

# Introduction to the Seven Bowls

Revelation 16:1

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## Text

16:1 And I heard a loud voice from the sanctuary saying to the seven angels, “Go, pour out the bowls of God’s fury on the earth.” 2 So off went the first one and poured out his bowl on the earth, and a foul and malignant ulcer appeared in the people who had the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. 3 Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood, like a dead person’s; so every living soul in the sea died. 4 Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and the springs of water, and they turned into blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying, “How just You are! The One who is and who was, the holy One, because You have judged these things. 6 Because they shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it!” 7 And I heard one from the altar saying, “Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty! Your judgments are true and just!”

## **I. Introduction to chapter 16 - the reversal of the chiasm: Twelve reasons to see a chiastic reversal of both themes and dates in chapters 16ff.**

### ***A. preliminary considerations and concessions from other schools of eschatology***

As I mentioned last week, this section of the book is the turning point in the book where the chiasm goes backwards and repeats the themes in a symmetrical way. And by the way, I am not the only one who has noticed some reversals. Even some Premillennialists have noted the odd fact (and it is only an "odd fact" on their system) that the second half of the book does indeed seem to reverse the order of several things that the first half had introduced.<sup>1</sup> They don't adequately account for that reversal. And they fail to

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<sup>1</sup> Some commentaries (from various perspectives) that note these reversals are listed below: Rev., Adrian Dieleman says, “Beginning with our Scripture reading this morning we see the destruction of God’s enemies in the reverse order in which they are introduced. So, in Revelation chapters 16-19 we see the destruction of Babylon; in Revelation 19 we see the destruction of the beast and the false prophet; and, in Revelation 20 we see the destruction of Satan.” <http://www.trinityurvisalia.com/NTSer/rev16v17-21.html> An Adventist writer said, said, "A close analysis of the above table will show that both judgments opened in reverse order. While the judgment of the dead opened with an earthquake and ended with voices, the judgment of the living opened with voices and ended with an earthquake. The same will be seen at the close of the Plagues—the finality of God’s judgments upon the living (Rev. 16: 18)." Aune speaks of “...placing two events in reverse order, a phenomenon that occurs frequently in

realize that the dates themselves reverse. But they do at least note some reverse order.

You already know that I have broken company with a number of preterists by showing that chapters 4-14 smoothly advanced from AD 30 to AD 136 rather than jumping around randomly, and we saw that each part was perfectly fulfilled.

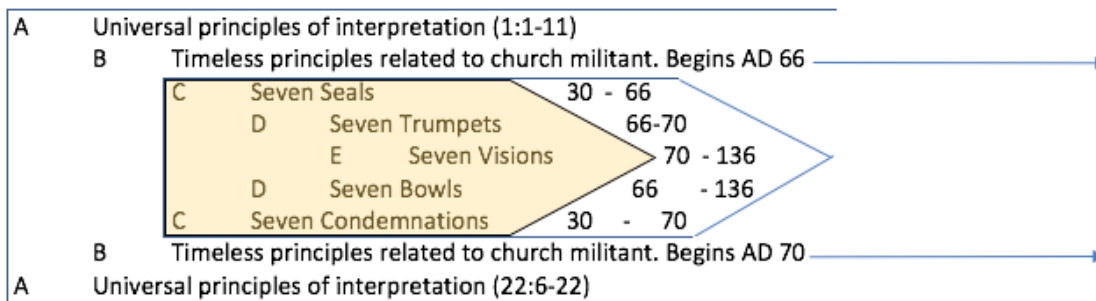
But I am also breaking company with most preterists in seeing a reversal of dates in these bowls. Of course, this is the section that other preterists have difficulty with. And I believe the reason they have difficulty is that they are not following the chiastic structure of the book. I think you will see that when you allow the God-given structure of the book dictate the exegesis, every detail falls perfectly into place.

In contrast, those who start over again at the beginning of the war and move forward to AD 70 struggle to find any realistic historical fulfillment for some of these bowls. And they are not able to adequately answer their critics. What many of them do to try to make things work is to have the bowls be out of order, but without an exegetical justification for doing so. It's a haphazard kind of out-of-order - jumping back and forth. And even though they mix up the order of some of these things, they still can't take all of them literally, so they spiritualize some of the prophecies. They say, "Don't expect to find a time in history when 100% of the sea creatures in the Sea of Galilee were killed. It's hyperbole. Or they may tell you not to expect to find a time

