

Notes on Revelation 16

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The Judgment of the Seven Bowls Judgment against sinners and the earth on which they live is not a new theme in Revelation. It is a recurring subject (as in chapters 6, 8, 11 and 14). What is different in the seven bowls is that their judgment no longer has the degrees we find in the seals and trumpets. In the seals a fourth of the earth are affected (6:8); in the trumpets it is a third (8:7,8,9,10,11,12). In chapter 16 the fractions are over. The wrath poured out is intense and full; the response to judgment is the opposite to what would lead to reconciliation with the offended Lord. Those enduring this judgment have no interest in being restored to God and no remorse when they suffer; instead they curse. With the angels' gospel appeal and warnings rejected (chapter 14), all that is left is God's pure justice to find its expression. There is no situation ever more terrible than for a sinner to stand in his sin before God with no mediator (note John 8:24). God has sent a Mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ, but no one can have Him when worship is given elsewhere. In this text that mark is a confession of allegiance to the Antichrist. We have reached the point in Revelation where the unmitigated wrath of God is poured on the earth without further warning or appeal. With these seven plagues "*the wrath of God is finished*" (15:1). The introduction in chapter 15 is odd. The angels with the plagues come first, followed by great rejoicing that all nations will come and worship the Lord (15:2-4). That does not include every person; chapter 16 reveals their fate.

The thread of salvation There was terrible judgment, though partial, in chapters 8 & 9. But after that something was stressed more than judgment. In chapter 10 the scroll was open and the seven thunders (which surely sound like judgment, as in 8:5) were suppressed. John was told to eat the scroll, because he would prophesy to many peoples, nations, languages, and kings (10:11). Then too the two witnesses in prophesying delivered a testimony (11:7). Note in the beginning and end of this book how central testimony is (1:9 & 22:20). The world did not welcome that testimony, and the two witnesses were killed by the beast (11:7). Yet the Lord turned their ministry and death into a powerful spectacle. Many were brought to fear God (the opposite of the response in 16:8-11), and they gave God the glory (11:13) called for in 14:7. God's salvation is present in chapters 11 and 14.

Eventually the kingdom of the world becomes "*the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ*" (11:15). The weight of such a statement needs to rest heavily on our minds, because THAT is the wonderful way it is going to be. On the other side, chapter 12 sets out a series of frustrations for the devil. He will be as ineffective in his final thrust against the Lord as he was in all his previous tries. (See Isaiah 54:17.) He is "all in". All Satan has in Revelation is a string of failures. Thus the record of his last big lunge for the universal worship of himself in chapter 13 is followed by the delightful scene of the redeemed in heaven in 14. He did not get them, not one. The saints Satan killed are at first glance the redeemed from the earth who

have become the joyful musicians of heaven. Then the slain are also presented as the *firstfruits* of the full harvest to come (14:4). That full harvest in 14:15,16 is a permanent take-away from the devil; He is losing his treasure. The theme of salvation is in full stride. Following this, it is no surprise to read that “all nations will come and worship you” (15:4). Such rejoicing in heaven (15:2) is by God’s redeemed people, murdered by the beast but praising God for His victory. Revelation has beautiful paradoxes. The tables have been turned, for often in Scripture the believing remnant was a small fraction. Now in 15:4 the nations come as nations. The powerful salvation unleashed on this earth is enduring. The devil does not win them back. The nations with their glory and honor will stream into the New Jerusalem as saved people (21:24-26).

But what of those who resist to the end? Not all have God-fearing repentance. This was the gospel appeal in 14:6,7: “*Fear God and give Him glory.*” Revelation 16 addresses the irreversible plight of those who do the opposite. The angels in Revelation 14 warn of the fall of Babylon and anguish in hellfire for those who reject Christ by following the beast. The warnings of Revelation 14 find their fulfillment in the seven bowls. With the bowls the wrath of God is finished (15:1). The seven bowls are the wrath of God. A few encouraging messages are sprinkled in for believers to remind us that God is true to His warnings (15:3; 16:5-7), but from the standpoint of the unrepentant the suffering of God’s wrath is all that is left.

