

Revelation 15-16, the Seven Bowls

Overview

The heart of John’s letter to the seven churches is a series of four visions that John receives “in the Spirit” (Figure 1, chart). These visions form a chiasm. The outer two, the letters to the churches and the Bride of Christ, show us God’s people in their presently earthly struggle (ch. 2-3) and ultimate exaltation (ch. 21-22). The center two deal with God’s judgments. First we have three series, each with seven world-wide judgments, the seals, trumpets, and bowls. Then we zoom in to see the defeat of the demonic system that opposes God’s kingdom, the great Whore.

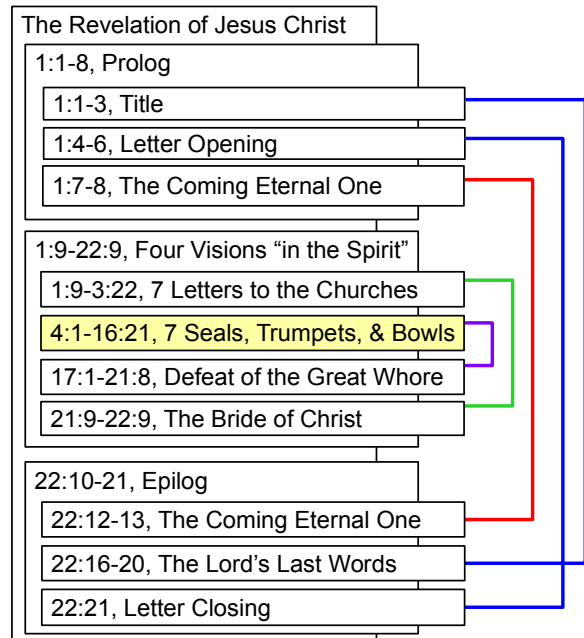


Figure 1: Structure of the Revelation

We have completed the first two series of seven world-wide judgments, the seals and the trumpets (Figure 2). The third series, like the first, begins with an introduction to the main characters, chapters 12-14.

The seven trumpets were interrupted in Revelation 10:1-11:13 with a “little book” from which John must “prophesy again” (10:11), and a vision of a period of 42 months (11:2-3) during which faithful witnesses (11:3) confront a satanic beast (11:7) in a “great city” (11:8). We saw these features in the introduction in chapters 12-14, and now chapters 15-16 give us the contents of the “little book,” probably the very book that our Lord opened during the six seal judgments.

The seventh seal (8:1-5) provided an introduction to the trumpets, describing the agents that bring the judgments (seven angels), some feature of the sanctuary (altar, temple), smoke, and a judgment falling on the earth (chart).

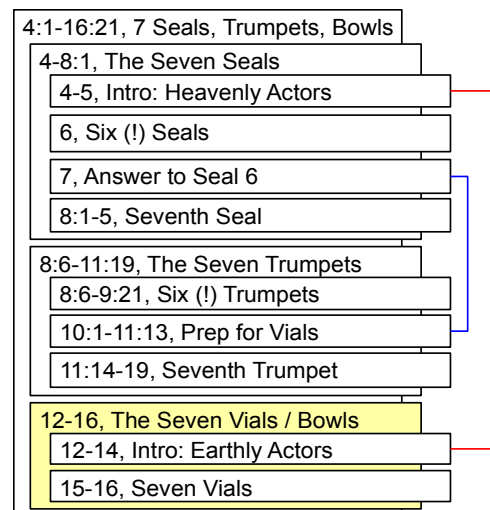


Figure 2: Structure of the Second Vision

Rev 8:1 And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. 2 And **I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.** 3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 **And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand.** 5 And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

Chapter 15 serves a similar role, introducing the angels who come from God’s smoke-filled temple to pour out the bowls of his wrath.

15:1-8, Preparation for the Bowls

The chapter has three parts, each introduced by “I saw” (translated in 15:5 as “I looked”). The first and last introduce the angels bearing the seven plagues, while the central section reports a hymn by the redeemed celebrating God’s victory.

