

CHAPTER 16

"Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, 'Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth'" (16:1).

The seven bowls of wrath, called the "third woe," now fall upon the whole earth.

Wrath is no longer restricted to the third or fourth part, but the whole scene is given up to judgment. There is not only an increase of severity, but the whole of that which had once the light of God, and had far and wide enjoyed outward privileges, is in complete apostacy, and given up to His wrath.¹

A question now must be addressed: Do the seven bowls follow the seven trumpets in chronological order, or are they the same as the seven trumpets or in some way encompassed within the seven trumpets? The same question can be raised concerning the seven trumpets in relation to the seven seals.

Gundry argues that there are two "acceptable arrangements of seals, trumpets, and bowls"² and presents a schematic of each.

Arrangement 1

In this arrangement the seventh of each of the three series reaches to the return of Christ. "Thus," explains Gundry, "there is a stepping back between seals and trumpets and between trumpets and bowls," as depicted in the following schematic:

										Second Coming						
Seals	1		2		3		4		5		6		7			
			Trumpets				1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
							Bowls			1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Arrangement 2

In this arrangement the events of the seals, trumpets, and bowls follow consecutively in which the seven trumpets constitute the seventh seal and the seven bowls constitute the seventh trumpet. The schematic would look like this:

																	Second Coming
Seals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7										
			Trumpets					1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
								Bowls			1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Walvoord takes this second view and states that the seven seals comprehend the whole:

1 Kelly, *Lectures*, pg. 346.
2 Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, pg. 75.

"Contained in the seventh seal are all the subsequent developments leading to the second coming of Christ, including the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of the wrath of God."³ Later he adds,

The vial judgments are subsequent to the trumpet judgments and proceed out of and constitute the seventh trumpet. The judgments described in the trumpet pronouncements and the vial pronouncements fall in rapid succession like trip-hammer blows, and they all will be consummated within a short period of time toward the close of the great tribulation. The vial judgments, the climax of God's divine dealings with a blasphemous earth, lead up to the second coming of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.⁴

Walvoord also cites Scroggie positively:

The trumpets, therefore, do not *double back* over all or some of the Seals, but lie under the sixth Seal, and proceed from it. For this reason it is equally incorrect to speak of the Trumpets as following the Seals. They do not follow, but are the Seventh Seal. . . . Therefore the Bowls do not *double back* over the Seal and Trumpet Judgments; neither is it correct to say that they follow the Trumpet visitations. They do not follow because THEY ARE THE SEVENTH TRUMPET CONTENTS."⁵

Archer offers a modification of arrangement one in which there is less overlap than depicted in the schematic.

Yet note that the sixth-seventh seal (6:12ff; 8:1), the seventh trumpet (11:15ff), and the seventh bowl (16:17ff) all depict events connected with the Second Advent. There seems to be some overlap between the sixth-seventh seal and the seventh trumpet (cf. 6:12 and 11:15), and the seventh bowl as well. But with the first five or six units in each series there is enough difference in order and contents to prevent any theory of complete overlap from successful demonstration.⁶

What is Reese's opinion? It is yet another modification of arrangement one, but he offers fewer details:

"The Last Trumpet, like the last seal (8:1) and the last plague [bowl] (16:17) brings us *up to* the Day of the Lord (Rev. 19:7-11ff.) and the inauguration of the Messianic reign (20:1-6), and no farther"⁷

Arranged in a slightly different schematic is the view of Dale Ralph Davis, which, briefly stated, is:

The suggestion now advanced is that the end of each judgment-series is parallel to the end of the other judgment-series; that, although the series are sequential in

3 Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 150.

4 *Ibid.*, pg. 232.

5 Emphasis original. Cited by Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 150.

6 Archer, unpublished class notes.

7 Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, pg. 86.

the main, the seventh members of each are simultaneous or parallel. (In the case of the seals, we hold the sixth seal as being included with the seventh in this parallelism; see below). The question is then: does the conclusion of each series bring us to the End, i.e., the immediate prelude to the second coming of Christ?⁸

Seals 1-5		6th-7th Seals	P
	Trumpets 1-6	7th Trumpet	A
		7th Bowl	R
	Bowls 1-6		O
			U
			S
			I
			A

Nathaniel West seems to have an opinion somewhat similar to the above. In commenting on Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2 of Daniel, he states:

This dream and its interpretation are the *fundamental prophecy* of all the prophecies in the book of Daniel. All else is supplementary to this. Chapter vii. repeats and enlarges this, under new symbols, in order to bring out *something new* in the development and character of each of the four empires. Chapter viii. repeats again the second and third empires, in yet other symbols, again to develop *something new*. . . . The same law of advance to the goal or end, of return and advance again to the same end, that we find in the different series of sevens in John's apocalypse, we also find here. The future is too complex to be represented in one series of visions, the end too great to be displayed in one revelation. The *something new* requires a return to begin again, a cyclical movement, to make a new race, to the end, till all that God intends to reveal is given.⁹

What conclusion, if any, can we come to? A brief review of the seals and trumpets might provide some help.

