

## AN ANALYSIS OF THE SEVENTH BOWL OF THE APOCALYPSE

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*The extent and structure of the seventh bowl of Revelation have not been completely clear. The angelic agent who shows the new Jerusalem and the structural pattern of the two major intercalations regarding Babylon and the new Jerusalem indicate that the bowl extends from 16:17 all the way through 22:5. A number of miscellaneous indications including two dramatic announcements of the end, the battle of Armageddon, the final judgment of Satan, and the finality of the last of the last plagues confirm this extended nature of the bowl. Potential objections to that conclusion have satisfactory answers. The core happenings of the bowl have their descriptions in eight scenes in 19:11-21:8, with the two major intercalations before and after them. This definition of the seventh bowl allows for it to have a nature similar to the seventh seal and seventh trumpet, provides for a proper literary structure of the book as a whole, and confirms the premillennial return of Christ.*

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Throughout most of the visional portion of Revelation (4:1-22:5), the prevailing anticipation looks toward the establishment of a kingdom on earth over which God Himself will rule.<sup>1</sup> John reaches the climax of his expectation in a series of bowl judgments that issue from the last of seven trumpet judgments which, in turn, result from the seventh of seven seal judgments.<sup>2</sup> The spotlight of the present

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<sup>1</sup>See Robert L. Thomas, "The Kingdom of Christ in the Apocalypse," *TMSJ* 3/2 (Fall 1992):117-40, for details of how this anticipation expresses itself.

<sup>2</sup>See Robert L. Thomas, "The Structure of the Apocalypse: Recapitulation or Progression?" *TMSJ* 4/1 (Spring 1993):45-66, for an elaboration of the case to support progression as the

study is on the last of the seven bowl judgments with the goal of discovering the extent of the account describing that bowl, examining the structure of that special part, and deriving implications based on what is discovered.

## THE EXTENT OF THE SEVENTH BOWL

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overarching scheme of Revelation's structure. The present discussion of the seventh bowl does not depend solely on conclusions of this earlier study, but assumptions based on it will inevitably surface here and there.

The earliest word about the seventh bowl is in Rev 16:17-21. The pouring of that bowl in the air leads to a loud voice out of the temple from the throne, proclaiming, "It is done," or better, "It has been and remains done" (Ggōnen [*gegōnen*]). The action with its announcement indicates that the climax has come to be and remains so now and forever.<sup>3</sup> The storm theophany, including the greatest earthquake yet, follows the utterance of that voice (cf. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19).<sup>4</sup> The great city, probably Jerusalem,<sup>5</sup> undergoes a division into three parts, and the cities of the Gentiles fall. But an announcement that God has appointed Babylon to incur His intense wrath is the worst news of all for the earth. The flight of the islands and the disappearance of the mountains along with a pelting by unbelievably large hailstones conclude the initial announcement. The result is human blasphemy against God because of the plague of hailstones.

Most exegetes feel that the seventh-bowl description does not terminate at the end of chap. 16, but continues into chaps. 17-18 with a detailing of Babylon's downfall.<sup>6</sup> Just how far it continues beyond that is, however, a point of obscurity. A definitive analysis of this issue from any perspective is hard to come by, so the present investigation, rather than evaluating several proposals to reach a decision, will advance what is hopefully an exegetically cogent theory with its supporting argumentation.

The thesis to be defended is that *the text all the way from 16:17 through 22:5 constitutes a description of the seventh bowl judgment*. The following rationale supports this thesis.

### *The Angelic Agent for Showing the New Jerusalem*

The angel delegated to reveal special features of the descending holy city in 21:9-10 is one of the angels of the seven last plagues, another name for the seven bowls.<sup>7</sup> The same identity holds for the angelic revealer in 17:1 where some would like to see him as the seventh of the seven bowl-angels because of the relevance of his revelation to Babylon, the main object of the seventh bowl.<sup>8</sup> The wording does not provide sufficient information to tell which of the

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<sup>3</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935) 482.

<sup>4</sup>Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Macmillan, 1906) 210.

<sup>5</sup>James Moffatt, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (W. Robertson Nicoll, ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.) 5:449; J. Massyngberde Ford, "The Structure and Meaning of Revelation 16," *ExpTim* 98/11 (August 1987):329.

<sup>6</sup>E.g., Swete, *Apocalypse* p. 213; Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Swengel, Pa.: Bible Truth Depot, n.d.) 340; Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John* (HNTC; New York: Harper, 1940) 337; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 248; Alan F. Johnson, "Revelation," in *EBC* (Frank E. Gaebelen, ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 12:554; Robert W. Wall, *Revelation* (in New International Biblical Commentary, W. Ward Gasque, ed.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991) 204.