1, The Sign

15:1 And I saw another sign in heaven,—This is the third of the signs that John sees in heaven. The first two are the woman in 12:1 and the dragon in 12:3.

great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues;—The sign is the appearance of the angels with the seven last plagues of God upon the earth. This sign is distinguished as “great and marvellous,” as explained in the next clause:

for in them is filled up the wrath of God.— “For” gives the reason for the previous statement. This sign is “great and marvelous” because it fills up, or completes, the wrath of God.

The word translated “wrath” is θυμός G2372. Another word sometimes translated “wrath” is ὀργή G3709. ὀργή is God’s persistent attitude of mind condemning those who oppose him, and planning his punishment of them. It appears early in the Revelation (open circles in Figure 3, chart). θυμός by contrast is an outburst of immediate wrath. It appears first as the wrath of Satan when he is cast out of heaven (12:12, red dot in Figure 3, chart):

Rev 12:12 the devil is come down unto you, having great **wrath**,

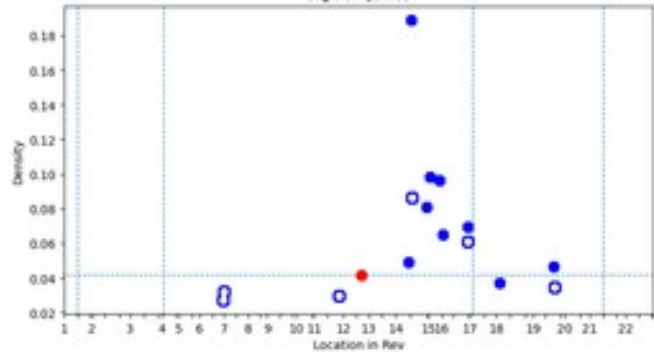


Figure 3: ὀργή (open circles) and θυμός (solid circles). Blue: God's wrath. Red: Satan's wrath.

But then the word repeatedly describes God’s wrath in 14-19. Like a spoiled child, Satan throws a temper tantrum, but he underestimates the one against whom he rages. God’s anger has been simmering, but now the pot erupts violently. When God’s ὀργή appears after 12:12, it is always paired with his violent θυμός, “the violent wrath of his anger” (16:19; 19:15), or vividly,

Rev. 14:10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath θυμός of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation ὀργή

We will return to these seven angels in 15:5-8, but first John’s attention is drawn to a group of people singing praise to God.

2-4, The Song

2 And I saw as it were a sea of glass—We last saw the “sea of glass” in 4:6, before the throne of God in heaven. Its appearance here, along with the living creatures (15:7, compare 4:6) show us that we are once more in the heavenly throne room.

mingled with fire:—The sea in chapter 4 was described “like unto crystal,” perfectly clear. Now it is mixed with fire, which the Revelation associates with God’s judgments (Figure 4, chart). We

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saw it in the demonic horses of the seventh trumpet in chapter 9 and now in the judgment falling on the followers of the beast (14:10). It culminates in the fire from heaven that destroys Satan’s final army (20:9), and the lake of fire and brimstone where the wicked suffer forever (20:10, 15).

How can the fire be mixed with the sea of glass? This sea stands before God’s throne. We have just been told that his anger is erupting into passionate wrath. Perhaps the glassy surface of the sea reflects the burning furnace of his fury.

and them that had gotten the victory —“Gotten the victory” is the verb νικάω G3528, usually translated “overcome.” We met it originally describing the goal to which the churches were exhorted in chapters 2-3, “to him that overcometh ...” (Figure 5). Now, after times when the forces of evil appear to be conquering, we see these triumphant saints again.

over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name,— With a glimpse back to chapter 13, we are reminded of the central adversary that we face: the Antichrist, the beast out of deep, whose lieutenant the False Prophet sets up his image, requires people to worship it, and imposes on his servants a mark, the mysterious number 666, which allows them to buy and sell. While this individual man of sin (2 Thes 2:3) has not yet appeared, the “spirit of antichrist” (1 John 2:3) has been active in the world at least since the first century. This is the real adversary that the churches of Asia Minor faced, and that we face.

stand on [or by] the sea of glass, having the harps of God.—The redeemed stand safely in the throne room beside this “sea ... mingled with fire,” a striking contrast with the wicked, who will be “cast into” a “lake of fire.” The overcomers have harps, like the elders in chapter 5 (chart),¹

Rev. 5:8 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them [the elders] **harps**, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. 9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: **for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood** out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; 10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

This is probably “the song of the Lamb” mentioned in the next verse.

