

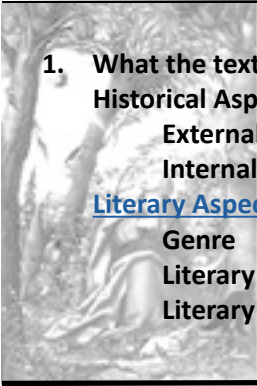


# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

## Bible Study 39

Text: Rev. 16:1-9

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# The Bowls 1-4, pt. 1

### Greek NT

16.1 Καὶ ἤκουσα μεγάλης φωνῆς ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ λεγούσης τοῖς ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλοις· ὑπάγετε καὶ ἐκχέετε τὰς ἑπτὰ φιάλας τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς τὴν γῆν.

2 Καὶ ἀπήλθεν ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ ἐγένετο ἔλκος κακὸν καὶ πονηρὸν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοὺς ἔχοντας τὸ χάραγμα τοῦ θηρίου καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας τῇ εἰκόνι αὐτοῦ.

3 Καὶ ὁ δεῦτερος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν, καὶ ἐγένετο αἷμα ὡς νεκροῦ, καὶ πᾶσα ψυχὴ ζωῆς ἀπέθανεν τὰ ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ.

4 Καὶ ὁ τρίτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ εἰς τοὺς ποταμοὺς καὶ τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων, καὶ ἐγένετο αἷμα. 5 Καὶ ἤκουσα τοῦ ἀγγέλου τῶν ὑδάτων λέγοντος· δίκαιος εἶ, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, ὁ ὄσιος, ὅτι ταῦτα ἔκρινας, 6 ὅτι αἷμα ἁγίων καὶ προφητῶν ἐξέχχαν καὶ αἷμα αὐτοῖς [δ]έδωκας πιεῖν, ἄξιοί εἰσιν. 7 Καὶ ἤκουσα τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου λέγοντος· ναὶ κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις σου.

8 Καὶ ὁ τέταρτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν ἥλιον, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ

### La Biblia de las Américas

16.1 Y oí una gran voz que desde el templo decía a los siete ángeles: Id y derramad en la tierra las siete copas del furor de Dios.

2 El primer ángel fue y derramó su copa en la tierra; y se produjo una llaga repugnante y maligna en los hombres que tenían la marca de la bestia y que adoraban su imagen.

3 El segundo ángel derramó su copa en el mar, y se convirtió en sangre como de muerto; y murió todo serviente que había en el mar.

4 El tercer ángel derramó su copa en los ríos y en las fuentes de las aguas, y se convirtieron en sangre. 5 Y oí al ángel de las aguas, que decía: Justo eres tú, el que eres, y el que eras, oh Santo, porque has juzgado estas cosas; 6 pues ellos derramaron sangre de santos y profetas y tú les has dado a beber sangre; lo merecen. 7 Y oí al altar, que decía: Sí, oh Señor Dios Todopoderoso, verdaderos y justos son tus juicios.

8 El cuarto ángel derramó su copa sobre el sol; y al sol le fue dado quemar a los hombres con fuego. 9 Y los hombres fueron quemados con el intenso calor; y blas-

### NRSV

16.1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."

2 So the first angel went and poured his bowl on the earth, and a foul and painful sore came on those who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped its image.

3 The second angel poured his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing in the sea died.

4 The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters say, "You are just, O Holy One, who are and were, for you have judged these things; 6 because they shed the blood of saints and prophets, you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!" 7 And I heard the altar respond, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, your judgments are true and just!"

8 The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire; 9 they were scorched by the fierce heat, but they cursed the name of God, who had authority over

### NLT

16.1 Then I heard a mighty voice shouting from the Temple to the seven angels, "Now go your ways and empty out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."

2 So the first angel left the Temple and poured out his bowl over the earth, and horrible, malignant sores broke out on everyone who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his statue.

3 Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse. And everything in the sea died.

4 Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs, and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel who had authority over all water saying, "You are just in sending this judgment, O Holy One, who is and who always was. 6 For your holy people and your prophets have been killed, and their blood was poured out on the earth. So you have given their murderers blood to drink. It is their just reward." 7 And I heard a voice from the altar saying, "Yes, Lord God Almighty, Page 797

καυματίσαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους femaron el nombre de Dios  
 ἐν πυρί. Ἡ καὶ ἔκαυματίσθησαν que tiene poder sobre estas  
 οἱ ἄνθρωποι καῦμα μέγα καὶ plagas, y no se arrepintieron  
 ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸ ὄνομα para darle gloria.  
 τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἔχοντος τὴν  
 ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τὰς πληγὰς  
 ταύτας καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν  
 δοῦναι αὐτῷ δόξαν.

these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory. your punishments are true and just.”

8 Then **the fourth angel** poured out his bowl on the sun, causing it to scorch everyone with its fire. 9 Everyone was burned by this blast of heat, and they cursed the name of God, who sent all of these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

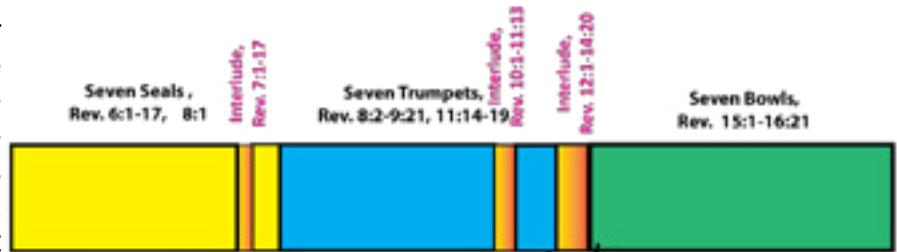
**INTRODUCTION**

The work of the seven angels now begins! In 15:1, they were first announced, then commissioned in 15:5-8, and now in 16:1 they are commanded to go do their work on the earth.<sup>1</sup> The blowing of the seventh trumpet in 11:14-19 signaled the coming of these seven angels, as the diagram on the right illustrates. In chapters twelve through fourteen John provided a lengthy ‘pause’ with some glimpses past the seven bowls as he prepares his readers for the increased severity of the seven bowls of divine temporal judgment upon the wicked. These signal the beginning of the end of human history and the inauguration of the eternal order centered in final judgment that determines the eternal destinies of the righteous and the wicked.

We will examine these seven bowls in two studies due to the length of chapter sixteen. Unlike the previous series of the seals and the trumpets, these are presented in rapid fire succession without interruption. Then something of an appendix or excursus is added in chapters seventeen and eighteen with graphic portrayals of the downfall of Rome through the image of Babylon first as a whore (chap. 17) and then directly with an appeal to the wicked to abandon her (chap. 18), that downfall first announced by the second of the three angels in 14:8 and somewhat continued with the third angel in 14:9-11. Thus the one/two punch of second and third angels in 14:9-11 is

<sup>1</sup>As discussed in class, it is not clear whether the seven angel group mentioned in 8:2 and 8:6 with the trumpets are the same seven angels now given bowls. John does not provide any clear signals as to whether they are the same group or two separate groups. Perhaps this is because it doesn't impact the significance of the work of the two sets of angels whether they had ‘double’ duty or ‘single’ duty.

**Links of the 7th trumpet to the 7 Bowls  
 Revelation 15:1-8 // 11:14-19**



Links between sections:

- 1) Seventh seal announces seven trumpets  
8:1, 7th seal
- 2) Seventh trumpet announces seven bowls  
11:14-19, 7th trumpet
  - a) 15:1 with ἄλλα σημεῖον links back to 12:1, 3 with the first two signs  
These mark the boundaries of the Interlude of 12:1-14:20
  - b) 15:8 ἐγένετο ὁ ναὸς καπνοῦ compares to 11:19 ἐγένοντο ἀστραταὶ καὶ φουνοὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμοὶ καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη.

Amplification of 15:5-8 link to 11:19:

- 1) ἡνοίγη ὁ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὃ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ (11:19a)
  - a) καὶ ἡνοίγη ὁ ναὸς τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, (15:5b)
- 2) ὤφθη ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ ναῷ αὐτοῦ, (11:19b)
  - b) καὶ ἔβησαν οἱ ἑπτὰ ἄγγελοι [οἱ] ἔχοντες τὰς ἑπτὰ πληγὰς ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ... (15:6-7)
- 3) ἐγένοντο ἀστραταὶ καὶ φουνοὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμοὶ καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη (11:19c)
  - c) ἐγένετο ὁ ναὸς καπνοῦ ἐκ τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ (15:8a)

The parallels are remarkable and both scenes move from the opening of the temple to what this reveals and reaches a climax with phenomena connected to the Divine Presence such as smoke etc. Additionally, the τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου links in 15:5 up to ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης αὐτοῦ in 11:19b. Thus John's pattern of the seventh item introduces the next series of sevens.

amplified in this appendix of chaps 17/18.