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Revelation: 3:3, 17; 5:5; 6:4; 10:9; 20:4-5, 12-13; 22:14)." David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, WBC 52B; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 562. Beale says, "It is also quite possible that 17:1-21:8 is intended as a broader, distinct section, since there all the main characters previously introduced in the book either undergo final judgment or receive a final reward (Babylon and the beasts, 17:1-19:21; Satan, 20:1-10; unbelievers, 20:11-15; believers, 21:1-8).<sup>23</sup> This section may even be intended as a chiastic contrast with chs. 12-14, since the evil characters in working their mischief are introduced there in the reverse order. 21:8 provides a fitting climax to this chiastic contrast of judgment, since it is the last formal statement in the book about the final judgment." G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 110-111. Lowry says, Beginning with 15:1ff., we have the pouring out of the seven bowls that emphasizes totality of judgment. John then becomes more specific as to who or what is judged totally: He zeroes in on the antagonists, who are judged and dispensed with in the reverse order they were introduced. Babylon is judged in 17:1-19:10, next the two beasts in 19:11-21, and then finally Satan and his followers are the focal point in 20:1-15, a passage that ends with the Final Judgment. . . "The pouring out of the seven bowls emphasizes total judgment of creation, including those who do not serve God. It also anticipates the total judgment of the antagonists who are dismissed in reverse order: Babylon, the two beasts, and the dragon." Robert Lowery, *Revelation's Rhapsody: Listening to the Lyrics of the Lamb : How to Read the Book of Revelation* (Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 2006), 135. The Navarre Bible states, "The assembling of the kings of the whole world marks the climax of the final victory of Christ which will take place when the seventh bowl is poured out; at that point his enemies will be routed in reverse order-first the kings then the beast and the false prophet and finally the Devil." Faculty of Theology at the University of Navarre, *The Navarre Bible*, (Bodmin, Cornwall, Great Britain: MPG Books, 2003), p. 99.

in history when all of the springs and streams were bloodied. Or they will say, "Don't expect to find the greatest earthquake that Palestine has ever seen." I don't buy that. As we have said many times in this series, while the events are indeed symbolic of spiritual changes that are taking place, they are still historical events. And so because I need to solidly lay the groundwork for the next few chapters, I am going to take most of my time in the introduction, then take a few minutes to deal with verse 1, and then give a very brief overview of the chapter.



And the first thing that needs to be addressed is this reversal of dates because you should be skeptical of my theory if I cannot clearly prove it from the text itself. Obviously each angel pours out the contents of his bowl one after the other in the vision, but does the historical fulfillment follow the same order? That's the big question.

Intuitively we would expect things to continue to move forward. So we ended chapter 14 with AD 136, and we might expect the history to move forward to the fall of Rome, just like Bahnsen and Morecraft and some of the older Preterists do. There is some merit to their exegesis. I wanted to hold to that viewpoint. But it falls apart at many places. The reason forward progress in this chapter seems reasonable is because we are westerners who are not used to thinking in chiasms and we are not used to reading literature chiastically. But I started the series by proving the chiastic structure of the book - that it moves forward in an ABCDE structure and then backward in an EDCBA form. This structure is so critical to understanding the book.

So this morning I have given you a lot more detail in your outlines than I normally do. If you buy into the twelve reasons for why these seven bowls move backwards in time, then the rest of the book is easy-peasey. It just falls into place.

***B. This is what you would expect with a chiastic structure***

Here's my first reason. One would expect that if there is a chiasm, it would be natural to assume that everything moves backwards; not just the themes,

but also the dates. There is precedent for Biblical chiasms to move backwards in time as well. For example the chapters in the book of Daniel are deliberately put in a different order than the order in which they occurred. Why? To accommodate the Hebrew literary feature of chiasms. That would not seem odd at all to a Hebrew reader, but many English commentaries are at a loss as to why Daniel's chapters are out of order.

I've put the miniaturized version of the chiasm of Revelation in your outlines once again. You will see that the first half of the chiasm has the dates moving forward in the highlighted judgments section and in our passage they move backwards. If it moves backwards thematically (which is an absolute certainty), why not move backwards chronologically? It is not a definitive argument, but it is a natural one.

***C. Many commentaries from all schools of eschatology have noted that God's enemies are dealt with in chapters 16-19 in reverse order to the way they were introduced in the first half of the book.***

Second, as I already mentioned, many commentaries from all schools of eschatology have noticed that there is a reverse order of at least some of the things introduced in the first half of the book. For example, Lowry states, "John then becomes more specific as to who or what is judged totally: He zeroes in on the antagonists, who are judged and dispensed with in the reverse order they were introduced."<sup>2</sup> Very interesting observation. Beale says, "This section may even be intended as a chiastic contrast with chs. 12–14, since the evil characters in working their mischief are introduced there in the reverse order."<sup>3</sup> And I could give you many similar quotes where commentaries mention this reverse order, but don't do anything with it. It doesn't drive their exegesis.