3 And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb,—In 5:9 and 14:3, we heard the redeemed singing “a new song,” an expression common in the Psalms (Psa. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; cf. Isa 42:10). That expression does not refer necessarily to a new composition, but indicates that the singer brings it as an expression of new,

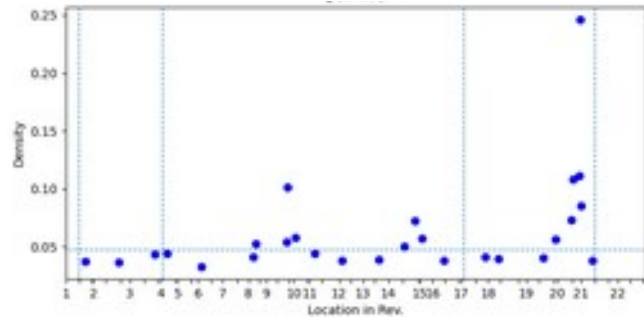


Figure 4: Fire πῦρ G4442 in the Revelation

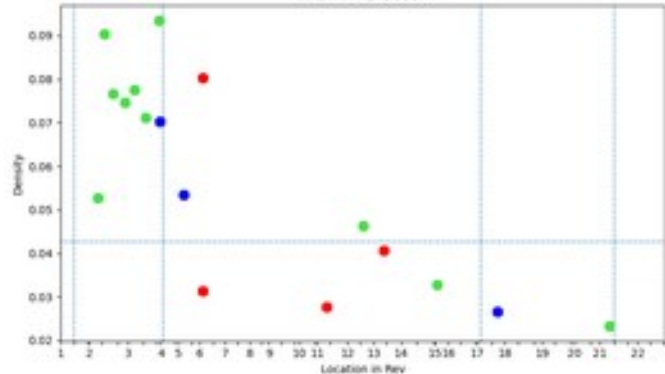


Figure 5: νικάω G3528: of saints (green), Christ (blue), evil (red)

¹ In 5:8, “having” ἔχοντες is masculine, and must refer to the elders, not the (neuter) living creatures.

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individual deliverance. By contrast, the song we hear now is described as an echo of previous compositions. “The song of the Lamb” may well be what was a “new song” in 5:9-10, while “the song of Moses” may refer to one or all of three OT compositions with similar themes.

Psalm 90, titled “A prayer of Moses,” emphasizes the shortness of human life and the need to live in the consciousness of God’s judgment:

Psa 90:3 Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men. 4 For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. 5 Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. 6 In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth. 7 For **we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled.** 8 Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. 9 For all our days are passed away **in thy wrath:** we spend our years as a tale that is told. 10 The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. 11 **Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.** 12 So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Moses’ first song is the one he composed after the defeat of Egypt by the Red Sea (chart):

Exo 15:1 Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. ... 6 Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: **thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.** 7 And in the greatness of thine excellency thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee: **thou sentest forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble.** ... 11 Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? ... 13 Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation.

A third candidate is Deuteronomy 32,² which Moses wrote shortly before his death to warn Israel of the consequences of their sin. The song is a *rib*, a formal accusation that Israel has broken God’s covenant and must face the consequences. Consider a few verses:

Deu 31:30 And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended. ... 32:5 **They have corrupted themselves,** their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation. ... 21 **They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities:** and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. 22 **For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell,** and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. 23 I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them.

All of Moses’ songs emphasize God’s righteous and judgment against sin, while the song of the Lamb reminds us of the salvation that God has provided from our sin. Recall John’s summary,

Joh 1:17 For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

² Deut 31:30 calls it “this song.”