These seven bowls give us a graphic picture of events just at the end of human history. The world in general deteriorates ever deeper into the moral and religious cesspool that we now see around us. Chaos and rejection of God dominate human society globally, and the people of God find themselves increasingly isolated from the rest of society because of their staunch commitment to serving the one true God through Jesus Christ His Son. But the day is coming when God says, “Enough is enough! I will put into action the accountability that I require of My creation to serve Me, and those in rejection of Me will discover the justice of My holy, pure character though My wrath being inflicted

upon them. This condition of humanity at the end approaches that of ancient Jericho when Anathema was pronounced upon them in their wickedness. The holy God of the universe was thus glorified by their destruction! The stench of their wickedness was removed forever from the nostrils of God and His people!

## 1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Both the literary and historical background to 16:1-9 will be examined, although the literary aspect will be more important for this passage than the historical aspect.

### Historical Aspects:

**External History.** In the hand copying of these nine verses over the first eight or nine centuries not many significant variations in wording surface among the several thousand still existing manuscripts. The editors of The Greek New Testament (UBS 4th rev. ed) considered only one place to be important enough to possibly impact the translation of this passage.

### 16:4 ἐγένετο, it became.<sup>2</sup>

The core issue is whether the singular ἐγένετο (blood happened) or the plural ἐγένοντο (they turned into blood).<sup>3</sup> Ultimately it is whether the verb (singular) goes back to ὑδάτων, waters, or whether the verb (plural) goes back to τοὺς ποταμούς καὶ τὰς πηγὰς, the rivers and the springs. Of course, not much difference exists between saying the rivers and the springs turned into blood, or that the waters in them turned into blood. The singular verb form has more internal weight in its favor although the external evidence is rather evenly split between the two.

<sup>2</sup>{B} ἐγένετο κ C 051 205 209 Byz [P 046] it<sup>ar</sup> vg arm Andrew; Beatus // ἐγένοντο P<sup>47</sup> A 1006 1611 1841 1854 2053 (2062 ἐγένετο [sic]) 2329 it<sup>gig,h</sup> vg<sup>ms</sup> syr<sup>ph,h</sup> cop<sup>sa,bo</sup> eth<sup>mss</sup> Primasius

[Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

<sup>3</sup>“Instead of the singular verb ἐγένετο, several important manuscripts read the plural ἐγένοντο (they became) in agreement with the preceding plural verbs. The singular form, which may be translated ‘there came about,’ is the more difficult, and it has adequate manuscript support. If the singular verb is original, the implied subject may be τὰ ὕδατα (the waters), which is a neuter nominative plural, which often takes a third singular verb. Other languages will often require a plural verb, so this variant reading has little significance for translation. If the plural is original, the implied subject must be ‘the rivers and springs of water (Aune, Revelation 6–16, p. 856, n. 4.e).’” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 543.]

As we typically note, this is not the only place where variations surface in these existing manuscripts. The Text Apparatus of the Novum Testamentum Graece (N-A 27th rev. ed.) lists some 26 places in the nine verses where variations surface.<sup>4</sup> Virtually all



### <sup>4</sup>Offenbarung 16,1

\* εκ τ. ουρανου 42 ar\*; Bea (ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ is replaced)

| – M<sup>K</sup>

° 051. 1854 M<sup>A</sup> (the καὶ between ὑπάγετε and ἐκχέετε is omitted)

°1 051. 1854 M<sup>A</sup> h co; Bea (The number ἑπτὰ is omitted before φιάλας)

\* 1 2 P<sup>47vid</sup> h sa (variation in sequence of τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς τὴν γῆν)

| 3-5 1 pc

### Offenbarung 16,2

\* ἐπι 051. 2053. 2062 M<sup>A</sup> (εἰς is replaced)

\* P<sup>47</sup> κ pc (the sequence of κακὸν καὶ πονηρὸν is reversed)

\* εἰς 051 M<sup>A</sup> (ἐπὶ is replaced)

\* τὴν –να κ pc (alternative spelling for τῆ εἰκόνι)

### Offenbarung 16,3

\* ἄγγελος 051. 2344 m vg<sup>el</sup> sy sa<sup>ms</sup> bo; Bea (ἄγγελος inserted after δεύτερος)

| txt P<sup>47</sup> κ<sup>2</sup> A C P 1006. 1611. 1841. 1854. 2053. 2062. 2329 al lat (κ\* om. vs 3a)

\* ζῶσα P<sup>47</sup> κ 046. 051. 1854. 2053. 2062. 2344 M<sup>A</sup> lat sy<sup>ph</sup> co (ζῶης is replaced)

| ζῶων 2329

| – M<sup>K</sup>; Prim

| txt A C 1006. 1611. 1841 pc sy<sup>h</sup>

\* τῶν 1006. 1841 pc (τὰ is replaced or omitted)

| – P<sup>47</sup> κ m latt sy<sup>ph</sup> co

| txt A C 051. 1611. 2344 pc

\* ἐπι τῆς –σης κ (ἐν τῇ θαλάσσει is replaced with alternative spelling)

### Offenbarung 16,4

\* ἀγγελος 051. 2344 M<sup>A</sup> vg<sup>ms</sup> sy<sup>ph</sup> bo (ἄγγελος inserted after τρίτος)

\* ἐπι P<sup>47</sup> κ pc (εἰς is replaced)

\* εἰς M<sup>K</sup> (one of these prepositions inserted before τὰς πηγὰς)

| ἐπι P<sup>47</sup> pc

\* –νοντο P<sup>47</sup> A 1006. 1611. 1841. 1854. 2053. 2329 pc it sy co (alternative spelling for ἐγένετο)

### Offenbarung 16,5

\* ος ἦν (+ και P<sup>47</sup> 2329 pc) οσιος P<sup>47</sup> 2329 M<sup>K</sup> (alternatives constructions for ὁ ἦν, ὁ ὄσιος)

| ο ἦν και ο σσ. 1006. 1841. 2053. 2062 pc

| ο ἦν οσ. A C 1611. 1854 pc

| txt κ 051 M<sup>A</sup> sa

### Offenbarung 16,6

\* αἵματα κ pc (singular αἷμα is replaced with plural form)

\* εδ– P<sup>47</sup> κ 051 M (alternative spellings for δέδωκας)

| εδωκεν 1854

| txt A C 1611. 2329 pc

\*1 ὀπερ αἷ. κ vg<sup>mss</sup> (conjunctions added before/after ἄξιοι)

| ἀρα αἷ. 2329

| αἷ. γαρ 2053. 2062 gij

of these variations represent stylistic changes in order to 'update' the expressions to more natural ones for the time of the copyist.

Thus we can exegete vv. 1-9 on the basis of the adopted reading of the text in full confidence of it being the original wording of the passage.

**Internal History.** The time and place markers inside vv. 1-9 belong more to the exegesis of the text than to any background study that could be made. Therefore they will be treated below in the exegesis of the passage.

### Literary Aspects:

Giving considerations to the literary aspects becomes the crucial background study for this passage.

**Genre:** Of course, the broad literary form of apocalyptic vision continues to play the primary role in shaping the content of these verses. The standard *Kaì ἤκουσα*, *and I heard*, in verse one sets up the scene for the seven angels with the bowls of wrath. John continues his usual pattern of *Kaì ἤκουσα*, *And I heard*, coming after *Kaì εἶδον*, *And I saw* (cf. 15:5). Here they signal continuation of the vision to the next stage.

No repeated genre patterns, matching forms used elsewhere, is used for the seven angels with the bowls of wrath beyond the core structure of the three series of seven angels related to seals, trumpets, and now bowls. Whereas in the first two sets a series of 4 + 3 was followed with the first four stressing basically divine punishment and the second set of three stressing divine protection of God's people. That pattern is not followed here, but a 4 + 3 shift is present with the first four targeting the earth and the second three targeting the beast basically. In the first two sets of sevens, the last angel, the seventh one, prepared the way for the next set. But here the seventh angel signals the completion of the divine punishments with the declaration, *γέγονεν*, "It is done!" (v. 17). Thus a core structure is maintained here with the preceding two sets of sevens, but by way of content and application this final 4 + 3 is different from the first two sets.

What is present here in this final set of sevens is a substantial amount of linking back to elements in the first two sets. This we will note in the exegesis below. From a literary standpoint, the first two sets of sevens establish the basis for the final set of sevens here in chapter sixteen. Within this final unit of seven one also finds unusual amounts of stereotypical features.<sup>5</sup> The element of genre thus surfaces in the repetitive features inside the seven subunits.