The wrath is in the bowls in the angels’ hands; when poured out the effects are referred to as plagues. An unusual feature of the seven bowls is that there is no mention of human death related to them. The emphasis in chapter 16 is crafted to show the response of sinners alive and cursing. The shocking news is not that sinners suffer, but that they go down cursing to the end. Here is passionate depravity in full bloom. But for the grace of God, there go I.

16:1 The loud voice in heaven is the voice of God, coming from the temple, His dwelling. The seventh plague is also introduced by the voice from the temple (16:17). From first to last these plagues find their source in God’s repugnance for sin. The angels do not act unilaterally; they execute the commandment of God. Warnings rejected have expired; the order to pour out God’s wrath was implemented in an unbroken series of judgments. Unlike the seals and trumpets there is no pause; it is all retribution for sin until God’s wrath is finished (15:1).

16:2 The first plague This plague was like the boils on the Egyptians (Exodus 9:8-12). Those who served the beast worshipped when they said, “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?” (13:4) Their pain and visible sores demonstrated the consequence of false worship; it was an answer from God. They had chosen the mark of the beast, a mark on their bodies, and there on their flesh were sores from God. Revelation has much about the true worship of our God and false worship deceitfully promoted by His enemy. Worship has enormous consequences for the worshipper. All the devil wants from you is your

worshipping allegiance, and that you should then participate in his suffering forever in the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41). Satan takes everything and gives nothing. Only the Lord presents every situation truthfully.

16:3,4 Plagues two and three Here comes the blood. Both the sea and inland rivers are afflicted,. There is nothing partial in this imagery; *every* living thing (i.e., nonhuman creatures) died. Water turning to blood harks back to the plagues on Egypt (Exodus 7:14-25). Those were the actions of God. They shed blood, and God shed theirs. In the second plague the blood was like that from a dead person. This anticipates the word of special explanation in vv.5 & 6. The blood of the Lord's dead was upon the ground, so the second bowl depicts the blood of the blood spillers.

16:5,6 A surprising interjection appears between plagues three and four. In both the seals and trumpets there is a break in rhythm and topic *only after the fourth* seal or trumpet has been announced (chapters 6 & 8). People familiar with apocalyptic material like the first recipients would note this. They could track a more complicated story line than many can today. Thus they were prepared for another 1, 2, 3, 4 plus a break in these outpoured bowls, but bowl 5 reads like a repetition of 4. That is deliberate. And that explanation coming after the third plague would attract special attention by its location. The seals and trumpets do not have anything different appearing after item 3. Thus the bowls do not fit the earlier pattern, because they depict the ultimate judgment without restraint.

Two speakers

First the angel speaks. This is the angel in charge of polluting the waters in plagues two and three. He speaks to explain that these two plagues are bloody. It is appropriate for God to do this, because the bloodshed of His saints and prophets has provoked from Him a judgment in kind. The whore of Babylon drank the blood of saints and prophets (17:6). Now it is her turn; she must drink the blood of God's vengeance, and that is what she deserves. This exceptional judgment is not the result of God having a fit of bad temper. God does not change. He is not moody. He is always the Holy One and terrible retribution from Him is as holy as the kindness of Jesus feeding the five thousand. Our Lord loves righteousness and hates iniquity. Both attributes, eternally present in God's nature, are equally holy.

Second a word from the altar. The souls (disembodied because murdered) cried to the Lord from beneath the altar. They wondered when their blood would be avenged (6:9-11). In the seven plagues in which the wrath of God is fully executed, the saints under the altar have their full answer from God. Their blood has been avenged (see 6:10). The altar will not be heard from again in Revelation. Later in chapter 20 we find these same souls sitting on thrones and reigning with Christ. From this point on, Revelation will speak only of their blessing. In chapter 16 the vengeance required by justice has been exercised. This prompts the murdered saints to acknowledge that God has been true to His promises. Their prayers have been answered. God's justice came down on the wicked.