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A “song of Moses” reminds us of God’s wrath on his adversaries, while a “song of the Lamb” points to the salvation that God continues to offer, to the very end, to those who repent.

saying,—Their song has three parts: praise of what God does, description of the appropriate response, and three motives for this response, each introduced by “for.” Each of these three sections emphasizes both the judgment of the Lord and his mercy toward his people, making it both a “song of Moses” and a “song of the Lamb” (Table 1, chart). They are organized AB-AB-C-BA, putting the focus on the statement “thou only art holy,” and reversing the last pair to close off the composition.

A: Moses	B: The Lamb
3 Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty	just and true are thy ways, thou King of the nations
4 Who shall not fear thee, O Lord	and glorify thy name?
C: for thou only art holy:	
for thy judgments are made manifest	for all nations shall come and worship before thee;

First we hear declarative praise for what God is doing.

Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty;—“Great and marvellous” repeats the description in v. 1 of the third heavenly sign, the angels about to pour out the bowls of God’s overflowing wrath. The sign warrants that title because (“for”) it displays the full measure of God’s wrath. The author of these works is the “Lord God Almighty,” representing his irresistible power. Moses might well have written these words, warning sinners of coming judgment.

Table 1: The Dual Background and Doubled Chiasm AB-AB-C-BA of Rev 15:2-3

just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints the nations.³—Now the Lord is characterized by his relation to the Gentiles. The “song of the Lamb” in 5:9 emphasized that his redeemed are “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation ἔθνος G1484.” His ways are both just and true. “Just” recognizes that the sacrifice of Christ declares God’s righteousness:

Rom 3:25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; 26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: **that he might be just**, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

“True” recalls the final word in God’s self-description as a merciful and forgiving God:

Exo 34:6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and **truth**,

Now a question challenges the hearers to two responses.

4 Who shall not fear thee, O Lord,—The first response is fear, appropriate to the awesome judge presented by Moses in his songs.

and glorify thy name?—But we are also called upon to glorify him for his salvation.

for thou only art holy:—This phrase, coming between the two AB sections and the BA section, receives special focus. In judging sin but also providing a way of salvation, God is holy, set apart from all of his creation. There is no one like him.

Together with its context, this verse parallels a verse from Moses’ first song, at the sea:

Exo 15:11 Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders ἄγῆ H6382?

The Greek word family most commonly used to translate “wonders” is √θαυμάζω G2296, which also lies behind “marvelous” θαυμάσιος G2298 in Rev 15:1, 3, reflecting the judgments on

³ See note for textual discussion.

which Moses focused, while the praises of Exo 15:11 recall the glory offered to God’s name for his salvation in Rev 15:4.⁴

for all nations shall come and worship before thee;—Those who receive the gospel, from every nation and people, will rejoice forever in his presence, echoing the song of the Lamb.

for thy judgments are made manifest.—But the warnings of Moses are not empty, and he will bring judgment on those who reject him.

5-8, The Sanctuary

5 And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened:—We have had a few references to the temple so far (Figure 6, chart), but the references are multiplied in this chapter. The seals and trumpets may variously reflect satanic opposition or human ambition, but the bowl judgments come from the temple, as the direct expression of the wrath of God.

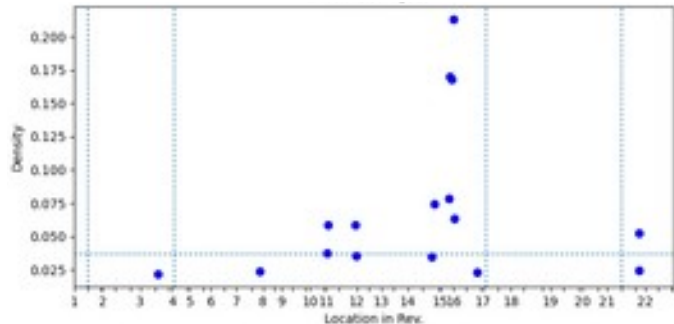


Figure 6: God’s heavenly temple (ναός G3485) in the Revelation

This is the only place where the temple is further described as “the tabernacle of the testimony.” The construction is probably apposition: “the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the testimony.” The latter phrase stands most often in the LXX (see note) for the Hebrew expression that the AV translates “the tabernacle of the congregation,” and the ESV “the tent of meeting.” The Hebrew expression probably reflects the tabernacle as the place where the people gathered together to meet with God

Ex. 29:42 This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD: **where I will meet you**, to speak there unto thee. (cf. 30:36; Num 10:3; 17:4).