<sup>7</sup>M. Robert Mulholland, *Revelation, Holy Living in an Unholy World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 276.

<sup>8</sup>Friedrich Dsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, in Meyer's Commentary (Henry E. Jacobs, trans. and ed.; New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1887) 428; Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (4 vols.; London: Longmans, Green, 1903) 4:704.

seven it was in 17:1 or in 21:9, however. Nor does it identify the two with each other. The information can only tie these two revealers to the seven last plagues in a general way.

As noted above, the vast majority have endorsed that tie-in for the angel of 17:1 because of the immediate context.<sup>9</sup> Those willing to attach the account of the new Jerusalem in 21:9`22:5 as part of the seventh bowl have been more scarce, however, probably because of the contextual distance between 16:17 and 21:9.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, one of the angels commissioned to dispense the seven last plagues also had the charge of portraying divine love and fellowship in the heavenly city upon the new earth.<sup>11</sup>

This forges a strong link in the chain connecting the end with the beginning in the larger context of 16:17`22:5.

### *The Structural Pattern of the Two Major Intercalations*

Few if any have overlooked the major antithesis between two women in the closing chapters of the Apocalypse.<sup>12</sup> The harlot Babylon receives detailed treatment in 17:1`18:24, and the bride of the Lamb in 21:9`22:5. Another element, a structural one, also marks the two major sections as parallel to one another, however. The wording of the introductory and concluding formulas for the two intercalations are to a remarkable degree either identical or nearly identical. These striking correspondences have been largely unnoticed or inoperative in analyses of the last chapters of the book.<sup>13</sup>

The introductory formulas to the sections contain twenty identical words in the same order and then five identical words in the same order followed by an analogous antithetical development: *prnh* (*porn*, "harlot")` *gyn* (*gyn*, "woman") / *pliw* (*polis*, "city"); *nmfh* (*nymph*, "bride")` *gyn* (*gyn*, "wife") / *pliw* (*polis*, "city").<sup>14</sup> The extreme similarity of the introductions is evident in the following alignments of texts:

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<sup>9</sup>See note 6 above.

<sup>10</sup>E.g., William Lee, "The Revelation of St. John," in *The Holy Bible* (F. C. Cook, ed.; London: John Murray, 1881) 4:819; Mulholland, *Revelation*, p. 276.

<sup>11</sup>Lee, "Revelation" 4:819.

<sup>12</sup>Lee ("Revelation" 4:820), A. T. Robertson (*Word Pictures in the New Testament* [6 vols.; Nashville: Broadman, 1933] 6:470), and Mulholland (*Revelation* 293) are among many who comment on the contrast between the two women. Richard Bauckham has also noted this contrast as well as the broad structural conclusions reached in this section ("The Economic Critique of Rome in Revelation 18," in *Images of Empire* [Loveday Alexander, ed.; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991] 47-48).

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Charles H. Giblin, "Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Theology of Revelation 16`22," *Bib* 55/4 (1974):488-89. Most have noted some of the similarities, but only with isolated comments (e.g., Alford, *Greek Testament*, 4:739; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977] 307 n. 1; Mulholland, *Revelation* 26-30, 276). It has been extremely rare for any to trace the extent and implications of these correlations.

<sup>14</sup>Giblin, "Structural and Thematic Correlations" 489; cf. Lee, "Revelation" 4:735; Wall, *Revelation* 205. The statistics pertain to the Greek text, of course.

Rev 17:1 Ka luen ew k tn pt gglvn tn xntvn tw

**Rev 21:9 Ka luen ew k tn pt gglvn tn xntvn tw**

*(Kai lthen heis ek tn hepta angeln tn echontn tas*

***(Kai lthen heis ek tn hepta angeln tn echontn tas***

*(And one of the seven angels who had the*

***(And one of the seven angels who had the***

pt filaw, ka llhsen met' mo lgvn, Dero, dejv soi

**pt filaw, . . . ka llhsen met' mo lgvn, Dero, dejv soi**

*hepta phialas, kai elalsen met' emou legn, Deuro, deix soi*

***hepta phialas, . . . kai elalsen met' emou legn, Deuro, deix soi***

seven bowls came, and spoke with me, saying, "Come, I will show

you

**seven bowls came, and spoke with me, saying, "Come, I will show**

**you**

t krma tw prnhw tw meglhw tw kauhmnhw p dtvn polln,

**tn nmfhn tn gynaka to rnoy.**

*to krima ts porns ts megals ts kathmens epi hydatn polln*

***tn nymphn tn gynaika tou arniou***

the judgment of the great harlot who sits beside many waters"

**the bride, the wife of the Lamb"**

. . . Rev 17:3 ka pnegkn me ew rhmon n pnemati.

