A lot of people find the book of Revelation difficult to follow. It seems to jump from one topic to another or the order can be confusing. Puzzles come in all shapes and sizes, some are very difficult and may contain 1000 pieces or more and take a long time to put together. Some are very simple for young children to put together.

Today I want to show you what I refer to as the 250 piece puzzle version of Revelation. Maybe too difficult for a young child, but not so difficult that it scares off new Christian adults from wanting to study the book – whether they be young or old. This might be a good way you can initially introduce them to the book of Revelation.

What we’re going to look at today is how the book of Revelation is written in symmetry. This symmetry just means it has a nice order that you can use to study it.

This symmetry is also called a chiasm or chiastic structure. In addition to this perfect symmetry of Revelation, we will see that it was designed to answer the following four questions:

1. What is the origin of evil?
2. How does God battle against evil forces in our world?
3. How will God judge evil?
4. And how does God deliver His people from evil?
These 4 questions cover the whole book of Revelation. There’s so much detail on just these 4 questions that we can’t begin to cover today, but hopefully you will enjoy using the method presented.

When we read a book, where do we normally begin reading? At the beginning. However, for the book of Revelation, you may not want to begin there.

To see the symmetry I mentioned we’ll begin in the middle of the book. You’re probably thinking “Why in the middle? That seems strange”. Let me illustrate it this way.

Imagine throwing a rock in a pond or a drop of water hitting a still pool of water. When it hits the water a ripple effect immediately takes place. The ripples on one side are like the ripples on the other side. What many people don’t realize is that the book of Revelation is written in a similar manner.

Chapter twelve, in the middle of the book, is comparable to the ripple affect or symmetry I talked about. This central location is going to answer the first question of "What is the origin of evil?" It will tell us where evil came from, who started it, and why.

Instead of starting in chapter 1, we first look at chapter 12 and then the chapters immediately on either side of chapter 12.

Notice that the questions are phrased somewhat differently. This is because the chapters before chapter 12 will answer these questions from a historical view point, while the chapters after chapter 12 focus on last day events. So, chapters 8-11 will answer the question, How has God warred against evil forces through the centuries, from the time of the early church until the Second Coming of Jesus? Chapters 13-16 will answer the question, How will God war against evil forces in the end of time?

We need the historical view point to know and understand how God has already fought against evil forces in our world. While chapters 8 – 11 identify evil forces from the past, it also identifies the kind of spiritual weapons that have already been used to fight evil. Think about Daniel and his companions. Or the fall of Jericho. What did they use
to fight evil? Could these be the same spiritual weapons that we need to fight evil in our own day and in our own lives?

The end time view is necessary so that we understand the kind of battles we’ll be fighting in the last days. There are many evil forces in our world, but the Bible identifies certain ones that should be the focus of our attention. As God provided the weapons to fight evil forces in the past, He has also identified the tools we are to use to fight evil forces in the end of time. You’ll discover that God has a special message to battle against the evil forces of our own day.

So far, we’ve started to see some symmetry in the center of Revelation starting in chapter 12. It answers that most important question, What is the origin of evil? From there Revelation ripples out from the center with chapters 8-11 on the historical side, and chapters 13-16 on the end time side.

Revelation 8–11: How has God warred against evil forces through the centuries?
Revelation 12: What is the origin of evil?
Revelation 13–16: How will God war against evil forces in the end of time?

Next, Revelation answers another important question, How will God judge evil? The historical section, chapters 4-7, answer the question, How has God judged evil through the centuries? The end time section, chapters 17-19, answer the question, How will God judge evil in these last days?

On the historical side, chapters 4-7, it gives us a view of the heavenly court. There we see the Father and the Son. But who are the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders? And what do the seven seals have to do with judgment? This will be your homework since we won’t have time to cover that today. On the end time side, chapters 17-19, it describes the judgment of the harlot church which is covered with the blood of the saints. Here we also find a symbolic dragon, a beast, and false prophet that are thrown into the lake of fire. But what powers in our world are represented by the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet? That’s even more homework as we’re not going into details today, but just a general overview of how you can study Revelation and how it was written.

The final section of this symmetry answers the question, "How does God deliver His people from evil?"
In the historical section, chapters 1-3, the question is answered, "How has God delivered His people from evil through the centuries?"
In the end time section, chapters 20-22, the question is answered, "How will God deliver His people from evil in the last days and forever?"
We know there will be an end to sin. God will bring all evil to an end in the lake
of fire, the fire that purifies the earth. Then God will create a new heaven and a new earth where there is no more evil.

Now remember, in this method we want to keep it simple so we’re just looking for the answers to the 4 questions even though the whole book can be studied as a 1000 piece or larger puzzle.

We live in a world that struggles between the forces of good and evil. We see that struggle go on in our own lives. To overcome the evil that is within and without, the book of Revelation, in this unique style of writing, gives us answers to these four questions we’ve been considering. Now remember, in this method we want to keep it simple so we’re just looking for the answers to the 4 questions even though the whole book can be studied as a 1000 piece or larger puzzle.