The connection between “congregation” and “testimony” is not clear in English, but in Hebrew the two words are etymologically related. And a few times, our Greek expression represents a different Hebrew phrase, “the tabernacle of witness” (Num. 9:15; 17:7-8; 18:2; 2 Chr. 24:6), recalling the tables of the law that were in the holy of holies with the ark. But in the Revelation, the Greek root leading to “testimony” is the same one that lies behind “witness” and “martyr.”

What is the significance of using this common LXX expression here?

1. It reminds us that the heavenly sanctuary is not like Solomon’s permanent building, but something portable.
Rev 21:3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, **and he will dwell with them**, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.
2. The direct meaning of “testimony” reminds us of the martyrs, whom we met in 6:9, waiting beneath the altar of incense for God to avenge their blood.

4 However, in Exo 15:11, “wonders” is translated by another Greek word, τέρας G5059. √θαυμάζω does appear in the verse, in the translation of “fearful,” using the same form that appears in Rev 15:1, 3.

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3. The underlying Hebrew, “tent of meeting,” reminds us of how Israel would gather there to meet with God.

All these allusions may be in John’s mind as he writes.

6 And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.—It is interesting that the angels already “have the seven plagues,” though they do not receive “the bowls full of the wrath of God” until the next verse. They already have the ability to unleash the plagues, but they are not yet marked as the distinctive wrath of God.

7 And one of the four beasts [living creatures]—Recall that our translation uses “beast” for two different Greek words. The Satanic beasts in chapter 13 are called θηρίον G2342, wild beasts. The word here is ζῷον G2226, more properly “living creature,” which we saw in chapters 4 and 5, the angelic creatures who stand closest to the throne of God. We saw them also in 6:1-8, where they usher in the four horsemen.

gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.—Not every natural disaster is a sign of the wrath of God. Many simply reflect the fallen creation. But these plagues are marked as distinctive manifestations of God’s wrath.

8 And the temple was filled with smoke—In the context of the Revelation, we should connect this with 8:3-4:

Rev. 8:3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand.

Now that smoke, ascended before God, fills the temple. The altar from which it comes is probably the one mentioned in 6:9-10 as the place where the martyrs wait and cry for vengeance,

Rev. 6:9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

The smoke would then be first of all their prayers for vengeance. But that smoke stirs up God (cf. Isa 65:5).

from the glory of God, and from his power;—The glory of God reveals itself in smoke in Isa 6:3-4, where the prophet is sent forth to declare God’s judgment:

Isa 6:3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. 4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.—This idea of the glory of God excluding people from the temple echoes two OT events: the dedication of the tabernacle and again of the temple (chart).

Exo 40:33 And he reared up the court round about the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the hanging of the court gate. So Moses finished the work. 34 Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 35 **And Moses was not**

able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

2Ch 7:1 Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house. 2 **And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD**, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD'S house.

Does this indicate that at this point temple is complete, all the believers are in place? Recall the events associated with the seventh trumpet:

Rev 11:18 And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and **that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name**, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth. 19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

If “the last trump” of 1 Cor 15:52, which marks the raising of the righteous dead, may be the seventh trump, the start of the bowl judgments:

1Co 15:51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, **at the last trump**: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

16:1-21, The Bowl Judgments

Compared with the seals and trumpets, the bowls are more thorough, but also much briefer. With the trumpets, they echo six of the ten plagues of Egypt (Table 2, chart).

Only one seal, the fourth, notes the extent of the judgment (chart):

Rev 6:8 And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over **the fourth part of the earth**, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

Each of the first four trumpets affects one-third of its target. The second bowl notes destruction of all sea life, and there is no limitation on any of the others. The objects of judgment are the same, but the extent of damage by the bowls is much greater than that of the trumpets.