THE SEVEN SEALS

- 1st seal - The "White Rider" goes out and conquers.
- 2nd seal - The "Red Rider" takes peace from the earth by means of people killing each other.
- 3rd seal - The "Black Rider" brings a time of famine and scarcity.
- 4th seal - The "Pale Green Rider" kills one-quarter of the earth's population.
- 5th seal - Souls of martyrs are seen in heaven. More are yet to be killed.
- 6th seal - Cosmic disturbances erupt in the heavens.
- 7th seal - 7 trumpets are announced.

I give my conclusion now, recognizing that with the variety of opinions from such great scholars

8 Davis, Dale Ralph, "The Relationship Between the Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls in the Book of Revelation." JETS, June 1, 1973. His answer to his own question is yes, and he then proceeds to give four primary lines of evidence for support.

9 West, Nathaniel, *Daniel's Great Prophecy, The Eastern Question, The Kingdom*, pg. 37.

as have been quoted here, it is hardly likely to be the correct one. But still I include it for two reasons. First, because God blesses our efforts to understand his word. Second, understanding doctrine and theology is a growing process. How many scholars have not changed their positions at least once over a lifetime of study? Who can say he has known it all, and correctly, from the very first?

The 1st seal represents the first 3 1/2 years of the tribulation, a time of world-wide peace. The 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th seals represent a period of trial and tribulation for the saints when Antichrist is reigning supreme, in other words, the last 3 1/2 years of Daniel's 70th week. When the 6th seal opens, we have come to the time of God's wrath against the beast, the very last days of the tribulation which shall usher in the reign of Christ.

Let's now review the trumpets.

THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

- 1st trumpet - A third of the trees are burned up.
- 2nd trumpet - 1/3 of all ships are destroyed and 1/3 of ocean waters polluted.
- 3rd trumpet - A meteor falls to earth poisoning 1/3 of rivers and springs.
- 4th trumpet - 1/3 of both the day and night are darkened.
- 5th trumpet - Hordes of strange creatures are released from the abyss; 144,000 not harmed.
- 6th trumpet - A mighty army is let loose by four angels (the Battle of Armageddon).
- 7th trumpet - The kingdom of Christ is ushered in.

My conclusion: all the trumpets represent God's wrath against the beast and his followers and therefore come after the 5th seal.

With regard to the bowls, we read in 16:1: *"Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels. 'Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.' "* Clearly the bowls must come in after the 5th seal. But where do they fall within the range of the trumpets? We will take a look at each one before offering any opinion.

THE SEVEN BOWLS

- 1st Bowl - Those with the mark of the beast are stricken with loathsome sores.
- 2nd Bowl - The sea becomes blood and every living creature in it dies.
- 3rd Bowl - Rivers and springs of water become undrinkable (blood).
- 4th Bowl - Men are scorched with great heat.
- 5th Bowl - The beast's kingdom becomes full of darkness and pain.
- 6th Bowl - The Euphrates is dried up, preparing the way for great battle.
- 7th Bowl - The earth is shaken when Christ comes in power and glory.

There is definitely, it seems to me, some overlap between the trumpets and the bowls. For example, we find the sea mentioned in both the 2nd trumpet and the 2nd bowl. Also, both the 3rd trumpet and the 3rd bowl mention rivers and springs becoming polluted. Surely the 6th trumpet and the 6th bowl refer to the Battle of Armageddon, and there can be no doubt that the 7th of each series ushers in the reign of Christ. So it would seem to me that either the 1st bowl

and the 1st trumpet overlap, with the bowl adding additional detail (similarly the case for the 4th and 5th of each series), or the first five bowls are intermixed with the first five trumpets, each of the bowls adding to the details provided in the first five but not necessarily paralleling each other.

Keeping in mind that all the seals, trumpets, and bowls are in God's control, the visualization would then be as follows:

SATAN'S WRATH AGAINST "THE CHURCH"

Seals 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 (seal 1 being a time of false peace falling in the first 3 1/2 years)

GOD'S WRATH AGAINST "THE BEAST" AND HIS FOLLOWERS

							Second Coming
Seals	6						7
Trumpets	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Bowls	(1	2	3	4	5)*	6	7

*Bowls not necessarily spaced correctly between the five trumpets, but they are in order.