**Rev 21:10 ka pnegkn me n pnemati p row mga ka chl,**

*kai apnegken me eis ermon en pneumat,*

***kai apnegken me en pneumat epi oros mega kai hypslon,***

and he carried me away into the wilderness in the spirit)

**and he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high moun-  
tain)**

As apparent, the first twenty words of 17:1 are the same as the first twenty of 21:9. Five words agree in form and order between 17:3 and 21:10, with the prepositional phrase ew rhmon (*eis ermon*, "into the wilderness") preceding n pnemati (*en pneumat*, "in the spirit") in 17:3 and p row (*epi oros*, "upon a mountain") following the same phrase in 21:10.

Certain parts of the concluding formulas exhibit a similarity almost as striking. Both have beatitudes, though the substance of the two is different (19:9a; 22:7b). The following layout reflects verbal concurrences of the Greek text:

Rev 19:9 . . . ka lgei moi, Otoi o lgoi lhuino to ueo esin.

**Rev 22:6a Ka epn moi, Otoi o lgoi pisto ka lhuino,**

*(kai legei moi, Houtoi hoi logoi alethinoi tou theou esin*

***(Kai eipen moi, Houtoi hoi logoi pistoi kai althinoi***

*(and he says to me, "These words are the true [ones] of God."*

***(and he said to me, "These words are faithful and true."***

Rev 19:10 ka pesa mprosuen tn podn ato proskynsai

**Rev 22:8 . . . pesa proskynsai mprosuen tn podn to ggloy  
to deiknontw moi tata.**

*kai epesa emprosthen tn podn autou proskynsai*

**... epesa proskynsai emprosthen tn podn tou angelou  
tou deiknyontos moi tauta**

and I fell before his feet to worship

**... I fell to worship before the feet of the angel who  
showed me these things**

ka lgei moi, 6Ora m< sndoylw so emi ka tn

**Rev 22:9 ka lgei moi, 6Ora m< sndoylw so emi ka tn**

*kai legei moi, Hora m; syndoulos sou eimi kai tn*

**kai legei moi, Hora m; syndoulos sou eimi kai tn**

and he says to me, "See that you do not [do this]; I am the  
fellow-slave of you and

**and he says to me, "See that you do not [do this]; I am the  
fellow-slave of you and**

delfn soy tn xntvn tn martyran 1lho<  
**delfn soy tn profhtn ka tn throntvn tow Igoyw to bibloy toto<**  
*adelphn sou tn echontn tn martyrian Isou*  
***adelphn sou tn profhtn kai tn trountn tous logous tou bibliou***  
***toutou***  
 your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus;  
**your brethren the prophets and of those who keep the words of**  
**this book;**

t ue prosknhson.  
**t ue prosknhson.**  
*t the proskynson.*  
***t the proskynson.***  
 worship God."  
**worship God."**

gr martyra 1lho1 stin t pnema tw profhteaw.  
**22:6b ka kriow, uew tn pneymtvn tn profhtn**  
*h gar martyria Isou estin to pneuma ts propheteias.)*  
***kai ho kyrios, ho theos tn pneumatn tn profhtn.)***  
 for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.)  
**and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets.)**

The first five words of 19:9b and 22:6a agree exactly with the subsequent concurrence of *lhuino* (*althinoi*, "true"). Five words of 19:10a are the same as five words of 22:8b, with a variation of word order. The first thirteen words of 19:10b and 22:9a are identical. Three words of 19:10c and 22:9b coincide exactly, and "the spirit of prophecy" in 19:10d is conceptually similar to "the spirits of the prophets" in 22:6b. The summation of 22:6 ff. appropriately concludes 21:1-8 and its elaboration in 21:9`22:5, just as 19:9b-10 summarizes and concludes 17:1`19:8.<sup>15</sup>

The resemblances are too close and too many to be accidental. Of course, the tactic of attributing the similarity to a later editor who copied one or the other from its companion passage<sup>16</sup> is a way to explain the correspondences, but endorsing the whole book to be the work of John as historically received has much greater plausibility than differing theories that partition the book into segments assigned to different scribes or editors. Those who respect the integrity of the Apocalypse must recognize the introductory and concluding formulas as intended to mark off the antithetical sections that elaborate on the background and destiny of the two women, both of whom relate to the seventh last plague.

In the closing formula of 22:6-9 two main obstacles seem to impede this otherwise clear-cut structural arrangement, however. The first consists of elements in the formula that make it a conclusion to the whole book rather than to just the vision of the heavenly city. To list a few, these include the expression *dejai tow doloiw ato*

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Moffatt, "Revelation" 5:478.

<sup>16</sup>Moffatt, "Revelation" 5:489; R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John* (2 vols., ICC; New York: Scribner's Sons, 1920) 2:128-29.