As we move through the three series, the judgments become more severe and move faster and faster until they culminate in the Lord's return.⁵ The bowls are the shortest series (Figure 7), and unlike the other two, have no interlude between the sixth and seventh elements. This pacing should encourage us. Compare God's encouragement to Habakkuk when he predicted the ultimate defeat of Babylon:

Hab 2:3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

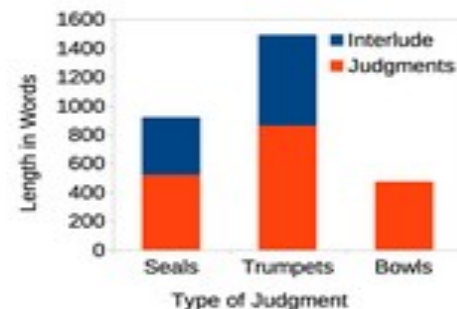


Figure 7: Lengths of the Judgment Series in the Revelation

5 Cf Figure 3 in notes on Rev 8b-11.

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Trumpets (Rev. 8–9)	Ten Plagues (Exod. 7–11)	Seven Bowls (Rev. 16)
	6. Boils (9:8–11)	1. People with Beast’s mark afflicted with sores (16:2)
1. Earth hit with hail, fire , and blood, 1/3 of trees and all grass burned (8:7)	7. Fiery Hail (9:13–34)	
2. 1/3 of sea turned to blood and 1/3 of sea creatures die (8:8–9)	(1. Blood (7:14–21)--rivers only)	2. Sea turned to blood and all sea creatures die (16:3)
3. 1/3 of fresh waters embittered by Wormwood (8:11)	1. Blood (7:14–21)	3. Rivers and springs turned to blood (16:4)
4. 1/3 of sun , moon, and stars darkened (8:12)	9. Darkness (10:21–23)	4. Sun scorches people with fire (16:8–9) 5. Darkness on earth (16:10–11)
5. Locust-horses released on earth after Abyss is opened (9:1–11)	8. Locusts (10:3–19)	
6. 200 million troops at Euphrates River released by 4 angels to kill 1/3 of men (9:13–16)	2. Frogs (8:2–14)	6. Kings from East gathered to Euphrates River by 3 unclean spirits resembling frogs (16:12–13)
7. Heavenly temple opens, accompanied by lightning, earthquake, and hail (11:15, 19)	7. Hail (9:18–34)	7. Lightning, severe earthquake, and plague of large hail (16:18–21)

Table 2: Parallels among the Trumpets, the Bowls, and the Plagues of Egypt. Unused plagues: 3 lice (8:16-18), 4 flies (8:20-24), 5 murrain (9:1-7), 10 death of firstborn (11:4-8)

In fact, Habakkuk’s encouragement is particularly relevant to our study, since the bowls culminate in the destruction of “the great city, Babylon” in chapters 17 and 18.

16:1 And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.—The angels are prepared, but cannot proceed on their awful mission until the Lord releases them.

As in the seals and trumpets, the first four judgments are distinct from the last three. Like the first four trumpets, they attack in turn the earth, the sea, the fresh water, and the heavenly bodies.

2 And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth;—Like the fire of the altar in the first trumpet (8:7), the first bowl is poured out “upon the earth” εἰς τὴν γῆν.

and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.—This bowl echoes the sixth plague of Egypt, Ex 9:8-11, which smote the Egyptians with boils. Exodus particularly notes the effect of the boils on the priest-magicians, those in most direct competition with Israel’s God (chart):

Exo 9:11 And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boil was upon the magicians, and upon all the Egyptians.

So here, this painful affliction is for those who turn aside from the true God to worship idols.

3 And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea.—Like the second trumpet, the second bowl turns the sea to blood. This time, the judgment is complete, and all sea life dies—a huge blow for a society that relies on fish for much of its protein.

4 And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood.—Like the third trumpet, the third bowl afflicts the fresh water, on which all life depends. The affliction, like that in the first plague of Egypt, consists of turning the water to blood. The Egyptians were able to get fresh water by digging wells:

Exo 7:24 And all the Egyptians digged round about the river for water to drink; for they could not drink of the water of the river.