These and other authors sense that things are reversed, and Beale even suspects that it may be intended as a chiasm, but because they have not worked out a detailed outline of the book they have not been able to show how the chiasm of the book drives everything. I really do believe that without a detailed outline, you will mess up the exegesis. But in any case, it is a chiasm and even futurists recognize that there seems to be a reversal of at least some events. I would say it is a complete reversal of the whole section. And this completely solves the problem we saw with preterists who

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2 Robert Lowery, *Revelation's Rhapsody: Listening to the Lyrics of the Lamb : How to Read the Book of Revelation* (Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 2006), 135.

3 G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 110-111.

take events out of order in both halves of the book. There is no need to do so. Following the chiasm maintains the sequence where the text necessitates it.

***D. These bowls are said to inflict the seven "last plagues" (15:1; 21:9). How can they be "last" if they cover the identically same history covered by the trumpets? And how can they be the "last" if both the seventh head of the beast and Israel itself continued to be judged by God in AD 70-74 and during the Bar Kochba rebellion (AD 132-136)?***

Third, in 15:1 and again in 21:9 the angels holding the bowls are said to be delivering the seven "last plagues." The word "last" implies that at least some of these bowl plagues had to be fulfilled at a later date than the plagues that trumpets brought. But most recapitulationists and most preterists see these judgments as being identical to the historical realities behind the trumpet judgments. Of course, that's what messes them up on finding historical fulfillment; it's just not there.

There are some who agree with me that the second C and D sections must deal with at least some events beyond AD 70. For example, Morecraft, Bahnsen, Moses Stuart, and most older preterists agree that "last" has to be speaking about judgments that come later. They don't see a chiasm, so they mess up by taking it into the distant future of the fifth century. But at least they are taking seriously this word "last."

But there is a second implication of that word "last." As we will see, the bowls include in them the very last judgments that Israel would see as a nation since the nation ceased to exist after the time indicated by the first three bowls. There was no nation of Israel after AD 136. Those who escaped were scattered to the winds.

Likewise, these bowls deal with the last judgments that would come upon the seven headed sea beast. Indeed, all the leadership that constituted the Beast from the sea as well as the Beast from the land that were introduced in the first half died. These bowls really do include the very "last" plagues that all the main characters introduced in the first half of the book endured. We can take that word very literally.

But that is simply not the case if you do like some preterists and recapitulate all these verses back to the first war against the Jews (AD 66-70). Taking bowl #1 back to the first century not only makes historical identification impossible, but it makes the word "last" meaningless. You see, only the

trumpet judgments and bowl judgments were called plagues, and if they are both referring to exactly the same thing, what are these plagues "last" in comparison to? It makes no sense. These plagues would be no more "last" than the trumpets were. I think this is a pretty water-tight argument for reversal or at least for Bahnsen and Morecraft's view that they occur after AD 70.

***E. Bowl one was poured out on the "land" (γῆν), yet it affects people who had the mark of the beast (v. 2). That could not literally happen till after Jerusalem was captured.***

Fourth, the first bowl must come after AD 70 because the people of the "land" (i.e., Israel) have the mark of the beast in verse 2. As far as I know, Jews did not wear the mark of the beast until after the transitional government was formed, and that mark was not imposed on all Israelites till after Jerusalem was conquered in mid AD 70. So at least bowl 1 has to come after AD 70.

***F. Contrary to what recapitulationists claim, there are marked differences between trumpets and bowls that necessitate a later history for bowls 1-5 (8:7-11:19 with 16:1-21)***

Fifth, the bowls are not identical recapitulations of the trumpets as so many people insist. There is no parallel to bowl one at all. Trumpet one deals with trees and grass being burned whereas bowl one deals with sores or boils on people's bodies. There is no comparison between the two. The main parallel that people point to is Trumpet 2 and Bowl 2, where the sea becomes blood. But the difference is that Trumpet 2 has 1/3 of the sea becoming bloodied and 1/3 of the sea creatures dying whereas bowl 2 has 100% of the sea becoming coagulated blood and 100% of the sea creatures dying. They are not the same event at all. Trumpet 3 has waters becoming poisoned (not bloodied) and Bowl 3 has the rivers and springs turning to blood and the Israelites being forced to drink blood-contaminated water. Again, while there are some thematic similarities, the differences are very strong. And as you do a detailed comparison of the trumpets and bowls side by side you realize that there is not a perfect parallel 1-7, though there are thematic parallels of the two groupings together. Both groupings are plagues; both have some similar themes, but they do not progress forward in synchronism. So to make these bowls to be a complete repeat of the trumpets just does not work.