16:8-11 Plagues four and five From a structural standpoint, these plagues depart from the expected 4/3 pattern of seals and trumpets. Those earlier breaks showed that the judgment did not grind on in such a way that there was no possible escape. Prior to chapter 15 repentance was called for, and relief was offered. In the bowl judgments the gospel is absent, and the plagues are neither stopped nor slowed. There is no pause between bowls four and five. In unrelenting judgment, the fourth bowl is followed immediately by the fifth. To show that this is deliberate, these two plagues have this outstanding feature: In both God is cursed because He brought His wrath upon them. In the defiled mind God is never right, and man justifies his sin. God justifies sinners in Christ; He never justifies sin. The other sinful response in bowls four and five is the refusal to glorify God.

The first of the three proclaiming angels pleaded in chapter 14 that the inhabitants of earth should “*fear God and give him glory.*” In the fourth plague these inhabitants did the opposite; they cursed; they did not repent or give Him glory, a response directly opposed to the appeal of the gospel, and evidence that they had no fear of God. The misery caused by the fifth bowl outpoured was anguish; then came cursing, and no repentance. So while the awesome judgments are described, their appropriateness is obvious. The scorching heat in this plague is in stark contrast to the reward of the martyrs in 7:16. For believers Christ is the shadow of a great rock (Isaiah 32:2). The darkness of the fifth plague is a reflection of the second last plague on Egypt (Exodus 10:11-29). There the darkness preceded the death of the firstborn. The Lord sometimes used darkness in descriptions of hell (Matthew 8:12; 22:13). Later we shall find that New Jerusalem has no night (21:25).

Revelation mentions thrones throughout. Twice thrones are related to the devil. Here in v.10 it is the throne of the beast. In another text Satan’s throne is in Pergamum (2:13). These thrones are on earth. Satan was cast out of heaven (chapter 12). Later in interpreting 20:4, I shall assert that the thrones of God’s martyrs are in heaven, like all the other thrones in Revelation except for those connected to Satan, and except for the scene in the New Jerusalem (22:1) once the holy city has come down with the Lord.

16:12-16 Plague six The sixth bowl dried the Euphrates River, so that large river was no longer an impediment to the armies of the kings from the east. In earlier times that region was the direction from which Assyria, Babylon, and Persia invaded. Much oppression came upon the Jews from that direction. For Jews hearing plague six, there would be a chill prompted by the memory of those days. In the sixth trumpet (9:13-21) a vast army of 200,000,000 came from the Euphrates. Those in the path of such an onslaught will be crushed. Centuries ago the Assyrians were certain that they had Jerusalem as a prize, but God used their attempt to destroy them (Isaiah 29:5-8). The people of God are still in the cross hairs of Satan, but the Lord in His Second Coming will destroy those who destroy the earth, and He will reward His servants (11:18).

The sixth plague adds another military item. When this bowl of wrath is poured out, the nations are commandeered by the dragon and his cohorts to join in the attack they have in mind. The assembled army would be for the battle coming on the great day of God the Almighty. That such a final battle is in mind begins here. (Trace 16:14; 19:19, & 20:8). In Greek all three texts have the article before the noun *battle*. Thus it is the battle, indicating one event, answered by the Second Coming. The demonic frogs emerge from the mouths of the three deceivers: the dragon, beast and false prophet. The kings of the whole world have been persuaded to combine their forces in one last great assault against God. “*The battle on the great day of God the Almighty*” does not state its target in chapter 16. The forces are assembled at Armageddon, a flat area geographically, “*the broad plain of the earth*” (20:9). Where are the attackers going? Many speak of “the Battle of Armageddon” as if Armageddon is the site of the battle, but that term is not used in the Bible. Armageddon is not the point of attack; it is the staging area. The real target of that coalition will be to wipe out “*the camp of the saints and the beloved city*” (20:9). This is just another way to say that the devil’s goal is to wipe out the people of God. His futile effort will result in the attackers being consumed (20:9). Satan knows he will lose and lose quickly (12:12), but he lusts to take with him all he can. Trusting the evil three results in a terrible end for all who adopt their deceit. This sixth bowl of the wrath of God is provoked by God’s enemy, but it is God’s will that Satan’s stratagem should backfire. The activity of the enemy is self-defeating, making it indeed a real plague from the Lord. What appears as a big bold move by the enemy with all the appearance of great success is actually the strategy of God to bring the devil’s kingdom to an end. Immediately he is cast into the lake of fire (20:10).