<sup>5</sup>“There are more stereotypical features evident in the composition of the vision of the seven bowls in 16:1–21 than in any of the two other series of seven plagues narrated in Revelation, the seven seals (6:1–17; 8:1) and the seven trumpets (8:7–9:21; 11:15–19). H.-P. Müller has suggested that the narratives of the outpouring of the seven bowls consist of five motifs:

“1. The angels who bring the seven last plagues are empowered (15:5–16:1), i.e., they receive the seven bowls from the four cherubim (15:7), and they are commissioned by an unidentified voice from the heavenly temple (16:1).

“2. Each individual vision begins with the stereotypical expression *καὶ* [the X (angel)] *ἐξέχεεν* τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ εἰς/ἐπὶ ..., ‘Then [the X (angel)] poured his bowl upon the ...’ (16:2a, 3a, 4a, 8a, 10a, 12a, 17a). The contents of the bowls are poured out seriatim on the earth (16:2a), the sea (v 3a), the rivers and springs (v 4a), the sun (v 8a), the throne of the beast (v 10a), the river Euphrates (v 12a), and the air (v 17a). Only in the case of the first angel is the verb of motion *ἀπῆλθεν* used (16:2a) to correspond to the command to go (*ὑπάγετε* in 16:1).

“3. The effects of the pouring out of five of the seven bowls is introduced with the stereotyped expression *καὶ ἐγένετο*, “and [it] happened,” “with the result that”:

Vision 1 (v 2b): *καὶ ἐγένετο ἄλκος*

Vision 2 (v 3b): *καὶ ἐγένετο αἷμα ὡς νεκροῦ*

Vision 3 (v 4b): *καὶ ἐγένετο αἶμα*

Vision 5 (v 10b): *καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ ἐσκοτωμένη*

Vision 7 (v 18a): *αἱ ἐγένοντο ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ* (v 18b): *καὶ σεισμός ἐγένετο μέγας ...*

(v 19a): *καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη εἰς τρία μέρη*

“The formulaic character of *καὶ ἐγένετο* is revealed in v 19a, where we find the unfelicitous clause *καὶ ἐγένετο ... εἰς τρία μέρη*, ‘and ... into three parts happened.’ Variations on this *ἐγένετο* formula occur in connection with the fifth seal (6:12) and the seventh seal (8:1) and with the first trumpet (8:7b), the second trumpet (8:8c), and the third trumpet (8:11b).

“4. Most of the visions then speak of the effects of the plague on those living beings within the affected area (visions 1 and 3 are exceptions):

Vision 2 (v 3b): *καὶ πᾶσα ψυχή ζωῆς ἀπέθανεν*

Vision 4 (v 9a): *καὶ ἐκαυματίσθησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι*

Vision 5 (v 10c): *καὶ ἐμασῶντο τὰς γλώσσας αὐτῶν*

Vision 6 (v 12c): *ἵνα ἐτοιμασθῇ ἡ ὁδὸς τῶν βασιλέων*

[Vision 7 (v 19a): *καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη εἰς τρία μέρη*]

“5. In three instances the negative response of people to the plague is mentioned:

Vision 4 (v 9bc): *καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν ... καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν*

Vision 5 (v 11): *καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν ... καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν*

Vision 7 (v 21b): *καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν*”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 868–869.]

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#### Offenbarung 16,7

\* εκ 046. 2329 pc ar (preposition inserter after ἤκουσα)

#### Offenbarung 16,8

\* αγγελος κ 051. 1854. 2329. 2344 M<sup>A</sup> ar vg<sup>cl</sup> sy<sup>ph</sup> co; Prim Bea (ἄγγελος inserted after τέταρτος)

◦ P<sup>47</sup> (αὐτῷ is omitted)

#### Offenbarung 16,9

\* οἱ ἄνθρωποι 051 M<sup>K</sup> sy<sup>h</sup> bo<sup>pl</sup> (after ἐβλασφήμησαν is οἱ ἄνθρωποι inserted)

\* ενωπιον A (τὸ ὄνομα is replaced)

◦ C 1006. 1611. 1841. 2053. 2062 M<sup>K</sup> (the article τὴν before ἐξουσίαν is omitted)

[Eberhard Nestle et al., *Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 663–664.]

**Literary Setting:** The literary context of 16:1-9 is easy to understand. It is a part of 16:1-17 that presents in order the seven bowls of wrath. The cumulative impact is then seen in 16:18-21, which will serve somewhat as an introduction to chapters seventeen and eighteen that detail the destruction of the city of Babylon in something of an appendix to the seven bowls of wrath. Chapter sixteen brings to a close the three sets of sevens that was begun in 5:1.

This section forms the largest single unit in the book of Revelation and details the working of God's wrath upon the earth from creation to the end of human history. From it comes primary theological assertion that God as ultimate holiness is completely intolerant of evil and thus holds the people He created severely accountable for their evil actions. The other theme is the repeated affirmation of divine protection and assistance to the people who have committed their lives to Christ and live in faithful obedience to that commitment. This does not exempt them from suffering harm from evil people for this faithful commitment, but it does mean that in the power of God even this harm is turned

into ultimate good for God's people. The worst harm of their execution becomes for God's people instant transporting into heaven and the full presence of this holy God. They join the groups of heavenly creatures around the throne of God enjoying the full benefits of God's presence.

For an initial targeted readership in the late 90s of the first century living in an increasingly hostile atmosphere to their religious faith, these words became powerful reassurance of the validity of their Christian faith and also profound insight into how God would take care of them in this hostile atmosphere. That message remains true from then to now, particularly when God's people are facing real persecution from evil people around them.

**Literary Structure:** The block diagram below highlights the internal structure of the primary and secondary ideas inside the passage. As always, it is presented in rough English translation in order to preserve the syntactical structure of the original Greek expression.

16.1            And  
**464**           **I heard a great voice**  
                   out of the temple  
    speaking to the seven angels:



16.2            And  
**465**           **went out the first one**  
                   and  
**466**           **he poured out his bowl**  
                   onto the earth,  
                   and  
**467**           **a sore . . . . occurred**  
                   foul                            |  
    and                            |  
                   evil                            |  
    upon the men  
    who have the mark of the beast  
    and  
    who worship his image.

16.3            And  
**468**           **the second one poured out his bowl**  
    into the sea  
                   and  
**469**           **there occurred blood**  
    as of a dead one  
                   and

470 every living thing died  
those in the sea.

16.4 And

471 the third one poured out his bowl  
into the rivers  
and  
the springs of the waters,  
and

472 they became blood.

16.5 And

473 I heard the angel of the waters  
saying:

C Just you are,  
the One who is and who was  
the Holy One,  
because these things you judged,  
16:6 because blood . . . they poured out  
| of holy ones  
| and  
| of prophets  
| and  
blood to them You have given to drink  
holy they are.

16.7 And

474 I heard the altar  
saying,

D Yes,  
Lord God  
the Almighty,

E true and just are Your judgments.

16.8 And

475 the fourth one poured out his bowl  
onto the sun,  
and

476 was given to it  
to burn the men  
with fire.

16.9 And

477 were burned the men  
with great heat  
and

478 they blasphemed the name of God  
who has the authority  
over these plagues  
and

479 they did not turn  
to give him praise.

in #s 471-472.

### **Summary of the Rhetorical Structure**

Quite clearly the four basic divisions of the passage are the actions of the four angels: #s 464; 465-467; 468-470; 471-474; 475-479. The passage begins with the general introduction in # 464. Statements 473-475 stand as an insertion to the action of the third angel

In each of the four core structures comes the action of each angel of pouring out his bowl: #s 465-466; 468; 471; 475. This is followed by a depiction of the impact of this pouring out action: #s 467; 469-470; 472; 476-479. These depictions draw heavily from the pre-

vious two sets of seven seals and trumpets for their content.

### Exegesis of the Text:

The above analysis of internal natural structure will provide the basis for outlining our exegesis of the passage.

The passage begins with the heavenly voice commanding the angels to action in light of their commissioning in 15:5-8. Each of the seven angels then complies with the command and pours out his bowl. In this study we will examine the first four, and in the next study the remaining three. At the end, we will chart out the larger picture of the seven bowls and include the connections to the other two sets of seven angels.

### A. Divine command to the angels, v. 1

1 Καὶ ἤκουσα μεγάλης φωνῆς ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ λεγούσης τοῖς ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλοις· ὑπάγετε καὶ ἐκχέετε τὰς ἑπτὰ φιάλας τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς τὴν γῆν.

1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”

John once more utilizes the Καὶ ἤκουσα formula to introduce a subunit scene following the Καὶ...εἶδον formula in 15:5 that introduces a major scene in his apocalyptic vision.

The phrase μεγάλης φωνῆς ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ, a loud voice from the temple, has echoes of Isa. 66:6b, φωνὴ ἐκ ναοῦ, φωνὴ κυρίου ἀνταποδιδόντος ἀνταπόδοσιν τοῖς ἀντικειμένοις, a voice out of the temple, the voice of the Lord dealing retribution to His enemies. Only here and in v. 17 do we find φωνὴ μεγάλη ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ, both signaling the voice of God speaking so that John hears it. This action sets up boundary marks to the actions of the seven angels. The first one signals for them to take actions and the second one marks the completion of their actions, with the cry γέγονεν, It is finished.