**G. There is zero evidence for the 100% destruction predicted in bowls 2-3 any time prior to AD 70, so even adjusting the timing to a later period than each trumpet does not rescue recapitulation (16:3-7)**

Sixth, there is zero evidence that 100% of the rivers and springs became blood prior to AD 70 at any time, and the third trumpet is not about blood anyway, but about 1/3 of waters being poisoned (see 8:10-11), whereas the springs and rivers are defiled by blood in the third bowl (16:4-7). This happened literally in AD 136. It is the only time when Jews were forced to become ceremonially unclean and drink blood in order to survive. Verse 6 says that they drink blood.

**H. On a chiastic structure, it makes sense to pick up where the last judgment left off (14:17-20), which was AD 136.**

Seventh, on a chiastic structure, it makes sense that the first bowl will pick up where chapter 14 leaves off. And on my interpretation it does. Chapter 14 left off with the fact that "blood came out of the winepress up to the horses' bridles, for a thousand six hundred stadia." Well, that makes total sense of disease in bowl 1, and the blood of bowls 2 and 3. Likewise, all three bowls deal with the very last days of Israel. That fits the Bar Kochba rebellion to a "t."

**I. The seventh bowl cannot be fulfilled in AD 70 (as most modern preterists place it) since any earthquake felt in AD 70 was not the greatest ever experienced since men were living in the land of Israel (v. 18)**

Eighth, we have a major problem in verses 18-21 if we follow many preterists who see those verses as referring to the end of Jerusalem in AD 70. The problem is acknowledged by all - that there was no earthquake of that magnitude in AD 70. So they say that it is exclusively spiritual. They say that it was a spiritual earthquake. Well, I agree that there was a spiritual earthquake, but it began happening at Passover of AD 66 when Christ was seen by virtually everyone in the heavenlies, and angels and chariots were seen flying all throughout Israel. That was the date of the most massive earthquake that the Mediterranean had ever seen, and certainly that Israel had seen. It was an earthquake that literally moved every mountain and island, and symbolized the far greater spiritual shaking of all things in heaven and earth that Hebrews 12 speaks about.

Certainly the literal historical events that were symbols are not as great a



shaking as the the spiritual shaking that was symbolized - the cosmic shaking that Hebrews 12 addresses, but it was great enough to be a perfect sign of the spiritual shaking. To have no earthquake seems incongruous with the constant connection of literal realities on earth with the spiritual realities that the symbols point to. The symbols are rooted in history on our interpretation; they are not on the interpretation of some.

***J. The literal Greek of “it is finished” in verse 17 is actually “it is beginning (γεγονεν).” This word is defined by dictionaries as “To begin to be, to come into existence as implying origin...In the aor. and perf., to have begun to be, to have come into existence” (CWSD), to be born...origin...to grow...genesis of something...” (NIDNTT), “to come into being...point of origin...entry into a new condition, become...” (BDAG), “birth, genesis”. The antonyms (or opposites) of this word are “παύω (3973), to stop, make an end; διαλείπω (1257), to leave between or an interval; ἡσυχάζω (2270), to be quiet, still; κοπάζω (2869), to cease, to be tired; ἀφίημι (863), to let go, cease to be; καταπαύω (2664), to cease; καταργέω (2673), to render inactive; παρέρχομαι (3928), to pass by, in regard to time.” (CWSD)***

Ninth, the last phrase in verse 17 should not even be translated, "It is done!" Now, my theory can account for it being translated either way, but there is no way that others can account for the literal translation of this word. There is a Greek word for "It is done" or "It is finished." It is the word Τετέλεσται from the Greek root, τελέω. But the word that is used here is listed by the Greek dictionaries as an antonym of that word. In other words, it means the opposite of the word, "It is finished."

What is used here is the Greek word, γεγονεν, from the Greek γίνομαι. Now, if it had meant "It is done" it could still refer to AD 66 when God got the ball rolling, and then it would simply mean that it is over for Israel; judgments will now start falling. But if this word is translated literally, it fits with God beginning His judgments on the land in AD 66. It's a huge clue to a Greek reader that there is a reversal going on. The last bowl begins the judgments, and it's a hint that they should read the judgments that way. I'll just read your outline notes so that you can follow along.