“Behold I am coming ...” Within this sober narrative a word from the Lord Jesus is inserted as the seven plagues continue unabated. It is a word of great comfort. One form of that comfort is the picture in chapter 7 of the immediate reception in heaven of all those slain in the great tribulation. The Lord’s words in 16:15 speak from a different angle. Revelation was not written to comfort saints in heaven; they do not need comfort. It is the ones on earth who endure the withering onslaught (12:12). Speaking to these exposed saints, the Lord assures them that He is coming. Hopefully after a lifetime of being Christians we learn that God jealously guards the time of His promised action, and that He is pleased when we trust Him while having nothing more than His promise (Hebrews 11:6). He is ready to act with suddenness against those whose passion is to destroy His church. He does not announce the time, just the certainty of His action on their behalf. In this sense He acts like an unannounced thief. And so surprising “*fire came down from heaven and consumed them*” (20:9). That is the end of the devil and his influence in this world. The Satanic team was gripped by their passions and wanted this battle so they could finish off the church, but God also wants the moment when He will finish off the devil and company.

The duty of readiness is laid on us. We are to believe God’s word; we are to be awake. Revelation sharpens issues which cannot be discerned by observing the world. The newspaper is no help. God’s counsel is not to go hide in the woods, but simply to expect the

Lord to come (Matthew 25:13). That we think this way must be very very important to the Lord. He refers to His coming frequently in Revelation. He shows the judgment tied to His coming in a variety of visions. (See Appendix 16 B below.) The expression of God being the One “Who is and was *and is to come*” shows the agenda of Revelation to keep the Lord’s *coming* front and center. Let us have our eyes fixed on His return so much that we are not surprised at the devil’s activity in advance (1 Peter 4:12) and the Lord’s Coming to set all things right.

16:17 The seven seals had the seven trumpets as part of seal seven. The seventh trumpet, speaks of the Lord intervening in great power. The kingdom of the world is replaced by the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. As the seals contain the trumpets, the trumpets contain the bowls. It means that the percolating judgment in both seals and trumpets overflows in a judgment so complete that the Lord said, “*It is done!*” When this is spoken again in 21:6, it refers to the same moment since putting down evil with finality and replacing it with lasting righteousness occur together.

16:19,20 Once in a while Revelation will bring up a matter before its time! For example, the beast is really introduced in chapter 13 with much about him there, yet a brief mention of him appears in 11:7. In this way a seed has been planted, and curiosity stirred. Those listening to Revelation know something about the beast will yet show up. In 14:8 an angel warns that Babylon is fallen. But the full focus on Babylon does not come till chapter 17, 18 and half of 19, the longest section on any subject in the entire book. The sense of anticipation is stirred even more when we read of the great city being split up in a massive earthquake. Switching metaphors, Babylon is made to drink the cup of wrath. Of course this is what she deserves (16:6). Scripture does not soft sell God’s commitment to punish. He is not squeamish about forcing Babylon to drink the cup, and what she drinks is nothing less than “*the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath*”. (For my commentary on v.20, see below “Making Babylon Drink the Cup of Wrath”.)