Interestingly in Jewish history, “an unidentified voice from the temple in Jerusalem reportedly said ‘We are departing from here,’ anticipating its destruction by the Romans (Jos. J. W. 6.299–300; Tacitus Hist. 5.13.1; John Malalas Chron. 10.26; see Kuhn, *Offenbarungsstimmen*, 176–84; cf. Ant. 13.282–83).”<sup>6</sup> Several places in Revelation a φωνὴ μεγάλη, loud voice, speaks in the narratives.<sup>7</sup> These

<sup>6</sup>David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 882.

<sup>7</sup> “Though the phrase φωνὴ μεγάλη, ‘loud voice,’ occurs twenty times in Revelation (1:10; 5:2, 12; 6:10; 7:2, 10; 8:13; 10:3; 11:12, 15 [the plural form φωναὶ μεγάλαι occurs only here]; 12:10; 14:7, 9, 15, 18; 16:1, 17; 19:1, 17; 21:3), this is the only use in which the adjective precedes the noun. φωνὴ μεγάλη occurs forty-eight times in the LXX, usually in the dative form φωνῆ μεγάλῃ, three times in the accusative (LXX Gen 27:34; 1 Esdr 3:11; Sir 50:16), and once in the nominative (LXX Esth 1:1). In four additional instances the adjective is placed before the noun

signal a active participation of God in the apocalyptic events narrated by John.

In 16:1 the cry of the divine voice is for the angels to take action: ὑπάγετε καὶ ἐκχέετε τὰς ἑπτὰ φιάλας τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς τὴν γῆν, *Depart and pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath upon the earth*. The command signals the launching of divine judgments against the earth.<sup>8</sup> The seven angels who then move in compliance to the divine command should be considered together as one set of divine judgments to be executed from heaven against the earth.<sup>9</sup>

The image of the live coals of fire that have been taken from the altar of incense and are in the bowls pictured here underscores God taking vengeance upon evil in the world for the harm done to His people on the earth. This is God responding to the pleas of His peo-

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as here, in the phrase μεγάλη τῆ φωνῆ (1 Esdr 5:64; 9:10; Prov 2:3; 26:25; see Rev 16:1). Though φωνὴ μεγάλη also occurs seven times in the Greek texts and fragments of the pseudepigrapha (Adam and Eve 5:2; 29:11; T. Abr. [Rec. A] 5:9; Paral. Jer. 2:2; 2 Apoc. Bar. 11:3; Sib. Or. 3.669; 5.63), the adjective always follows the noun, reflecting the Semitic pattern. The avoidance of the explicit mention of the name of God as the one speaking is a device frequently found in Revelation (6:6; 9:13; 16:17; 18:4; 19:5).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 882–883.]

<sup>8</sup>The LXX uses ‘pour out God’s wrath’ (ἐκχέω + θυμός) to indicate judgment, against either covenant-breakers or those who have persecuted God’s people (Ezek. 14:19; Jer. 10:25; so similarly Ps. 68[69]:25[24]; Zeph. 3:8).<sup>39</sup> For example, note the verbal similarities between Jer. 10:25 and Rev. 16:1:

Jer. 10:25	Rev. 16:1
ἐκχεον τὸν θυμὸν σου	ἐκχέετε τὰς ... φιάλας
ἐπὶ ἔθνη	τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ
(‘pour out your wrath	εἰς τὴν γῆν
on the nations’)	(‘pour out the ... bowls
	of the wrath of God
	on the earth’)

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 812.]

<sup>9</sup>“Sometimes the formula includes ‘fire’ as the figurative destructive effect of the pouring, which enforces a figurative interpretation of the bowls (e.g., Jer. 7:20; Lam. 2:4; 4:11; Ezek. 22:21–22; 30:15–16; Zeph. 3:8; so also Ps. 78[79]:5–6 and Ezek. 21:36–37[31–32], which substitute ὀργὴ for θυμός; the fourth bowl also has ‘fire’ as an effect). The pouring out of a bowl by each angel is certainly not literal but a metaphorical representation of the execution of divine judgment from heaven (cf. Midr. Pss. 104.3). If the initial execution of each woe is metaphorically portrayed, then it is likely that the following description of the effect of the woe is also metaphorical. Such a figurative view is in line with Wisdom 15–17, which understands one of the exodus plagues as a theological metaphor (see on 8:12). Further study of each bowl plague will enforce a figurative analysis.<sup>40</sup>” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 813.]

## B. First angel obeys, v. 2

2 Καὶ ἀπήλθεν ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ ἐγένετο ἔλκος κακὸν καὶ πονηρὸν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοὺς ἔχοντας τὸ χάραγμα τοῦ θηρίου καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας τῇ εἰκόνι αὐτοῦ.

2 So the first angel went and poured his bowl on the earth, and a foul and painful sore came on those who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped its image.

What will be established by John in his depiction is a formula type introduction: ὁ --- ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ εἰς / ἐπὶ....,<sup>11</sup> The ---- [angel] poured out his bowl upon.... This will introduce the action of each of the angels. Here and only here, but assumed in the subsequent six narratives is first the statement Καὶ ἀπήλθεν

<sup>10c</sup>Ps. 79:6, 12 may have been partly formative for v 1: ‘pour out your wrath on the nations that do not know you ... sevenfold into their bosom.’ Rev. 16:6 will allude to Ps. 79:3, and in both the pouring out of the blood of the righteous is punished in the same manner, by God pouring out his wrath. Furthermore, Rev. 6:10 alluded to Ps. 79:5, 10 to launch the trumpet woes (see on 9:14) and the last judgment (8:3–5).

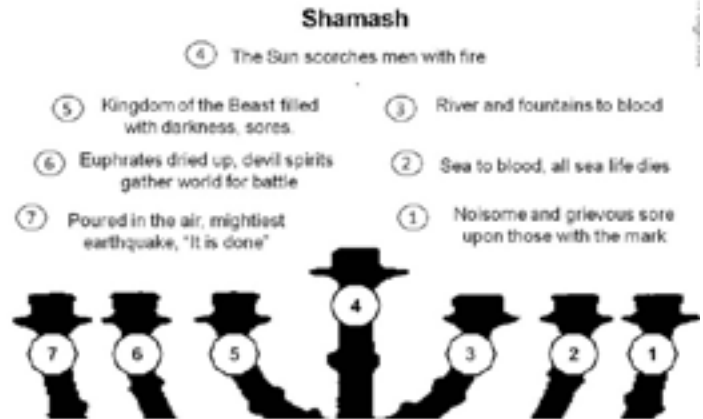
“Also standing in the background is the ‘pouring out’ (ἐκχέω) of sacrificial blood by the priest at the base of the altar in direct connection twice with “the priest [who] ... will sprinkle it [the blood] seven times ... in front of the sanctuary’ (Lev. 4:6–7 and 4:17–18; cf. the pouring out of blood [ἐκχέω] at the altar also in Lev. 4:7, 25, 30, 34; 8:15).<sup>41</sup> Just as the pouring out of sacrificial blood represented the cleansing of the tabernacle from defilement of sin, so the pouring out of the bowls cleanses the earth from the defilement of sin through judgment. The Leviticus background is enhanced by the temple imagery in Rev. 15:5–16:1, 7, and the temple imagery of the bowls themselves (see on 15:7).

“ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ (‘from the sanctuary’) is omitted in *M<sup>A</sup>*, perhaps intentionally because elsewhere when a place name designating the source of the voice follows ἤκουσα μεγάλης φωνῆς (‘I heard a great voice’) or like phrases, it is always ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (‘from heaven,’ 10:4, 8; 11:12, 15; 12:10; 14:2, 13; 18:4). A scribe apparently found the reference to the ‘temple’ too odd to be original. Some scribes overtly conformed the verse to the other parallels by replacing ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ with ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (42 *κ\** Bea). For the same reason in 16:17 many mss. either delete ναοῦ from the phrase ἐξῆλθεν φωνὴ μεγάλη ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ (‘a great voice came out of the sanctuary’) or add οὐρανοῦ. The same phenomenon occurs with ‘from the throne’ following ‘I heard a great voice’ in 21:3. Metzger suggests that the variant ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ in v 1 is the result of wrongly understanding ναοῦ as the contracted form of οὐρανοῦ (= οὐνοῦ).<sup>42</sup> Or τουναοῦ could have been mistaken for οὐρ ανου, especially since the latter would have been more expected because of its occurrence elsewhere.”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 813.]

<sup>11</sup>The shifting of prepositions between εἰς and ἐπὶ reflects the appropriate preposition, both with the accusative case, to the nature of the prepositional object in ancient Greek. But the conceptualization remains the same.