The literal Greek of “it is finished” in verse 17 is actually “it is beginning (γεγονεν).” This word is defined by dictionaries as "To begin to be, to come into existence as implying origin...In the aor. and perf., [and the current word is in the perfect tense; it means] to have begun to be, to have come into existence" (CWSD), [Another dictionary

says,] to be born...origin...to grow...genesis of something..." (NIDNTT),[another dictionary says] "to come into being...point of origin...entry into a new condition, become..." (BDAG), [Another dictionary says] "birth, genesis". [And then come:] The antonymns (or opposites) of this word are "paúō (3973), to stop, make an end; dialeípō (1257), to leave between or an interval; hēsucházō (2270), to be quiet, still; kopázō (2869), to cease, to be tired; aphīēmi (863), to let go, cease to be; katapaúō (2664), to cease; katargéō (2673), to render inactive; parérchomai (3928), to pass by, in regard to time." (CWSD)

Another dictionary that I did not quote is the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament. It says, "It means in the literal sense become, originate, come into existence."<sup>4</sup> This angel is giving the hint that the moment the last bowl was poured out it was time to see the historical fulfillment of each bowl beginning to come into existence. When the last bowl was poured out, it was the start of the judgments that would spell the doom of Israel and the seven headed monster. So bowl seven is not the end; it is the beginning.

***K. This makes chapter 16 flow naturally into chapter 17.***

Tenth, seeing it as a reversal makes chapter 16 flow naturally into chapter 17. It makes things rather choppy on your typical preterist approach. And you will notice that when we get to that chapter.

***L. Since this introduces the priestly section, it makes sense that the seven temple bowls refer to the seven temple Festivals (Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles). Since chapter 14 leaves us in the time right before Tabernacles (i.e., Atonement - Tisri 10, AD 136), and since the bowls start right "after these things" (15:5), then it makes sense that the first bowl will be Tabernacles (Tisri 15-21). The seven bowls then move backwards from Tabernacles (v. 2) to Passover (vv. 17-21). Is it merely coincidental that these events land on these dates?***

Eleventh, we have already seen that this is a priestly section. The seals introduced Christ's Prophetic judgments; the trumpets introduced Christ's Kingly judgments; and this section introduces Christ's priestly judgments. And we saw that the golden bowls were blood-bowls used exclusively in the temple. And I believe they were the bowls used at the seven festivals of Israel. The festivals of Israel appear to structure this book as well. So if each bowl represents one of the seven festivals (Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles), then we might expect a sequence following the order of the Festivals.

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4 Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament Volumes 1-3 ,” EDNT, paragraph 4.

Well, here's the thing. Chapter 14 ended it's last judgment just before Tabernacles, at the time of the Festival of Atonement (Tisri 10). There are a number of historical references to that date. Bether fell the day before, which is the same date that the first temple fell and the second temple fell. Then chapter 15:5 says, "After these things," and what Festival comes after Tisri 10? Tabernacles comes immediately after Atonement. Atonement is Tisri 10, and Tabernacles is Tisri 15-21. So we would expect this chapter to start at Tabernacles. But if that is the case, since that is the last Festival, you would then expect the bowls to move backwards. Well, it just so happens that there are unbelievably significant dates in history that land on those Festivals, and we will end with the seventh bowl being on Passover of AD 66.

One more confirmation that bowl one starts with Tabernacles is that Atonement and Tabernacles come right after grape harvest. Well, chapter 14 ended with grape harvest. When you start seeing the overlay of the chiasms in this book with temple ritual, and Festivals, it shows a beautiful symmetry in the whole book. I love the way God structured this book.

***M. This reverse order also perfectly explains both the throne and the kingdom of the beast being full of darkness (v. 10) and the sores as being literal sores (v. 11)***

Twelfth, we will later see that this makes the "sores" of verse 11 as literal sores of those alive in Rome, not demons and men cast into hell. Likewise, the throne of the beast became dark. This literally happened in AD 79-80. The other theory tries to say the beast was cast into hell. And I actually believed that theory up until a few months ago. But hell did not become dark, nor did Satan's metaphorical throne become dark at any time in the first century. It was already spiritually dark and it didn't become physically dark. So what I am once again suggesting is that these verses will describe literal events in history that have symbolic significance of changes in the spiritual realm.

**II. The command to the seven angels (v. 1)**

***A. The vision occurs in AD 66 - the fulfillment comes later (v. 1a)***

Well, with that as background, let's deal with verse 1. And the first phrase gives one more confirmation of what we have just said.

And I heard a loud voice from the sanctuary saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the bowls of God's fury on the earth."

The first thing to notice is that John heard the voice giving the command, and he heard it before he wrote it down, so the bowls were obviously poured out in AD 66 when John received this vision. He sees them being poured out. It is important to notice the difference between the order of events within the prophetic vision itself and the order of events during the time when the vision would be fulfilled.