16:18 & 21 In the texts that follow something out of 4:5 is repeated as a way to show God’s majesty and power. “*From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder ...*” These things make us tremble. In 4:5 there are three components, but in 8:5 there is an addition, “*Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.*” This escalates in 11:19 where, “*God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.*” It is not that a series of events in real time is being predicted, but the issue of intense divine fury is vividly stressed. The impression is that things are moving to a grand climax for those who reject Christ. When the seventh angel poured out his bowl, judgment is conveyed in the shake-up of creation.

The earthquake is described in more detail and the hailstones are bigger than ever. This is not chapter 19, yet 16:17 already adds its note of finality, *“It is done”*. Chapter 16 with the seven bowls of plagues is introduced by 15:1 which described the seven plagues as *“the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.”* The wrath of God cannot be finished and then finished again later. Thus the bowl judgment is as much a picture of the final judgment as the fire from heaven in 20:9. Revelation repeatedly shows the same great event, the most momentous yet to come, from one angle after another. See below: [Appendix 16A The Final Judgment and the Second Coming of Christ.](#)

Review and reflection Chapter 16 is a climax. The judgments have no mercy and no degree of divine restraint. Mercy and dire warning were once broadcasted to the world (14:6-11), but were rejected by those who curse God no matter what. Repentance is absent; there was no fear of God. Thus a crescendo of divine reaction is demonstrated in one way by the mounting phenomena of upheavals in nature. This is presented as earthquakes like none before, and hail with hundred pound hailstones and more; the lightning, rumblings and thunder are always included. In chapter 16 plagues lead the way in the form of extreme sores, much blood, a scorching sun, darkness, and tongues being gnawed in anguish. To this add the Satanic deceit which results in the ultimate worldwide confrontation. “Those who dwell upon the earth” (6:10) attempt to wipe out the people of God. In that great assault the victims become the conquerors, because Revelation stresses their immediate entrance into the presence of their Lord (14:13). Heaven cannot be assaulted. On the other hand, there are no survivors in the last great demonic move against God. It becomes Satan’s final failure, culminating in the Great White Throne judgment and eternal punishment (Revelation 20).

Having that perspective, we read the seals and trumpets as building up to the climax of chapter 16. The grape harvest ends with a staggering scene of judgment (14:17-22). The awesome scene in seal six has all mankind facing the wrath of God and the Lamb; they prefer the mountains to fall on them. This is an early picture (6:15-17) of the wrath spelled out in later chapters. The final judgment is a recurring theme in Revelation.

Chapter 17 begins all over with the vision of Babylon drunk with the blood of saints, yet devoured by the Satanic forces that used her only when it was to their advantage (17:16). Babylon will be burned up (18:8), mourned by merchants, but cheered by saints in their *“Hallelujah”* (19:1-6). In its protracted narrative, Revelation has a series of failures in every attempt by the evil one. Revelation 16 emphasizes the disastrous collapse of God’s opponents. The Lord is using His *“revelation of Jesus Christ”* (1:1) to impress this reality deeply in our hearts. The message is so important that it is a repeated theme. A reality we need impressed upon us is the permanent and future failure on the part of the devil. Chapter 12 is about a string of the dragon’s frustrated attempts, followed in later chapters with one last great effort, *“the battle”*. The other reality that must be impressed on us is the certain hope of the coming New Jerusalem, and in the meantime the immediate comforts for His saints when they are slain. Much is communicated as the seven seals are opened and the seven trumpets

sound. This kind of imagery concludes with the seven bowls becoming seven plagues. Almost half of chapters 6-16 is devoted to the seals, trumpets, and bowls.

After the seven bowls, much of what remains in Revelation will focus on two women: Babylon the whore, and the New Jerusalem the bride of the Lamb. The climax of final judgment will return. The vile city will go up eternally in smoke, and the city of the faithful bride will delight in the presence of God forever with His covenant people.