And the third trumpet affected only a third of the fresh water, and it only made them bitter, not completely undrinkable. But there no exception here, and people must die of thirst.

The first two seals have no associated commentary, but each seal from this point on leads to one or more comments (Table 3, chart). The third seal invites two comments.

5 And I heard the angel of the waters say,—This may be the same angel who sounded the trumpet defiling the fresh water sources in 8:10-11.

The first comment is an ABBA chiasm (Table 4). It is bracketed by two absolute statements about the Lord and his adversaries: “Thou art righteous ... they are worthy.”⁶ Each statement is supported by a reason, introduced by ὅτι “because, for.”

Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou

hast judged thus.—God is righteous, because he has judged. Had he not judged, his righteousness would be called into question. The whole of the gospel lies in the interplay between God’s love and his righteousness, and the two are reconciled only in the sinless life and substitutionary redemption of the Lord Jesus.

6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.—They are worthy of this particular judgment, because they have shed the blood of the righteous.

Seal	Commentator	Comment
3. 16:4-7 Fresh water → Blood	Angel of the waters	God is righteous; they are worthy
	Martyr from the altar	God is true & righteous
4. 16:8-9 Scorching sun	Victims	Blasphemy; no repentance
5. 16:10-11 Darkness		
6. 16:12-16 Kings from the east	Lord Jesus	Behold, I come quickly
7. 16:17-21 Voices, thunder, lightning, earthquake, hail	God	It is done

Table 3: Comments on the last five plagues

	16:5		16:6
Statement	Thou art righteous		They are worthy
Reason ὅτι G3754	Because thou hast judged thus		For they have shed the blood .. and thou hast given them blood ...

Table 4: Chiasm in 16:5-6

⁶ TR’s γάρ before the second statement, according to CNTTS, is supported only by at most one Greek mss.

7 And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.—The second comment comes “out of the altar,”⁷ from the martyrs of the fifth seal (6:9-11).

8 And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. 9 And men were scorched with great heat,—This is a departure from the fourth trumpet. There, the sun was darkened (compare also the ninth plague in Egypt); here the sun is intensified.

The fourth and fifth seals both have the same comment: blasphemy from the people who are suffering, instead of repentance.

and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.—They recognize that God has power over these disasters, but instead of repenting of their sin, they curse him.

10 And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, 11 And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.—From blazing light, the fifth bowl plunges them into utter darkness, as in Egypt’s ninth plague (Ex 10:21-23), but they continue their hardness.

The reference to “pains and . . . sores” takes us back to the sores of the first bowl. These plagues follow rapidly upon each other. Their effect is not successive, but cumulative.

12 And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.—Like the sixth trumpet, the sixth bowl anticipates a coming invasion from the east. In the trumpets, 200 million demon horsemen were released by four angels bound “in [beside] the Euphrates” (9:14-16). Now the Euphrates, the major obstacle to their advance, is removed, and we read of “the kings of the East,” whose mission is explained further in v. 14.

13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.—The Satanic trinity summons the nations to this great battle. The comparison of the demons to frogs recalls the second plague of Egypt (Ex 8:2-14).

14 For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.—Not just the kings of the east, but “of the whole world,” come to stand against God.

The response to the sixth seal is from the Lord, reminding his people of his imminent return:

15 Behold, I come as a thief.—The details in these series of judgments might tempt some believers to try to match the events with their current circumstances, and figure out when the Lord will return. The Lord Jesus breaks in here with an admonition to the recipients of the book (the churches of Asia), based on a figure that he introduced in the Olivet discourse (chart):

Mat 24:43 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. 44 Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

⁷ “another,” apparently intended to point to another angel, is only in the Vulgate.

Revelation 15-16, the Seven Bowls

The apostles pick up this warning:

1 Thes 5:2 The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night

2 Pet 3:10 The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night

The Lord repeats it in Rev 3:3, “I will come on thee as a thief.” Now once more he warns us not try to set times from these prophecies, but to be ready at any moment for his appearance.

Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.—This readiness has two aspects. The first is to watch for the Lord’s return. The second is to keep our garments unspotted, so as not to bring shame to his name.