## THE SEVEN VIALS OF WRATH



ὁ πρῶτος, And went out the first one....

In keeping with the divine command in v. 1, only the **first** angel is said to have poured out his bowl **on the earth**: εἰς τὴν γῆν. But the others relate to more specific places connected to the earth: **2**. εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν, **on the sea** (v. 3); **3**. εἰς τοὺς ποταμοὺς καὶ τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων, **into the rivers and the springs of water** (v. 4); **4**. ἐπὶ τὸν ἥλιον, **upon the sun** (v. 8); **5**. ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον τοῦ θηρίου, **on the throne of the beast** (v. 10); **6**. ἐπὶ τὸν ποταμὸν τὸν μέγαν τὸν Εὐφράτην, **upon the great river Euphrates** (v. 12); **7**. ἐπὶ τὸν ἀέρα, **into the air** (v. 17).

Also to be noted is that each angel pours out the same thing: τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ, **his bowl**. Verse one has depicted each bowl as symbolizing τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, **the wrath of God**. Thus each bowl pours out an expression of God’s wrathful vindication of His people upon the earth with punishments upon evil. The distinctives of each action are seen not in the pouring out of the live coals, but in the impact of the actions. The repetition of the divine action implicit verb ἐγένετο comes in bowls 1, 2, 3, and 5. Language appropriate to the consequence is used in the others: 4., ἐδόθη αὐτῷ, **it was granted to him**; 6., ἐξηράνθη τὸ ὕδωρ αὐτοῦ, **its waters were dried up**; and 7., ἐξῆλθεν φωνὴ μεγάλη, **a loud voice went out**. Consistently the impact action is depicted as divine in origin.

One should note carefully the parallel between the seven bowls and the plagues of God inflicted upon the Egyptians described in Exodus. The sequential presentation is different and not all the Egyptian plagues are described here, but the dependency of John upon them for background imagery is unmistakable. They provide the necessary picture of God’s wrath upon those who harmed His people from the past. But one should note that in Revelation the impact is universal rather than just directed at the pharaoh and the Egyptians as was the case in Exodus. The ten plagues upon the Egyptians are listed below in the sequence of their depiction in Exodus 7-11:



1. Water into blood (דָּם): Ex. 7:14–25
2. Frogs (צְפַרְדֵּי): Ex. 7:25–8:11
3. Lice (כְּנִיָּם): Ex. 8:16–19
4. Wild animals or flies (עָרֹב): Ex. 8:20–32
5. Diseased livestock (דָּבָר): Ex. 9:1–7
6. Boils (יִשְׁחָ): **Ex. 9:8–12**
7. Storms of fire (בְּרָד): Ex. 9:13–35
8. Locusts (אַרְבֵּבָה): Ex. 10:1–20
9. Darkness (חֹשֶׁךְ): Ex. 10:21–29
10. Death of firstborn (מָוֶת בְּכֹרֹת): Ex. 11:1–12:36

This first bowl of wrath corresponds to the sixth plague in Exod. 9:8-12 and Deut. 28:35.

**Exod. 9:8-12.** 8 Εἶπεν δὲ κύριος πρὸς Μωυσῆν καὶ Ααρων λέγων Λάβετε ὑμεῖς πλήρεις τὰς χεῖρας αἰθάλης καμιναίας, καὶ πασάτω Μωυσῆς εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐναντίον Φαραῶ καὶ ἐναντίον τῶν θεραπόντων αὐτοῦ,† 9 καὶ γενηθήτω κονιορτὸς ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν Αἰγύπτου, **καὶ ἔσται ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ τετράποδα ἔλκη, φλυκτίδες ἀναζέουσαι, ἐν τε τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ ἐν τοῖς τετράποσιν καὶ ἐν πάσῃ γῆ Αἰγύπτου.**† 10 **καὶ ἔλαβεν τὴν αἰθάλην τῆς καμιναίας ἐναντίον Φαραῶ καὶ ἔπασεν αὐτὴν Μωυσῆς εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, καὶ ἐγένετο ἔλκη, φλυκτίδες ἀναζέουσαι, ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ ἐν τοῖς τετράποσιν.**† 11 καὶ οὐκ ἠδύνατο οἱ φαρμάκοις στῆναι ἐναντίον Μωυσῆ διὰ τὰ ἔλκη· ἐγένετο γὰρ τὰ ἔλκη ἐν τοῖς φαρμάκοις καὶ ἐν πάσῃ γῆ Αἰγύπτου.† 12 ἐσκήρυνεν δὲ κύριος τὴν καρδίαν Φαραῶ, καὶ οὐκ εἰσήκουσεν αὐτῶν, καθὰ συνέταξεν κύριος.†

8 Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw it in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. 9 It shall become fine dust all over the land of Egypt, **and shall cause festering boils on humans and animals throughout the whole land of Egypt.**” 10 **So they took soot from the kiln, and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses threw it in the air, and it caused festering boils on humans and animals.** 11 The magicians could not stand before Moses because of **the boils**, for **the boils** afflicted the magicians as well as all the Egyptians. 12 But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had spoken to Moses.

When the first angel poured out his bowl upon the earth the impact was **ἔλκος** κακὸν καὶ πονηρὸν, **a boil bad and evil.**<sup>12</sup> The term ἔλκος is a physical reference

<sup>12</sup>“The first angel sets in motion his judgment, which comes to punish people because of idol worship (‘those who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image’). Just as the pouring out of the bowl and ‘the mark of the beast’ (see on 13:16–17; 7:2–3) are figurative, so also the bowl’s effect of producing ‘a bad and evil sore’ (ἔλκος κακὸν καὶ πονηρὸν) should be taken metaphorically. The bowl’s effect is based on the literal Egyptian plague of boils (Exod. 9:9–11), which is summarized in Deut. 28:27, 35 as an ‘evil sore’ (ἔλκει πονηρῶ). The punishment matches the crime: those who receive an idolatrous mark will be chastised by being given a penal mark.<sup>43</sup> The ‘sores’ of the Egyptian plague caused

but the two adjectives κακὸν καὶ πονηρὸν modifying it dominantly are moral and spiritual references.<sup>13</sup> Clearly κακός, -ή, -όν in the other usage in Revelation (2:2) is a behavior reference. The second adjective πονηρός, -ά, -όν in the other 51 references inside Revelation defines inherent evil in a person or a thing. This matches the depiction of the Egyptian plague boils defined in Deut. 28:35, πατάξαι σε κύριος ἐν ἔλκει πονηρῶ ἐπὶ τὰ γόνατα καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κνήμας ὥστε μὴ δύνασθαί σε ἰαθῆναι ἀπὸ ἵχνους τῶν ποδῶν σου ἕως τῆς κορυφῆς σου, **The Lord will strike you on the knees and on the legs with grievous boils of which you cannot be healed, from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.** These evil people were be struck down by an evil boil that would torment them.

A certain irony exists here. The earthly targets of the boils were ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοὺς ἔχοντας τὸ χάραγμα τοῦ θηρίου καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας τῇ εἰκόνι αὐτοῦ, **upon the men who have the mark of the beast and who worship his image.** They chose to identify themselves to the ‘beast’ by receiving his ‘mark.’ This is affirmed in their worship of his image. Now God is putting another ‘mark’ on them, a ἔλκος κακὸν καὶ πονηρὸν, that identifies them as bad and evil and brings them continuing torments. Note a tendency to refer to the evil people on the earth from chapter thirteen onwards as those having the ‘mark’ and/or worshiping the beast: 14:11, 16:2; 20:4. Thus this divine punishment series begins with an exposure of who these people truly are and with torment accompanying this exposure.

### C. Second angel obeys, v. 3

3 Καὶ ὁ δεῦτερος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν, καὶ ἐγένετο αἷμα ὡς νεκροῦ, καὶ πᾶσα suffering. The sore here represents some form of suffering, presumably like that entailed by the spiritual and psychological ‘torment’ (βασανισμός) of the fifth trumpet (see on 9:4–6, 10).

“Likewise, early Jewish writings described the plague of boils in Egypt as causing ‘torment.’ Josephus, Ant. 2.304, refers to the plague of boils as a time when God ‘tormented’ (βασανίσαι) the ‘evil’ (πονηρία) Egyptians with ‘bad things [κακοῖς] ... for now their bodies broke out into horrible sores’ [δεινῶς ... ἐξηλκοῦτο]. Philo, Vit. Mos. 1.127–28, affirms that the Egyptians ‘suffered in soul more or no less than in body ... for one continuous sore [ἔλκος] was to be seen stretching from head to foot....’ Pesikta Rabbati 17.8 says that the Egyptian plague of boils would also come on Rome.