The material in Revelation is not a development of one different thing after another in a distinct chronological sequence. It is quite the opposite as it brings up repeatedly the end for the devil and for all who are loyal to him. The imagery varies; the judgments escalate, and this truth is repeated, so that we see Revelation giving one visionary scenario after another of its basic themes. If this is so and becomes clear to you, grasping these things enables more enjoyment in reading the book. Whether Revelation is linear or not affects in a large way how we interpret Revelation 20 and the thousand years. More on that to come.

Appendix 16A

The Death of God's Saints

This crucial theme receives much mention in Revelation. In God's sovereign control, the murderous actions of Satan fit in with God's purpose for the kingdom of the world to become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (11:15). Those who had been killed were very happy about what God had done for them as shown in 7:9-17 and 14:1-5. Never in Revelation do the martyrs complain against the decision of God, and they worship the Lord when His justice was expressed.

- Antipas in Pergamum was slain (2:13), the only Christian named in Revelation, other than John the writer.
- Murder is at the heart of seal five where John saw the slain souls under the altar (6:9,10). The perpetrators were those who dwell on the earth.
- More death would follow, “... *They were ... told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been*” (6:11). I fear this is an ignored verse!
- The multitude in heaven came out of the great tribulation by death into the presence of the Lord (7:9-17 and 14:1-3). They could not come out of it unless they had been in it. It was in that tribulation that they had been slaughtered.
- The nations trample the holy city (11:2), and the beast kills the two witnesses (11:7).
- The beast is allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them (13:7,8). For a brief season, it is the will of God that saints should be slain (13:9,10,15)
- Specific encouragement for future martyrs and related promise is injected into the narrative (14:12,13). Revelation teaches a blessed and fruitful death.

- The final judgment, portrayed in the seven bowls of chapters 15 & 16, includes God giving the unrepentant blood to drink. He does this because they shed the blood of saints and prophets.
- Babylon is drunk with the blood of the saints (17:6). When war is made on the Lamb (17:14), it is against those who belong to the Lamb. Christ is out of reach (12:5), so the target was the woman who bore the Child (12:6) and her other offspring, God's people (12:17).
- In Babylon music, the arts, and business ceased, but what could be found there was the blood of the saints (18:24). Then God has avenged on her the blood of His saints (19:2).
- Satan will be released; the deceived nations with vast numbers will attack in "*the battle*" surrounding the saints with intent to destroy them when suddenly God strikes (20:7-9).

Appendix 16 B

The Final Judgment and the Second Coming of Christ

For many of us the text that most clearly joins the Second Coming with the judgment of the wicked is Revelation 19. There is a time for the dead to be judged, and God's servants to be rewarded, and for the destroyers to be destroyed (11:18). Only with the coming of the Lord could all three of those features come together in one time; they accompany the coming of the Lord. The Lord says, "*Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done...*" (22:12). A reward of both kinds (relief or vengeance, as in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8) is tied to Jesus' coming.

Within its narrative Revelation pictures events which cannot occur apart from the Lord's return. The Lord's coming is not only referred to in words as in 22:20; repeated visions show it happening. Our Lord's coming is worked in often, such as describing God as the One Who is, Who was, and *Who is to come*. 14:7 mentions the hour of His judgment, referring to something future. My approach now is to view various *actions* which depict the Lord's coming. Revelation keeps returning to this event.

1. Seal six: A response to the martyrs' plea in seal five. The cry for vengeance from the base of the altar is a prayer that reappears in some form throughout Revelation. It is fully resolved by the time we arrive at 16:7. After that the burden of that prayer never comes up again; it has been answered. The plea in seal five followed by the earth and sky shaking in seal six makes one sense that seal six is a response to seal five. Those who murdered the martyrs will face the justice of God, and they cannot get away. This is a partial answer to their prayer.

