second line, the ‘testimony’ is the testimony given by Jesus’ words. It is his verbal witness – ‘the testimony of Jesus Christ.’ Jesus speaks extensively in the Book of Revelation. We note, for instance, that the ‘entire seven messages’ to the churches were spoken by Jesus. (See Revelation Chapters 2 and 3)

## Reference B.

God gave the Revelation which itself is the Word of God.

B 1 ‘which God gave him’

parallels

B 2 ‘that is, the word of God’

B 1 What did God give to Jesus Christ? God gave Jesus the ‘revelation.’ It was to show what must soon take place. The revelation originated with God; it came from God through Jesus Christ.

B 2 Likewise, the ‘word of God’ is the testimony of God. This also stands true in the broader sense, as the Bible, ‘being the Word of God’ is the testimony of God. Note that we separate the Bible into the Old Testament and the New Testament. ‘Testament’ means testimony, evidence, and witness. The word of God is God’s testimony.

## Reference C.

The church is shown the revelation because John testifies to it.

C 1 ‘to show his servants (PLURAL) what must soon take place’

parallels

C 2 ‘his servant John (SINGULAR) testifies to everything he saw’

C 1 Servants PLURAL: It was ‘to show what must soon take place.’ All of God’s servants are to see this revelation of future events. God revealed it to Jesus Christ, and Jesus revealed it to his servants through his servant John.

C 2 Servant SINGULAR: John testifies. ‘His servant John testifies to everything he saw.’ God testifies first, Jesus testifies next, and then John testifies.

In this line of the chiasm, both the audible and the visible aspects are included -- ‘John testifies to everything he saw.’

## D. Central line – Title/Summary

‘He (God) made it known by sending his messenger (Jesus Christ) to his servant John’

This ‘Title line/Summary line’ gives a succinct description of the entire chiasm. It summarises the chiasm. ‘God made it known // by sending his messenger (Jesus Christ) // to his servant John’

God gave Jesus the revelation. ‘The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him.’ (Rev 1:1)

Jesus, in turn, gave the revelation to John. In Rev 1:10, 11, Jesus told John: ‘Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches.’

## Final Point

The chiasm is concise and informative. It provides the perfect introduction to the Book of Revelation.

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