“Wall suggests that Job 2:1–10 is the background for the ‘evil sore.’<sup>44</sup> But Job suffered for the sake of righteousness, not because of idolatry or rebellion against God. Furthermore, the terminology of ‘evil sore’ occurs also in the descriptions of the exodus plagues, which are clearly in mind throughout Revelation 16.”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 814.]

<sup>13</sup>A interesting side note. In modern Greek ἔλκος refers to a surface level ulcer or sore.

ψυχὴ ζωῆς ἀπέθανεν τὰ ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ.

3 The second angel poured his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing in the sea died.

This second bowl echoes the first Egyptian plague with the water to blood image. The ten plagues upon the Egyptians are listed below in the sequence of their depiction in Exodus 7-11:

1. **Water into blood** (דָּם): **Ex. 7:14–25**

2. Frogs (צְפַרְדֵּי): Ex. 7:25–8:11

3. Lice (כְּנִיִּם): Ex. 8:16–19

4. Wild animals or flies (עָרוֹב): Ex. 8:20–32

5. Diseased livestock (דָּבָר): Ex. 9:1–7

6. Boils (שִׁחִיחַ): Ex. 9:8–12

7. Storms of fire (בָּרָד): Ex. 9:13–35

8. Locusts (אַרְבֵּבָה): Ex. 10:1–20

9. Darkness (חֹשֶׁךְ): Ex. 10:21–29

10. Death of firstborn (מִקַּת בְּכוֹרוֹת): Ex. 11:1–12:36

Further, Psalm 78:44 and Psalm 105:29 reflect back on this Egyptian plague.

**Ps. 78:44** (LXX 77:44). καὶ μετέστρεψεν εἰς αἷμα τοὺς ποταμούς αὐτῶν καὶ τὰ ὄμβρηματα αὐτῶν, ὅπως μὴ πίωσιν. **He turned their rivers to blood, so that they could not drink of their streams.**

**Psalm 105:29** (LXX 104:29). μετέστρεψεν τὰ ὕδατα αὐτῶν εἰς αἷμα καὶ ἀπέκτεινεν τοὺς ἰχθύας αὐτῶν. **He turned their waters into blood, and caused their fish to die.**

The impact of this second bowl was total: καὶ ἐγένετο αἷμα ὡς νεκροῦ, καὶ πᾶσα ψυχὴ ζωῆς ἀπέθανεν τὰ ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ. and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing in the sea died.<sup>14</sup> The image here compares to the blowing of the second trumpet in 8:8-9,

8 Καὶ ὁ δεῦτερος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν· καὶ ὡς ὄρος μέγα πυρὶ καιόμενον ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν, καὶ ἐγένετο τὸ τρίτον τῆς θαλάσσης αἷμα 9 καὶ ἀπέθανεν τὸ τρίτον τῶν κτισμάτων τῶν ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ τὰ ἔχοντα ψυχὰς καὶ τὸ τρίτον τῶν πλοίων διεφθάρησαν.

8 The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea. 9 A third of the sea became blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

The most notable difference is the completeness of death in the second bowl, over against just the third of an impact in the second trumpet.<sup>15</sup> An economic impact

<sup>14</sup>“In the ancient world, blood was paradoxically both a source of pollution and the means of purification (Parker, *Miasma*, 370–74). The pollution of the sea with blood is reminiscent of the first plague in Exod 7:14–24 (see Pss 78:44; 105:29), in which the Nile was turned to blood, which made the water unpotable and caused the fish to die. Other references to waters polluted by blood are found in Isa 15:9 and 2 Macc 12:16.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 884.]

<sup>15</sup>“The second bowl’s parallelism with the second trumpet

upon humanity is the point of both the second trumpet and the second bowl. Additionally, signals of linkage to the downfall of Babylon (14:8, 10; 15:7; 16:1; 16:19) tie these two divine punishments to the destruction of Babylon described in chapter eighteen.

The phrase πᾶσα ψυχὴ ζωῆς ἀπέθανεν τὰ ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ needs further amplification in that it points toward the death of people due to the death of everything in the sea.<sup>16</sup> The signal of this is the unusual construc-

(8:8–9) is striking. The trumpet struck the sea and ‘a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the living creatures in the sea died.’ Likewise, the second bowl strikes the sea and ‘there came about blood as of a dead person, and every living thing died, the things in the sea.’ Both texts are based on Exod. 7:17–21, where Moses turns the Nile into blood and the fish in it die (like Rev. 8:8–9 and 16:3, Philo, *Vit. Mos.* 1.100, extends the effect of the plague in Exod. 7:17–21 to include the death of people).

“Therefore, the second trumpet and the second bowl have to do with the same kind of judgment. The primary difference is the trumpet’s partial effect and the bowl’s total affect. The second bowl shows that what can be applied partially can also be applied universally at times throughout the inter-advent age. That is, at times the economic plague extends throughout the entire earth and not merely part of it. Just as the world kingdom of Babylon was the object of the second trumpet’s woe, so likewise the kingdom of Babylon throughout the world together with that of the beast is the object of the second bowl’s affliction (see on 8:8–9). Indeed, the bowls generally are linked to the judgment of Babylon, as implied from the connection of 14:8, 10 with 15:7 and 16:1. The seventh bowl makes the link with 14:8, 10 explicit, especially in 16:19: ‘Babylon the Great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of his fierce wrath.’

“As with the second trumpet, the similar imagery of the second bowl may indicate famine conditions and economic deprivation, though more severe because of the wider application. ‘The mark of the beast,’ just mentioned in 16:2, first appeared in 13:16–17, where it had an essentially economic connotation. The second bowl is either a figurative parallel with or an anticipation of the dissolution of ‘Babylon the Great’ as the source of prosperous maritime commerce in Revelation 18. As a result, all those who make their living on the ‘sea’ become impoverished (18:17, 19). Therefore, the economic implications here are to be seen in the light of ch. 18.”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 814–815.]

<sup>16</sup>“πᾶσα ψυχὴ ζωῆς ἀπέθανεν can be translated ‘every living soul died’ (ζωῆς taken as a qualitative or adjectival genitive). This may refer to the death or suffering of people who depend on a maritime economy. The second trumpet judgment involved the death of sea creatures ‘having life’ (ψυχᾶς), but the point of the description, as we have seen, was to highlight maritime disaster and famine conditions in general, in which humans also suffered and died. The death of humans themselves appears to be the point of 16:3, especially since every other use of ψυχὴ in Revelation, except technically in 8:9, refers to people (6:9; 12:11; 18:13, 14; 20:4). Babylon’s demise is referred to as ‘plagues’ that result in ‘pestilence, mourning and famine.’ Therefore, the sea being turned to ‘blood’ in 16:3 is figurative, at least in part, for the demise of the

tion πᾶσα ψυχὴ ζωῆς, every living life, i.e., person. The consequence here of dying is famine producing wide-spread death.

What begins to emerge here is the progression toward totality. This movement will continue until after the seventh angel God declares that it is finished (v. 17).

#### D. Third angel obeys, vv. 4-7

4 Καὶ ὁ τρίτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ εἰς τοὺς ποταμοὺς καὶ τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων, καὶ ἐγένετο αἷμα.

5 Καὶ ἤκουσα τοῦ ἀγγέλου τῶν ὑδάτων λέγοντος·

δίκαιος εἶ, ὃ ὦν καὶ ὃ ἦν, ὁ ὅσιος,

ὅτι ταῦτα ἔκρινας,

6 ὅτι αἷμα ἀγίων καὶ προφητῶν ἐξέχεαν

καὶ αἷμα αὐτοῖς [δ]έδωκας πιεῖν,

ἄξιοί εἰσιν.

7 Καὶ ἤκουσα τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου λέγοντος·

ναὶ κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ,

ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις σου.

4 The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters say,

“You are just, O Holy One, who are and were,

for you have judged these things;

6 because they shed the blood of saints and prophets,

you have given them blood to drink.

It is what they deserve!”

7 And I heard the altar respond,

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ungodly world’s economic life-support system.

“The ‘sea’ as figurative for ungodly humanity is not inconsistent with the other uses of θάλασσα in the Apocalypse (twenty-four occurrences), which are susceptible to such a symbolic interpretation (except in 18:17, 19, 21).<sup>45</sup> Clearly the ‘many waters’ of 17:1 are a picture of unbelievers throughout the earth (17:15). Furthermore, Satan’s standing ‘on the sand of the sea’ in 12:18 may refer to his sovereignty over the wicked nations, since in 20:8 ungodly nations are compared to ‘the sand of the sea.’ The sea from which the beast of 13:1 emerges represents the mass of nations. This symbolic understanding of 16:3 is supported by the explicit figurative interpretation of the bloody ‘rivers and springs of waters’ in v 4 as God’s judgment on the impious (vv 5–6). The understanding of “blood” in v 3 as representing the suffering of the ungodly is warranted by the immediate context (e.g., vv 2, 8–11) and by the use of ‘blood’ (αἷμα) elsewhere in Revelation to refer, without exception, to the suffering of the wicked or of Christ and the saints (the former in 11:6; 14:20; 19:13; cf. 6:12; 8:7–8; the latter in 1:5; 5:9; 6:10; 12:11; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2).