Seal six is adjacent to the martyrs' prayer. Is this event in 6:12-17 the Judgment Day, meaning that this is it? Before affirming that that is so, let us return to the martyrs of seal five. Those hearing Revelation read when it arrived in the churches would have no difficulty concluding that the murder of the saints would result in the wicked being brought to face God. That is the flow of the book and the expectation of the Christian audience hearing the reader, especially Jews familiar with this kind of literature. Interpreters must decide whether this severe judgment is one more presentation of the final one, or just one more in a series of divine reactions against human sin prior to the Second Coming. There have been repeated judgments throughout man's days on earth. Seal six in one view is just another one of these, even though it is of cataclysmic proportions. That view then is that seal six is an event restricted to a time prior to the end, but not the Judgment Day, even though it includes "*everyone slave and free*" (6:15). That interpretation is widely held in our day in dispensational circles. I think a surface reading of the text shows seal six is the final judgment.

Surely v.17 settles the question: "*for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?*" On that great day all mankind will face the wrath of God and the Lamb. By the words of v.17 we have the final judgment. But judgment requires the Judge, and He is shown in His judging and in the fear it produces. What these most fearful men have done is not explicitly stated in seal six, but what is clear is that God has reacted against all who deserve the wrath of God and the Lamb. Generations of Christians reading this text saw that it meant that the Lord has come and sinners are terrified. I think their reading of this text has been correct.

2. The seventh trumpet 11:15-18 This text has a broad scope of the purpose of the Lord's return. If the Lord has taken over by making a rebel kingdom His own, and if He has begun a reign which will not end, and if this action is elaborated upon by explicit indications that God moved aggressively to implement this reign, then it shows the Lord's return by showing what that appearance has produced. The Lord countered the rage of the wicked with His own wrath and brought about the resurrection of the dead so that He could judge them, while treating all of His own people with mercies, and finally destroying the wicked. These events come only as only as a consequence of His coming to judge the earth. There is no judgment without the Judge, and when He appears, it is the Second Coming of Christ.

3. The two harvests 14:14-20

a. The grain harvest (14:14-16) has a picture of the Lord Jesus, "*one like a son of man*" (the precise wording of Daniel 7:13) at the end of the age gathering in His grain. The earth was harvested. The hour to reap had come, and the harvest of the earth was fully ripe. All He needed to do was bring His harvest home. This is a beautiful picture of the Lord collecting His people. But many do not see that meaning in this paragraph. I fear they miss another way Revelation presents the Second Coming of Christ. In Revelation 14 two harvests are presented side by side. They are opposite activities of the Lord. Both are

gatherings, but to different ends. The way they are presented tips the interpretation in favor of them being two different gatherings at the time of the Lord's coming. The other one is clearly a harvest for judgment, but both harvests occur at the coming of the Lord.

b. The grape harvest (14:17-20) on the other hand is an unmistakable and undisputed presentation of judgment. After the grapes were gathered they were thrown into the winepress. It has a more ominous name; it is "*the great winepress of the wrath of God*". Those grapes are then crushed by the feet of someone not identified in chapter 14. Later in 19:11-16 the One on the white horse has a robe dipped in blood. He is the One Who has treaded "*the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty*". Those hearing Revelation were not going to think of two different winepress events. They could see that the matter of the great judgment was back. Chapters 14 and 19 are simply two references to the same event using the same imagery. That event is the singular final judgment at the coming of Christ.

4. Making Babylon drink the cup of wrath (16:19,20), the seventh plague

A few things make this text stand out. No one survives drinking God's cup of wrath. That always has a note of finality. It is Babylon the corporate city forced to drink this cup, and Babylon is broken up in the worst earthquake ever. There are other crucial indicators.

- These words in chapter 16 appear in the seventh bowl.
- Revelation 8:1,2 shows that the seven trumpets are elements in the seventh seal.
- A kind of logic follows in reading apocalyptic. We assume consistency in the book so,
 - a) if the seventh seal contains the trumpets,
 - b) then the seventh trumpet contains the bowls. (a) is explicit in 8:1,2; the remainder (b) is a deduction that trumpets and bowls are parallel to seals and trumpets.