When you study Revelation in this manner, take notice that the words and phrases used on the historical side (chapters 1-11), are the same kind of words and phrases used on the end time side (chapters 13-22).

For example, when reading the words and phrases in chapters 8-11 you should notice that the same kind of words and phrases are used in chapters 13-16. This tells us that these chapters are tied together. But how are they tied together? Are they speaking about the same period of time? No. We’ve seen they’re tied together by the same topic. They answer the same question. One answers the question from a historical viewpoint, and the other from an end time view.

Maybe you’re thinking, “well this was sort of interesting”, but wait, there’s much more to Revelation than this. We’ve only got the border put on our 250 piece puzzle. It’s important that we take time to study Revelation in a manner that won’t get us confused. We can start simple like I’ve shown you here and then build upon what we understand until we learn even more about it and can handle a more complicated puzzle.

John on the Isle of Patmos tells us in Revelation 1:3
“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.” Revelation 1:3.

Guess what, chapter 12 all by itself, has this same symmetry. Open your Bibles and take a look. Hopefully this is getting even more interesting. It has the same type symmetry. Think about writing in this manner. It wouldn’t be easy, at least not for me. In our day no one writes in this manner so we don’t think about reading the Bible this way. As you can see, the center of the book, chapter twelve, is written in the same symmetry as the entire book. The second half mirrors the first half with similar words and phrases. We begin this chapter with verses 10 and its mirror verse 11. Here we see the victory of Christ in the past and the victory of His people in the future.
These central verses point us to the central issue in the great controversy between good and evil. So, why did God write Revelation in this manner? I believe God wants us to understand the relationship of the behavior of His people from past history as a warning to us, and that because of the victory of Christ, He will save a people in the future that have victory over sin. I also believe God wants us to dig into His Word and not just be casual readers all the time. In other words, He wants us to learn the puzzles of His Word. By having to study we will learn and remember it better.

Next we look at verses 9 and also the mirror of it in verses 12 and 13a where Satan is cast to the earth. 13a means the first part of this verse. Remember that in the original Greek language, there were no chapters, no verses, no punctuation, and no spaces between words, just the written text which was all uppercase letters because they didn’t even have lowercase letters. Chapters, verses, punctuation, spaces, and upper and lowercase were added by the translators to make reading and finding locations in the Bible easier for us.

While this clearly creates some challenges for Bible translation, those challenges are seldom very large. As a simple test, try reading the English text in the following line:

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WHATDOESTHISsay
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Usually they made pretty good decisions on how to divide them up, but sometimes the writers may not have picked the best place to mark or divide a chapter or a verse. In fact, let’s take a quick look at one in Matthew 27 & 28 in the King James Version before we continue.

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65: Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can.
66: So they went and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch.
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We’ll start around Matthew 27, verse 65 about the burial and resurrection of Jesus. This is how the King James Version of the Bible translates it.
In this slide, I’ve marked the punctuation of the verses in the color red. Notice anything unusual about this? Remember, that the original Greek had no chapters, no verses, no punctuation marks or even spaces between words.

The first thing to notice is chapter 28 verse 1 where it begins with “In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week...” Now when does the Sabbath end? At dawn or at sunset? The end of the Sabbath occurs at sunset, so why would the interpreters have said “In the end of the Sabbath as it began to dawn ...”? To see why they said this, let’s begin by displaying the text without the chapter and verses.

Even though the punctuation is still here, let’s read it as though there’s no punctuation. Notice the punctuation I highlighted in red. Watch what happens next if the punctuation had been different.

Remember, there were no commas or periods in the original language. So how might this have happened? Maybe because the translators all kept Sunday and didn’t think about when the Sabbath began or ended.
Had the translators made a slight change in how they added the punctuation it would have read as follows:

They set the watch at the end of the Sabbath. Then we have “As it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary.”

So, why did I take this little side road about there being no chapters, no verses, no punctuation, etc. in the original language? It’s so we can realize, that had the translators made Revelation with chapters and verses that followed the symmetry, then today we could see the symmetry even more clearly. As it is, sometimes the symmetry may not at first appear to be very orderly because it’s split within verses, such as verses 12 and 13. Once we understand why then we can realize even better how the original writing was done in a very symmetrical or orderly way.

OK. Let’s get back on track about the symmetry in Revelation and begin looking at more detail in the layout of chapter 12.

As we continue to follow this symmetry effect in chapter 12, we see that on the historical side the war between good and evil began in heaven (verses 7, 8). Then on the exact opposite side of the center we find that the war between good and evil was transferred to planet Earth (verse 13b) and will continue into the future until Christ comes.
Then in verses 3–6 we have three attacks by Satan. On the exact opposite side of the chapter we have three attacks by Satan (verses 14–17a). The description of these attacks helps us understand that Satan uses both deception and force to fight against Christ and His church.

In verses 1 & 2 we have a threefold description of the early church. On the exact opposite side of the chapter we end with a threefold description of God’s last day church in verse 17.

While the symbols John uses to describe the early church are different than those used to described God’s remnant or last day church, these symbols have the same meaning. So in the end of time, God will have a church that will be like the original.