We saw in the first half of the book that this distinction was also maintained. One seal after another might be opened up in John's vision of chapter 6, covering a short period of time, but when it comes to fulfillment, the text itself will specify long periods of time that will take place, and delays between the fulfillment of what is prophesied in each seal, with phrases like this: "a little while longer," "after these things," "those who had come out (past tense)," "for about half an hour," "five months," "in those days," "one woe is past," "two more woes are coming," "the hour and day and month and year," "in the days of," "forty-two months," "one thousand two hundred and sixty days," "three and a half days," "in the same hour," etc., etc. In other words, the timing of the fulfillment is very specific and detailed.

But the bowls are quite different. Though the New King James and Pickering both have some "then" words sprinkled through the passage, it is not a word of the passing of time - unless it is acting as equivalent to a Hebrew *waw* consecutive. But this is a different use of the Greek word *Kai* that we normally translate as "And." These are simply a series of snapshots. I saw this, and I saw this, and I saw that.

And interestingly, the lack of historical sequence is so marked (especially when you contrast it with the previous sections), that some Premillennialists think that these bowls show no sequence at all - that they are all poured out at the same time. But that is not a necessary conclusion. One could also say that the marked absence of forward sequence is simply because these are snapshots that will be moving backwards in time. The two exceptions are not in the bowl section; they are the first verse of chapter 18 and the first verse of chapter 19. And there is a good reason for that. The reason is that chapter 17 will take us back to AD 30, then chapter 18 needs to move forward again, as does chapter 19 to get us to Christ's judgment day in AD 70. But those two exceptions are explicitly stated and fit perfectly into the chiasmic structure that we have examined. So this confirms the dozen points I gave earlier on the reversal of the chiasm.

### ***B. The loud voice shows the urgency of the situation (v. 1b)***

Next John says that he heard a loud voice. The loud voice shows the urgency of the situation. God is patient with a lot of evil, but there does come a time when evil is so evil that it has to be dealt with; it has to be restrained. As we will see, this was certainly the case with these two enemies of the church. Things had gotten so out of hand that God had to trim the enemies ranks down a bit.

And by the way, I will remind you that judgment is often necessary for the elect themselves to come to repentance and salvation. That too requires this sense of urgency. We saw last week that these are redemptive judgments; priestly judgments; judgments that would grow the church. By judging the nation with devastation, God was preparing the elect to be saved. Without the judgment it appears that this would not have happened. God in His sovereign purposes knows what is needed to draw all the elect in. So both the judgment of the non-elect and the redemption of His people show an urgency in this loud voice.

### ***C. That the angels fly from the ναός (Holy of Holies) shows that this is coming from the throne room (v. 1c)***

Notice that the loud voice comes from the sanctuary. The word for sanctuary is ναός, which always refers to the Holy of Holies where God's throne was. We aren't told whose voice this is, whether that of Jesus or one of the cherubim angels, or the living creature who gave the angels their bowls, or God the Father Himself. But it doesn't matter - if the loud voice came from the throne room as a command, then it represents God's will, whether this is God's voice Himself or the voice of one of His instruments. You cannot escape the conclusion that it represents God's will.

Why is it important to take note of that fact? Because most Christians today deny that God is the sovereign giver of the kinds of things that these verses talk about. For example, God sent the first angel to pour out the first bowl, and it produces what? Disease. Yet countless Arminian Christians insist that God never gives disease. One author says,

Deuteronomy 26 lists many of the diseases known to man today. They are listed as curses. So if you think God gave you a disease, think again! God does not give disease, disease comes when you are disobedient to the Word.<sup>5</sup>

He's missing the point - God brings those curses, even if He uses means.

This author tries to say that God doesn't curse anyone; He just allows curses to come. If you doubt that both God and Satan can bring curses, read Robert

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5 <http://lifeapplicationministries.org/Rootlisting.htm>

Fugate's new booklet on curses and blessings. It's probably the most thorough treatment that I have seen - an excellent booklet. These seven plagues are curses. Not just Satan's curses. Certainly Satan may bring them and delight in bringing them, but they are still sovereignly sent from God's throne. And until a nation turns to God, such curses cannot be averted. Lord willing, we will look at each of the curses in the next two or three weeks. There is a lot we can learn from them.

But to deny that God brings typhoons, wars, disease, etc. is actually to deny God's sovereignty. Amos 3:6 says, "When disaster comes to a city, has not Yehovah caused it?" He is sovereign over everything, and works all things together for His glory and for the good of the elect. It is the knowledge that economic disasters, war disasters, disease disasters come from the hand of our loving Father that gives us comfort, and hope, and faith. Things are not out of control. God is in control of our lives. It would be awful to think that these things happen to us by chance.