Before leaving this subject of seals, trumpets, and bowls, one question comes to mind, and it is connected with Matthew 24:37-39, wherein we read, *"But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field . . ."* Luke 17:26, 27 is similar: *"And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: they ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all."* My question is: With all the turmoil and destruction resulting from the seals, trumpets, and bowls, how could it possibly be that anyone would be living in an unconcerned, careless, lackadaisical manner?

One answer is, that these verses in Matthew 24 and Luke 17 refer only to the time before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Beilby Porteus (going back to verse 36 in Matthew 24) comments as follows:

"But of that day and hour knows no man; no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." That is, although the time when Jerusalem is to be destroyed is, as I have told you, fixed generally to this generation, yet the precise day and hour of that event is not known either to men or angels, but to God only. This he speaks in his human nature, and in his prophetic capacity. This point was not made known to him by the Spirit, nor was he commissioned to reveal it.

It is supposed by several learned commentators, that the words *that day* and *that*

hour refer to the day of judgment, which is immediately alluded to in the preceding verse, *heaven and earth shall pass away*. This conjecture is an ingenious one, and may be true; but if it be, this verse should be inclosed in a parenthesis, because what follows most certainly relates to the destruction of Jerusalem (to which St. Luke in the seventeenth chapter expressly confines it), and cannot, without great violence to the words, be applied to the final advent of Christ.¹⁰

Unfortunately, I have not found any others who comment on this specific question.

Leaving, now, the subject of seals, trumpets, and bowls, we turn to verse 16 where we read, "*And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.*" Buswell comments,

Note that Armageddon is not the place of the battle. The great plateau to the north west of Jerusalem, the triangular area which touches the Mediterranean coast at Mount Carmel, the area which includes the important town of Megiddo, is a great military cantonment, a center of military preparation. The Antichrist himself establishes his headquarters at a point farther south, "And he shall plant the tabernacle of his palace between the sea [Mediterranean] and the glorious Holy mountain [Jerusalem]" (Daniel 11:45).¹¹

But if Armageddon is only the place where the armies of the Antichrist are gathered in preparation for the actual battle, where will this battle actually occur? Buswell continues,

The student should note that at the gathering of the armies of the world to the military cantonment of Armageddon, the collectivistic or totalitarian power of the Beast has come to its highest realization. . . . He rules politically over the entire human race (Revelation 13:7; 17:12,13), and now he has gathered the military fighting force of the world to prevent Christ from taking possession of the city of Jerusalem, as the prophets of old had unanimously declared that He would do.

It must be remembered that the last great battle, the battle of the valley of Jehoshaphat, erroneously called the battle of Armageddon, is not an international conflict. As reflected in the prophecies of Zechariah, especially chapter 14, in Joel, chapter 3, and in Revelation, chapters 18-20, this final battle is a direct fulfillment of the picture set forth in the second Psalm . . ."¹²

Thus the battle actually takes place at Jerusalem. As Joel states in 3:16, when the battle is engaged, "Yahweh will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem." But what about the name

10 Beilby Porteus, *Lectures on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, pg. 272. Porteus takes the position that all of Matthew 24 should be taken primarily to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. The reader will find his commentary illuminating as he brings much history to the fore when referring to Josephus, Tacitus, and Eusebius.

11 Buswell, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, pp. 474-475. Note also the comment in *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (1967), p. 1368, n. 1: "The word [Armageddon] is generally interpreted as meaning *the mountain of Megiddo*. Megiddo is located on the south side of the plain of Jezreel, and is often referred to in the O.T. as a military stronghold (Josh. 12:21; 17:11; 2 Ki. 9:27; 23:29; etc.)."

12 Buswell, *Systematic Theology*, pg. 475.

"Valley of Jehoshaphat" mentioned in 3:2, 12? Richard Patterson states that

while several views exist as to the words of the Hebrew text of "The Valley of Jehoshaphat," one must conclude that the primary idea here has to do with a place where God enters into judgment with the nations, not a known valley, as the wordplay makes clear (i.e., "The valley of judgment," "I will judge," cf. v. 12). Joel subsequently called it "the valley of decision" (v. 14).¹³

Zechariah also makes it clear that the great battle is fought at Jerusalem:

For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken . . . Then Yahweh will go forth and fight against those nations . . . And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, *making* a very large valley . . . Thus Yahweh my God will come, *and* all the saints with You. (Zech. 14:2-5)

The last questions to address in chapter 16 concern verse 19: *"Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath."*

Which city is meant by the "great city" and how does "great Babylon" fit?