16 And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue

Armageddon.—“Armageddon” is most naturally understood as “the mountain of Megiddo.”

Megiddo was a fortified city at the southern edge of the Valley of Jezreel, guarding a pass through the Carmel range that leads to the coastal roads (Figure 8, chart). It is not a mountain, but there are heights all around it. Armies approaching Israel from the east would naturally enter through Jezreel, and pass by Megiddo.



17 And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air;

—The three series of sevens have similar endings, and the sixth seal joins with the seventh in anticipating some of these features. The three series start at different times:

- The seals began in the first century;
- The trumpets come out of the sixth and seventh seals;
- The bowls come out of the seventh trumpet.

But they end together, with a set of shared features (chart). First we have the comment: from the temple itself.

and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.—Each ending has a proclamation. In the sixth seal, it comes from those under judgment:

6:15 And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, ... 16 ... said ... 17 For **the great day of his wrath is come**

In the seventh trumpet, the 24 elders make a similar proclamation:

11:16 And the four and twenty elders, ... 17 Saying, ... 18 ... **the nations** were angry, and **thy wrath is come**

Now God himself proclaims that it has not only come, but that it has happened.

Figure 8: Megiddo guarding the Carmel pass.

<https://www.google.com/maps/@32.6885607,35.2812479,10.34z/data=!5m1!1e4?entry=ttu>

Revelation 15-16, the Seven Bowls

The perfect tense recalls the words of our Savior on the cross,

In 19:30 When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, **It is finished**: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

The history of the world is defined by two great attributes of God, both summarized in Exod 34:6-7: his lovingkindness and tender mercy (34:6) and his righteous judgment on the wicked (34:7b). The work of redemption was complete two thousand years ago. God has been patiently withholding his wrath until his elect are gathered in, but now that has happened, and now he announces that his work of judgment is also complete.

out of the temple, from the throne—Like the throne here, the other final episodes refer to items in the temple:

8:3 And another angel came and stood at the **altar**, ... before the **throne**.

11:19 ... and there was seen in his **temple** the **ark** of his testament:

18 And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.—

These signs marked the Lord's appearance on Sinai (Ex 19:16, 18). We saw the same constellation of wonders in the seventh seal and seventh trumpet:

(seal:) 8:5 And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were **voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake**.

(trumpet:) 11:11:there were **lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake**,

19 And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.—We did not hear about “great Babylon” by name during the seals or trumpets. She is introduced only by the second of the three flying angels in Revelation 14,

Rev 14:8 And there followed another angel, saying, **Babylon is fallen, is fallen**, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

Now that angel's prediction is about to be fulfilled, in the next two chapters.

20 And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.—So in the sixth seal,

6:14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

The seventh trumpet does not mention these dislocations.

21 And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.—Hail was the seventh plague of Egypt (Ex 9:18-34). It was not mentioned in the sixth or seventh seals, but it was in the seventh trumpet:

11:19 ... there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, **and great hail**.

Thus we come to the end of the three sevens, recording how God's longsuffering finally ends in the outpouring of his wrath on those who rebel against him.

Notes

The Text of 15:3 “king of saints / nations / ages”

The overwhelming majority favors “nations,” as does Tischendorf, and this reading is likely to be understood as a fulfillment of Jer 10:6-7, which not only provides the title “king of nations,” but also echoes “Who is like the Lord” from Exod 15:11. TR’s ἀγίων is CNTTS class 50, only one Greek ms or Latin support. Tischendorf cites only Stephanus, and comments, “[the reading] seems to have arisen from the confounding of centuries and saints.”

15:5, The Tabernacle of Testimony

ἡ σκηνή τοῦ μαρτυρίου represents two different Hebrew expressions (Table 5). The most common one is אהל מועד, usually translated “tent of meeting,” but the LXX reflects the etymological relation between עֲדוּת and מועד.

	אהל מועד	אהל העדות		Total
σκηνή (τοῦ) μαρτυρίου	143	4		160
οἶκος τοῦ μαρτυρίου		1		1
Total	145	5		

Table 5: Hebrew precursors of ἡ σκηνή τοῦ μαρτυρίου