#### ***D. Seven angels represent invisible spiritual warfare in earth's histories (v. 1d)***

The next phrase has been harped on by me so many times that I will not dwell on it, but it says, "saying to the seven angels..." These plagues were brought by angels; good angels, not bad angels. Could bad angels also be used as God's agents? Sure, I don't see why not. But these are not bad angels. They are good angels sent from God's throne to inflict plagues. God gives disease and so do angels. And therefore the physical disasters in this chapter, including war, are part of angelic spiritual warfare. Don't look only at the physical side of this life; realize that there are invisible realities behind these disasters.

#### ***E. To pour out a temple bowl represents a redemptive judgment (v. 1e)***

The next phrase says, "'Go, pour out the bowls..." I went to great lengths last Sunday to point out that these golden bowls are only used in the temple, and were used to hold both incense and blood from sacrifices. Where the previous sections emphasized Christ's prophetic and kingly judgments, this section represents Christ's priestly judgments. In other words, they are redemptive judgments.

So you would expect some growth of the church. And we saw last week the phenomenal way that the church grew as the enemies were taken down a peg or two. By the early 200s AD Tertullian claimed that there was not a nook or

cranny of the empire that was not being taken over by Christians, with the exceptions of the pagan temples. Christians were in the palace, the army, the civics of many cities, and in virtually every area of life. Judgment should not be feared if it is God's means of clearing out the rubble to make way for Christ's kingdom realities. God may have to do that to America if America does not repent. But always keep in mind that temple bowls advance redemption for the elect while inflicting judgment on the non-elect.

***F. When redemption is rejected all that remains is God's wrath (v. 1f)***

The next phrase says, "of God's fury." It is popular nowadays for people to deny the wrath and fury of God. Liberal denominations have done this for a long time. They have taken the word "atonement" out of their hymnbooks because atonement means the covering of God's wrath. They don't believe that God has any wrath. They believe that religion has evolved beyond that kind of superstition.

But what is sad to me is to see so many evangelicals who teach that God does not have any anger. He's pleasant all the time. A milder form of this is the view that says that God never gets mad at believers. But even that is inaccurate. One Bible teacher recently said,

First, all believers willfully and deliberately sin. It's in our nature. Second, God does not get mad at us for doing so. In Colossians 1:19-20 Paul wrote that God reconciled all things to Himself by making peace through the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross for our sins.<sup>6</sup>

This teacher is mixing up two things: God's relationship to us as a judge and God's relationship to us as a father. It is true that once we were justified, we will never have to face the wrath of God as judge again. We have been adopted into His family. But Jesus still gets angry when His children sass and abuse their mother; in other words, the church, which is His bride. Jesus says that you're not going to get away with that. And it scares me that so many AHA people sass and abuse mother church. That is not cool.

Likewise, Jesus still gets angry when Christians deliberately sin against Him. It is simply false to say that God never gets mad at believers. Exodus 4:14 says, "So the anger of Yehovah was kindled against Moses." In Zechariah 10:3 God said, "My anger is kindled against the pastors..." Why? Because the pastors were not doing their job of guiding the sheep, teaching the sheep, leading them in righteousness. That's a kind of spiritual abuse. Jesus gets angry at that kind of behavior. It doesn't take much time to find a

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<sup>6</sup> <https://gracethrufaith.com/ask-a-bible-teacher/does-god-get-mad-at-us/>

number of passages that speak of God's anger against Christians.

But fury seems to be reserved for unbelievers who have sinned with a high hand. And numerous passages speak of God's fury against His enemies and the enemies of the church. What would you think of a man who was not furious with a rapist who had just raped his wife? I would hope you wouldn't think much of that man. God is furious with those who injure and rape His bride, the church.

Yet the constant message I hear from the evangelical church till I am almost sick to my stomach is that God is not angry with the world; God loves everyone just the way they are. Really!!? God loves a murdering rapist just the way he is?! I don't think so. Scripture is full of declarations that God is furious with the wicked. Isaiah 34:2 says, "For the indignation of the LORD is against all nations, and His fury against all their armies." In Isaiah 63:3 God says, "For I have trodden them in My anger, and trampled them in My fury; their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My robes." Psalm 5:5 says of God, "You hate all workers of iniquity, You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man." Psalm 11:5 says,

...the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. Upon the wicked He will rain coals; fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup. For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness...

The postmodern church has made a God in their own image; an image that tolerates everything except for the intolerance of God, His law, His judgments, and those who agree with God. That they cannot tolerate. But again, this Scripture could not be more clear. These diseases, wars, volcanoes, earthquakes, and other disasters are the direct result of God's fury. You cannot simply say that Satan did them. No, they flow from God's fury.