“Some see the woe of v 3 as reflecting the bloodshed of ancient sea battles, such as that described by Josephus, War 3.522–31: ‘one could see the whole lake red and covered with bodies, for not a man escaped.’ While this is possible, v 3 more likely portrays suffering in general, though the effects of warfare could certainly be part of this general suffering.”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 815–816.]

“Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty,  
your judgments are true and just!”

After the third angel (v. 4) comes another angel with a song of chant celebrating the justness of God’s judgments (vv. 5-6). This evokes a heavenly affirmation (v. 7).

**The third angel, v. 4.** Καὶ ὁ τρίτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ εἰς τοὺς ποταμοὺς καὶ τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων, καὶ ἐγένετο αἷμα. The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. Here the same introductory formula as with the first two angels is used to indicate the pouring out of the third bowl.

The distinction is where it was poured: εἰς τοὺς ποταμοὺς καὶ τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων, into the rivers and the springs of waters. This works in close coordination with εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν, into the sea, in the second bowl (v. 3). The two almost become one in the very similar emphasis.

But also the third bowl is parallel with the third trumpet in 8:10-11.

10 Καὶ ὁ τρίτος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν· καὶ ἔπεσεν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀστὴρ μέγας καιόμενος ὡς λαμπὰς καὶ ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸ τρίτον τῶν ποταμῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων, 11 καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ ἀστέρος λέγεται ὁ Ἄψινθος, καὶ ἐγένετο τὸ τρίτον τῶν ὑδάτων εἰς ἄψινθον καὶ πολλοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπέθανον ἐκ τῶν ὑδάτων ὅτι ἐπικράνθησαν.

10 The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water.

11 The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many died from the water, because it was made bitter.

Here a star falls on the rivers and springs contaminating the waters so that many people die from drinking the water. But with the third bowl, the waters of the rivers and springs turn into blood, in a manner similar to the second bowl and the second trumpet.

This, along with the image in the second bowl, draws upon the first of the ten Egyptian plagues for a background.<sup>17</sup> The ten plagues upon the Egyptians are

<sup>17</sup>“The third bowl is parallel with the third trumpet (8:10–11). The third trumpet brings destruction ‘on a third of the rivers and on the springs of the waters ... and many people died from the waters because they were made bitter.’ Similarly, the third bowl is directed against ‘the rivers and the springs of the waters, and they became blood.’

“Again, both texts are based on the plague on the Nile (Exod. 7:17–21; Ps. 78:44; see on 8:10–11). Therefore, the third trumpet and the third bowl pertain to the same kind of judgment. Again, the primary difference is that the former has partial effect and the latter total effect, indicating that the partial economic woe of the third trumpet can be extended at times throughout the inter-advent age to the whole earth. And just as the kingdom of Babylon was the object of the third trumpet’s woe (see on 8:10–11), so like-

listed below in the sequence of their depiction in Exodus 7-11:

1. **Water into blood** (דָּם): **Ex. 7:14–25**
2. Frogs (צְפַרְדֵּי): Ex. 7:25–8:11
3. Lice (כְּנִיִם): Ex. 8:16–19
4. Wild animals or flies (עֲרוֹב): Ex. 8:20–32
5. Diseased livestock (דָּבָר): Ex. 9:1–7
6. Boils (שָׁחִין): Ex. 9:8–12
7. Storms of fire (בָּרָד): Ex. 9:13–35
8. Locusts (אַרְבֵּה): Ex. 10:1–20
9. Darkness (חֹשֶׁךְ): Ex. 10:21–29
10. Death of firstborn (מִקַּת בְּכוֹרוֹת): Ex. 11:1–12:36

The point of this judgment seems to be economic punishment along with the second bowl.<sup>18</sup> The reasons for this is the same water-into-blood image. This is coupled with a similar background image in the destruction of Babylon in 18:8, 10-19, with all three based on the Egyptian plagues. This matches the economic thrust of the second and third trumpet with the emphasis upon

wise those who persecute the saints suffer from the bowl judgment (16:6). This judgment comes on all who so persecute. And again, like the woe in 8:10–11, this one implies famine, though famine may represent even broader kinds of suffering.”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 816.]

<sup>18</sup>“Like the second bowl, the third probably also refers to severe economic suffering like that described in 18:8, 10–19, since both are based on the same exodus plague and speak of water becoming blood (see on 16:3). In both bowls the ‘blood’ is figurative, not only for death, but for suffering in general, which may lead to literal death. Therefore, the third bowl, like the second, is either a figurative parallel with or an anticipation of the portrayal in ch. 18 of the destruction of ‘Babylon the Great’ as the basis of prosperous maritime commerce. As a result of this destruction, all those who make their living on the basis of this commerce become destitute (18:10–19). An economic interpretation of the saints’ suffering in 16:6 and of the suffering of the ungodly envisioned in this bowl is supported by the verbatim parallel between 16:6 and 18:24, according to which the ungodly world is to be judged (16:6; 18:20) because it spilled ‘the blood of saints and prophets’ (αἷμα ἁγίων καὶ προφητῶν, though the wording is reversed in 18:24). Plausibly lying behind this expression are the kind of economic trials experienced by the Asian churches (see on 2:9), which included various degrees of suffering, including imprisonment and even death (see on 2:9–11).

“Instead of singular ἐγένετο (‘it became’ or ‘there came about’) some mss. have the plural ἐγενοντο (‘they became,’ P<sup>47</sup> A 1006 1611 1841 1854 2053 2329 pc it sy co). The singular is preferable since it is the harder reading. It is understandable that a scribe would change the singular to plural to harmonize it with the multiple bodies of water that became blood, but no discernible motive could underlie a change from an original plural to the more difficult singular. Translation of the singular as “there came about” removes the apparent difficulty.”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 816–817.]

partial punishment, in contrast here to complete coverage of punishment.

**The angel of the waters, vv. 5-7.** Two introductory expressions introduce the two chants:

Καὶ ἤκουσα τοῦ ἀγγέλου τῶν ὑδάτων λέγοντος:....

Καὶ ἤκουσα τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου λέγοντος:....

This sets up an initial declaration that is followed by an affirmation of agreement. The first declaration comes from the angel, and the response from the heavenly altar. Both are introduced by the standard Καὶ ἤκουσα, and I heard, which begins new sub-units of emphasis.

One of the interpretive questions is whether the ‘angel of the waters’ is a different angel from the third one who emptied out his bowl on the waters.

The expression τοῦ ἀγγέλου τῶν ὑδάτων, angel of the waters, reflects the role of angels in superintending over various aspects of the created order of things.<sup>19</sup> In Rev. 7:1-2 four angels manage the four corners of the earth and control what happens on the earth. The expression here seems to play off that earlier image.

The language of the text can be understood as this angel being different from the angel with the bowl. But just as strong a case can be made for the two references being to a single angel with poured out the bowl, and then announced a message which John heard. Ul-

<sup>19</sup>“This assumes a cosmos in which the various material elements are presided over by, or are personified by, particular angelic beings (1 Enoch 60:12–22 [which mentions the spirits or angels of the sea, hoarfrost, hail, snow, mist, dew, and rain]; 69:22; 75:3; 2 Enoch 4–6; 19:1–4; Jub. 2:2; 1QH 1:8–13; Str-B, 3:818–20; 1 Enoch 61:10 mentions angels of the water). In rabbinic literature the term, שַׂר הָעוֹלָם *śar ha-ōlām*, ‘prince of the world,’ refers to an angelic prince who is in charge of various aspects of creation (Str-B, 2:552). Various lesser angelic figures who are guardians of various aspects of the cosmos are mentioned in Revelation: Rev 7:1–2 refers to angels who control the four winds (see b. Git. 31b; Schäfer, Rivalität, 57), while Rev 14:18 (and Apoc. Abr. [Rec. A] 13:10) refers to the angel who has authority over fire (see Comment on 14:18); in rabbinic literature Gabriel was known as the prince of fire (Cant. Rab. 3.11 § 1; Schäfer, Rivalität, 57). 1 Enoch 66:2 refers to angels or powers who were in charge of the waters, and Sopher ha-Razim 4.10 speaks of ‘the angels of water.’ Rabbinic literature mentions Ridja as the angel in charge of water and particularly rain (b. Ta.an. 25b; b. T. Yom 20b; Schäfer, Rivalität, 58). The medieval cabbalistic work in Hebrew, the *Clasicula Salomonis*, mentions a number of angels in charge of various elements, including Taliahad, the angel of the water (S. L. M. Mathers, *The Key of Solomon the King* [London, 1888] 74). PGM XIII.169–70, 481–84 (a parallel) speaks of a god who appeared and ‘was placed in authority over the abyss, for without him moisture neither increases nor decreases.’ PGM XXXV.7–10, part of a magical recipe heavily influenced by Judaism, mentions several supernatural beings in authority over various aspects of the cosmos: ‘I invoke you, who is in charge of the showers, Telze; I invoke you, Edanoth, who is in charge of the sea; I invoke you, Saesechel, who is in charge of the dragons; I invoke you, Tabium, who is in charge of the rivers.’”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 884–885.]

timately it has no real impact on the meaning of the text.