If we have some difficulty understanding a certain section of Revelation, all we need to do is look to the mirror side for some guidance or help. For example, many have had a difficult time trying to understand the seven trumpets found in chapters eight and nine. So what can we do? We can go to the mirror side of the book. There we find the description of the seven last plagues in chapters fifteen and sixteen. Notice that the seven trumpets and the seven last plagues have the same key words in the exact same order. This tells me that the trumpets and plagues are tied together. If I know what the seven last plagues are about, then it may help me in understanding the purpose behind the seven trumpets.

At this point we’ve only seen the tip of the iceberg so to speak. I’m still studying this method, but wanted to share it with you. If we were to continue we’d see a more detailed outline and comparison between chapters 11 and 13, 10 and 14, and many others. This style of writing is also used in Daniel and Joshua as well as various writers in the New Testament.
As I end this presentation, let’s take a look at one last example of this writing style used by Joshua. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Joshua. In Joshua 1 we see this structure used in verses 5-9. Starting in the middle, the text highlighted in green, we see the heart of these verses – to always keep God’s law in our hearts. Then, on each side of that, the yellow text, we’re told to be careful to obey God’s law. Then going out farther on each side, the red text, we’re told to be strong and courageous and not get discouraged. And finally in the white text, we’re given the assurance that God will not forsake us and will be with us wherever we go. This symmetry is in a way, like poetry and I find it interesting.

May the Lord bless you and keep you and cause His face to shine upon you as you study His word.
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Other Comparisons

Revelation 11
1. God uses His two witnesses, the Old and New Testaments, to fight against evil. (Verses 3, 4)
2. God empowers the two witnesses. There is power in God’s Word. (Verses 3, 6)
3. The two witnesses prophesy for 1260 prophetic days, or 1260 literal years. (Verse 3)
4. God’s Word speaks with authority as fire symbolically proceeds out of the mouths of the Old and New Testaments. (Verse 5)
5. Those who oppose God’s Word will be killed. (Verse 5)
6. God’s Word has the power to withhold rain. (Verse 6)
7. God’s Word can turn water into blood and perform other miracles. (Verse 6)
8. Near the close of the 1260 year prophesy, God’s Word is killed, or rejected. (Verse 7)
9. After three and one half years the Bible comes back to life, or is accepted again. (Verse 11)

Revelation 13
1. Satan uses the two beasts to fight against the people of God. (Verses 1–18)
2. The dragon, Satan, empowers the two beast powers. (Verses 2, 11–13)
3. The first beasts rules for 42 prophetic months, or 1260 literal years. (Verse 5)
4. The second beast is able to make fire come down from heaven. (Verse 13)
5. Those who oppose the worship of the beast will be threatened with death. (Verse 15)
6. The second beast is able to withhold economic trade. (Verse 17)
7. The second beast does great wonders and miracles to deceive the world. (Verse 13, 14)
8. At the end of the 1260 year prophecy the first beast receives a deadly wound and loses her political power. (Verse 3)
9. By the second beast making an image to the first beast, the deadly wound of the first beast is healed and she regains her political dominance once again. (Verse 3)
God raises up a Special Movement to Combat Evil
Revelation 10
1. Christ, the mighty messenger is clothed with a cloud. (Verses 1–4)
2. There is the declaration that there should be time no longer. After the fulfillment of the 2300 year prophecy, there are no more time prophecies to be fulfilled. (Verses 5–7)
3. God bids His people to proclaim the truth to many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings. (Verses 8–11)
4. God’s people are directed to the heavenly sanctuary. The heavenly sanctuary is the place where Christ has been interceding for His people since His ascension. (Revelation 11:1)

God’s Threefold Warning Message to Evil Forces
Revelation 14
1. In Christ’s work of gathering His saints, He is seen as sitting on a cloud. (Verses 13–20)
2. It is declared that the hour of God’s judgment is come. The 2300 year prophecy points to the beginning of the judgment. See Daniel 8:14. This is the last time prophecy to be fulfilled. (Verses 7–12)
3. This three-fold message of warning is to be proclaimed to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. (Verse 6)
4. The 144,000 are the saints that have cooperate with Christ’s high priestly work in the heavenly sanctuary. (Verses 1–5)

The Seven Trumpets
Revelation 8, 9
1. Cast upon the earth. (8:7)
2. One-third of the sea became blood. (8:8, 9)
3. One-third of the rivers and fountains of waters. (8:10, 11)
4. The sun smitten. (8:12, 13)
5. Darkness. (9:1–12)
6. The great river Euphrates dries up. (9:13–21)
7. Lightning, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail. (11:14–19)

The Seven Last Plagues
Revelation 15, 16
1. Poured out on the earth. (16:2)
2. Sea became blood. (16:3)
3. Rivers and fountains became blood. (16:4–7)
4. Sun scourges the earth. (16:8, 9)
6. The great river Euphrates dries up. (16:12–16)
7. Voices, and thunders, and lightning, a great earthquake, and great hail. (16:17–21)