***G. Though bowls will be poured out on the capitol city of Rome (see v. 10), all bowls relate tightly to Israel (v. 1g - "on the land")***

The last phrase of verse 1 says, "on the land." "Go, pour out the bowls of God's fury on the earth," which should be "on the land." It is a reference to the land of Israel, which was the focal point of many of the problems in Israel and in Rome, as we will see in the next weeks. Israel rode the beast; Israel in many ways stimulated the beast with its money, its manipulations, and its involvement in Roman politics. I don't have time to get into that this morning. But we will see in the upcoming sermons that even the judgments



on the throne of the beast are somehow related to the land of Israel.

### **III. An overview of all seven bowls**

#### ***A. Bowls 1-3 deal with Israel being finished as a nation (vv. 2-7) in the false messianic Bar Kochba rebellion (AD 132-136)***

Now, let me end with a brief overview of this chapter. As these bowls are poured out, they prophetically show what these same angels will do in the future to both Rome and Israel. The first three bowls focus on the total end of Israel. That automatically rules out AD 70 since Israel did not end as a nation on AD 70. Jerusalem did; temple did; Old covenant did. But the beast from the land (in other words, the pro-Roman Israeli government) continued to rule Israel and continued to persecute Christians for the next 66 years. But these three bowls spell the absolute end of the beast from the land.

It is a grouping of three disasters, symbolized by a similar grouping of three Festivals. And all three describe events that resulted from the Bar Kochba Rebellion. I won't explain the symbolism today, but if you want a quick and dirty list. Bowl one occurred on the Festival of Tabernacles in AD 136. It was the disease that resulted from the bodies and blood that had accumulated after the disaster of the last part of chapter 14. And 15:5 hints that the first bowl will be "after these things." It is. And only then does it move backwards in time.

Bowl 2 occurred just a few days earlier on Ab 9 of AD 136.

Bowl 3 was eight days before that on Ab 1. Some books date these events in 135, and others in 136.

#### ***B. Bowls 4-5 deal with the seventh head of the sea Beast (Vespasian) being killed and Titus experiencing Vesuvius and the massive plagues that followed (AD 79ff)***

Then we move to God dealing with the seventh head of the sea beast, Rome. So the first set deals with Israel's end. The second set deals with the Rome pictured in the seven heads. You have a quick succession of disasters that befell Rome in a one to two year period covering AD 79-80. The seventh head of the beast, Vespasian, died in AD 79. Mount Vesuvius erupted unleashing 100,000 times the thermal energy of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki bombings. That's a lot of heat - 100,000 times more. It just so happens that Titus' own legion was in Pompeii vacationing when it erupted. So the very soldiers that came to Israel were destroyed. Even dignitaries from Israel

were vacationing there - like another Agrippa, the son of Drusilla and Felix. A massive locust plague darkened the skies. Then disease struck the entire empire killing off an estimated 10,000 people a day. The city of Rome was ravaged by fire for three days, killing almost as many as the AD 64 fire under Nero. The Temple of Jupiter, the Pantheon, and Pompey's Theater burned to the ground. So bowls 4-5 are a fitting grouping to summarize the end of the seventh head, Vespasian, and God's pronouncement of the imminent end of Titus. He would die within a year.

***C. Bowl 6 deals with the Euphrates miracle and both physical and demonic armies converging on Israel (AD 69-70)***

Then bowl six shows the miraculous crossing of the Euphrates in AD 69 leading vast armies to decimate Israel and then using these armies to decimate Rome in the year of four emperors.

***D. Bowl 7 is a reiteration of the Seal 6 (6:12-17), which occurred on Passover of AD 66***

And bowl 7 takes us back to AD 66 where it all started. And God signaled the massive destructions that would follow with signs in the sky and on the earth, and the beginning of three factions fighting for control of Jerusalem. So that's the bird's eye view. And by the way, these bowl groupings have an ABBA format as well - surprise, surprise. Another chiasm. It deals with Israel, then Rome, then Rome, then Israel.

The only last admonition that I would give you beyond the applications I have already made is that you can trust God to be in control during tough times. That includes His sovereign control over disease (v. 2), over pollution (verses 3-7), over global warming (verses 8-9), over volcanoes and pain (verses 10-11), over armies and demons (verses 12-16), and over earthquakes, storms, and social disruption (verses 17-21). Knowing that God is sovereign brings great stability to a Christian's life. May each of us be a witness to the post-modern church and the world that we really do believe in a sovereign God who brings redemptive judgments. Amen.