Once that idea is admitted, the words of wrath and earthquake – with other cities falling in the rest of the world (16:19) – are an elaboration of the seventh trumpet. The fate of Babylon and worldwide destruction combine to show the final judgment.

Another factor emerges which might be overlooked. 16:20 says, "*... every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found.*" This is the converse of 6:14, "*every mountain and island was removed from its place.*" In Jewish fashion, with its ABBA structure, island and mountains are reversed. This signals that the flight of islands and mountains happening here in chapter 16 and the phenomenon in seal six point to the same event. Seal six is the Second Coming, and it follows from this that the seventh bowl is as well. In similar wording, "*earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them*" (20:11). Whenever the mountains and islands or earth and sky take off in fear, that signals that God has come in the majesty of His judgment. There can be no judgment like this unless the He has come.

5. The judgment of the great prostitute Babylon (17:1) We just had Babylon in chapter 16, and in the next chapter it starts all over again, because in this new segment of the book the fate of Babylon is the central focus. 17:1 – 19:10 is the long passage concerning Babylon. It is also a case of the subject of Babylon being brought up after two previous mentions! (14:8 and 16:19). Revelation really does have recapitulations.

This large section on Babylon is introduced in v.1 in terms of judgment. The Lord God has judged her (18:8). The beast and his allies will devour the flesh of the prostitute, because God has put it in their hearts to do so (17:16,17). The picture is enhanced by words of a speedy end – in one day, in one hour (18:8, 10). The twenty-four elders rejoiced (11:16,17) that the Lord had begun to reign. That reign takes over the kingdom of this world (11:15). They rejoiced that in the time of His wrath the Lord would destroy the destroyers of the earth (11:18), the former rulers of the kingdom of this world. Seeing the destruction of Babylon, the twenty-four elders fall down and worship, saying, "*Amen. Hallelujah!*" (19:4). This is just one more angle to view the Second Coming. In Revelation 19 God's judgment on Babylon is immediately followed by the marriage supper of the Lamb. That cannot happen apart from the coming of the Lord.

6. The rider on a white horse (19:11-16) Many accept that this text is about the Lord Jesus coming from heaven to judge the nations that live on the earth. In other words it is the Second Coming. The eyes of the rider are like a flame of fire (v.12), and the sword from His mouth (v.15) fit the vision of Christ in 1:14. The names given belong to Christ; in 17:14 He is Lord of lords and King of kings. In John 1 and in 1 John 1 He is called the Word. His ruling with a rod of iron is the fulfillment of a Messianic psalm (Psalm 2:9). Likewise treading the winepress is a fulfillment of Isaiah 63:1-4. The description of Christ, the reference to relevant OT texts, the activity of His sovereign judgment, and the descent from heaven to earth all combine to give a convincing vision of the coming of the Lord.

7. The intervention at the end of the thousand years (20:7-10) with fire from heaven. Later texts speak of judgment (21:8, 27; 22:11,12,15,18,19), but the fire from heaven is the last image in Revelation of the judgment event, coupled with the Great White Throne. The Lord will destroy the destroyers of the earth (11:18), and here He does it. What the seventh trumpet presented as a prediction (11:18) is now fulfilled in Revelation 20 as fire from heaven. Revelation 11:18 places this action, including raising the dead for judgment, at the same time as rewarding His saints. Revelation 20:7-10 is the vision that focuses on the end of Satan and those who follow him. It does not speak of it explicitly as the Lord coming, but simply and succinctly as "*fire came down from heaven.*" (Note 2 Thessalonians 1:7,8.) And that pictures what will happen when the Lord Jesus personally comes to destroy the destroyers of the earth (11:18). A trial requires the presence of the Judge.