According to Seiss, the "great city" is Jerusalem. He writes: "The great city here is Jerusalem, for it is specially distinguished from the cities of the Gentiles, which are entirely ruined. It is only partially destroyed, because now in part possessed and appropriated as the Lord's."¹⁴ Further, he distinguishes the "great city" from "great Babylon" and states, "The description and fate of great Babylon forms the subject of the next chapters."¹⁵

What is Milligan's view?

By some it is contended that the "great city" is Jerusalem, by others that it is Babylon. The expression is one which the Apocalypse must itself explain, and in seeking the explanation we must proceed upon the principle that in this book, as much as in any other of the New Testament, the rules of all good writing are followed, and that the meaning of the same words is not arbitrarily changed. When this rule, accordingly, is observed, we find that the epithet is, in chap. xi. 8, distinctly applied to Jerusalem, the words "the great city, where also their Lord was crucified" leaving no doubt upon the point. But, in chap. xviii. 10, 16, 18, 19, 21, the same epithet is not less distinctly applied to Babylon. The only legitimate conclusion is, that there is a sense in which Jerusalem and Babylon are one. This corresponds exactly to what we otherwise learn of the light in which the metropolis of Israel appeared to St. John. To him as an Apostle of the Lord, and during the time that he followed Jesus in the flesh, Jerusalem presented itself in a twofold

¹³ Richard D. Patterson, *Joel*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 259-60.

¹⁴ Seiss, *Lectures*, vol. III, pg. 97.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. III, pg. 99.

aspect. It was the city of God's solemnities, the centre of the old Divine theocracy, the "holy city," the "beloved city." But it was also the city of "the Jews," the city which scorned and rejected and crucified its rightful King. . . . The first of these Jerusalems is the true Church of Christ, the faithful remnant, the little flock that knew the Good Shepherd's voice and followed Him. The second is the degenerate Church, the mass of those who misinterpreted the aim and spirit of their calling, and who by their worldliness and sin "crucified their Lord afresh, and put Him to an open shame." In the latter aspect Jerusalem *becomes* Babylon. As in chap. xi. 8 it became "spiritually," that is mystically, "Sodom and Egypt," so it becomes also the mystical Babylon, partaker of that city's sins, and doomed to its fate. . . .

One other remark has to be made upon the identification of Jerusalem and Babylon by the Seer. It has been said that he has one special aspect of the metropolis of Israel in his eye. Yet we are not to suppose that he confines himself to that metropolis. As on so many other occasions, he starts from what is limited and local only to pass in thought to what is unlimited and universal. His Jerusalem, his Babylon, is not the literal city. She is "the great harlot that sitteth upon many waters;" and "the waters which thou sawest," says the angel to the Seer, "are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues [ch. 17:15]." The fourfold division guides us, as usual, to the thought of dominion over the whole earth. Babylon is not the Jerusalem only of "the Jews." She is the great Church of God throughout the world when that Church becomes faithless to her true Lord and King. . . .

The conclusion to be drawn is that Babylon is a spiritual city. That, as such, she is Jerusalem is further confirmed by the fact that, at the close of the chapter [ch. 18], it is said, *And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that have been slain upon the earth.*¹⁶

And what does Walvoord say?

The question has been raised as to the reference to the great city, inasmuch as Babylon is specifically mentioned later in the verse. Some have taken both references to indicate Babylon, others have identified the first great city of the verse as Jerusalem. In 11:8 Jerusalem is referred to as "the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified." It is also clear that great typographical changes will take place around Jerusalem in connection with the judgments at the end of the age (cf. Zech. 14:4). There is therefore some justification for considering Jerusalem as a possible interpretation. There does not, however, seem to be any clear evidence that Jerusalem is destroyed with the judgments which overtake the earth at the end of the great tribulation. Babylon, however, according to Scripture, is destined to be completely destroyed. Whether this refers to Rome which is spiritual Babylon or, as some have understood it, to a rebuilt city of Babylon on the Euphrates, it is clear in any case that Babylon is the special object of the judgment of God, expressed graphically in

¹⁶ Milligan, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 274-275, 295, 310. One needs to read his whole commentary in context to avoid the conclusion that he is in any sense contradictory.

the statement "to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath."¹⁷

An identification of great Babylon will have to wait until chapter 18.

¹⁷ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 240.