### **The angel's chant:**<sup>20</sup>

δίκαιος εἶ, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, ὁ ὅσιος,  
ὅτι ταῦτα ἔκρινας,  
ὅτι αἷμα ἀγίων καὶ προφητῶν ἐξέχεαν  
καὶ αἷμα αὐτοῖς [δ]έδωκας πιεῖν,  
ἄξιοί εἰσιν.

The core expression is δίκαιος εἶ, **You are just**. The remainder is expansion elements, that move in two directions. First is the direct address of God as ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, ὁ ὅσιος, **the One who is and who was, the Holy One**. Then follows a twofold declaration of reasons for God being just: **ὅτι** ταῦτα ἔκρινας, **ὅτι** αἷμα ἀγίων καὶ προφητῶν ἐξέχεαν καὶ αἷμα αὐτοῖς [δ]έδωκας πιεῖν, ἄξιοί εἰσιν, **because You have judged these things, because the blood of the saints and prophets was poured out and you have given them blood to drink, they are worthy!**

The main affirmation of the angel is δίκαιος εἶ, **You are just**.<sup>21</sup> The adjective δίκαιος, -αία, -ον is used four times in Revelation in reference to God: 15, 3; 16:5, 7; 19:2. The relational thrust of the term underscores that God's actions toward humanity are consistent with His righteous character (δικαιοσύνη). In the usage found in Revelation God's judgments, αἱ κρίσεις σου, are δίκαιαι. And also δίκαιαι are His αἱ ὁδοί σου, **paths** (15:3). This theme is very common throughout the Old and New Testaments, as well as in early Christianity and Judaism.

The connection of God's justness to who He is finds affirmation in the direct address terms:

**ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν**. This declaration of God's eternal existence here stands as a part of an often repeated formula in Revelation:

<sup>20</sup>Note that the verbal introduction to the chant is λέγοντος, **saying**, i.e., a verb of speaking rather than of singing.

<sup>21</sup>“There are a number of prayers and hymns to God in the OT and early Jewish literature affirming that he dispenses judgment properly and never in an arbitrary or undeserved manner (Neh 9:33; Dan 9:14; Tob 3:2; 3 Macc 2:3). The initial predication δίκαιος εἶ, ‘you are righteous,’ introducing prayers or hymns to God in the ‘you style,’ occurs in the LXX (Tob 3:2; Esth 4:17; Pss 118:37; 119:137; Jer 12:1 [יהוה אלהיך שׂדִּיִּק *saddiq attâ YHWH*, translated δίκαιος εἶ, κύριε]). There are two close parallels to Rev 16:7 in early Jewish literature, the first in the du-Stil, ‘thou style,’ the second in the er-Stil, ‘he style’: (1) Apoc. Moses 27:7 (within the context of a judgment doxology pronounced by angels), δίκαιος εἶ κύριε καὶ εὐθύτητάς κρινεῖς, ‘You are just, O Lord, and you judge rightly’; (2) T. Job 43:13, δίκαιός ἐστιν ὁ κύριος, ἀληθινὰ αὐτοῦ τὰ κρίματα, ‘Righteous is the Lord, true are his judgments.’ The predication is followed by the address. The two divine titles ὁ ὢν and ὁ ἦν also occur in 11:17 (preceded by ὁ παντοκράτωρ) and as part of the tripartite formula ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ‘who is and who was and who is coming,’ in 1:4, 8; 4:8. ὁ ὢν and ὁ ἦν belong together and have been inserted between δίκαιος and ὅσιος, which also constitute a complementary pair of divine attributes.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 886.]

κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, **Lord God Almighty who is and who was**, 11:17;

ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, **the One who is and who was and who is coming**, 1:4;

κύριος ὁ θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ, **Lord God who is and who was and who is coming, the Almighty**, 1:8;

κύριος ὁ θεός ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, **Lord God Almighty, who was and who is and who is coming**, 4:8.

**ὁ ὅσιος**. This attribute of God's being is less common than δίκαιος, but in 15:4 we find **μόνος ὅσιος, You alone are holy**. Both δίκαιος and ὅσιος are paired as affirmations of God in Deut. 32:4 (LXX).

θεός, ἀληθινὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ,  
καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ κρίσεις·  
θεὸς πιστός, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀδικία,  
**δίκαιος καὶ ὅσιος κύριος**.

**God, His deeds are true  
and all His paths are just;  
God is faithful, and is not unjust,  
just and holy is the Lord**

As the Holy One God is ultimate purity without any blemish or stain.<sup>22</sup> Therefore in the wrath of God, τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ (v. 1) which stands behind His judging and issuing the sentences of punishment (ταῦτα ἔκρινας, v. 5) in these seven bowls, God always acts consistent with His just and holy character.

The two causal ὅτι clauses in vv. 5b-6 provide the

<sup>22</sup>“While שׂדִּיִּק *saddiq* or δίκαιος is a relatively frequent attribute of God in Israelite, early Jewish, and early Christian literature (Exod 9:27; Deut 32:4; Josh 7:19–21; 2 Chr 12:6; Ezra 9:15; Neh 9:8, 33; Jer 11:20; 12:1; Pss 7:11; 116:5; 119:137; 145:17; Tob 3:2; Esth 4:17; Dan 9:14; 3 Macc 2:3; Adam and Eve 27:5; Pss. Sol. 2:18; Jos. J. W. 7.323; John 17:25; Rom 3:26), ὅσιος (which also occurs in 15:4 as a divine attribute) occurs very rarely as a divine attribute (it is often used in the plural of the righteous), though the titles δίκαιος and ὅσιος are paired in Deut 32:4 and Pss. Sol. 10:5; see 1 Clem. 14:1 (these paired terms are used in the singular [T. Abr. (Rec. A) 9:2] and plural of the righteous in early Jewish literature; see 1 Enoch 25:4; 104:12). Elsewhere in Revelation the title ὁ ὅσιος occurs only in 15:4. There is a great deal of inscriptional evidence from Asia Minor (primarily from Phrygia and Lydia) concerning a cult of Hosios and Dikaios (Holiness and Justice), often associated with other deities such as Men, the Rider God, Zeus Bronton, and Apollo; see A. R. R. Sheppard, “Pagan Cults of Angels in Roman Asia Minor,” *Talanta* 12–13 (1980–81) 77–100. A corpus of all relevant inscriptions that mention Hosios and Dikaios can be found in M. Riel, “Die Götter Hosios und Dikaios in Mäonien und Phrygien,” *Epigraphica Anatolica* 18 (1991) 1–70; 19 (1992) 71–103, and there is a succinct summary of the major contours of the Hosios and Dikaios cult by R. A. Kearsley in *New Docs* 6:206–9; see also Mitchell, *Anatolia* 2:25–26. The phrase ταῦτα ἔκρινας, ‘you have decided to inflict these punishments’ (see Note 16:5b–b.), refers to the wrath of God previously mentioned in 15:1, 7.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 886.]

foundation for the affirmation of the just nature of God.

**ὅτι ταῦτα ἔκρινας.** In the nine uses of the verb κρίνω in Revelation -- 6:10; 11:18; 16:5; 18:8, 20; 19:2, 11; 20:12 -- God delivers a judicial sentence of punishment against the evil of this earth. The antecedent of the demonstrative pronoun ταῦτα most naturally alludes to the preceding three bowls of wrath. The aorist verb form ἔκρινας highlights that God has rendered these judgments which have been implemented by His angels. The point of the statement is that God has indeed taken action against evil. With the opening of the fifth seal (6:9-11), the martyred saints under the altar raised the question, ἕως πότε, ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ἐκ τῶν κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; *“Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?”* (v. 10). Then they were told to wait a while before God would take action to defend His holy character (v. 11). But now God has indeed responded to their pleas and taken action in judgments upon the earth. The angel in this chant celebrates that God always does what He says He will do. This is Who He is!

**ὅτι αἷμα ἁγίων καὶ προφητῶν ἐξέχεαν καὶ αἷμα αὐτοῖς [δ]έδωκας πιεῖν, ἄξιοί εἰσιν.** This second basis for God being δίκαιος is the blood of His people and prophets. This further ties this celebration back to the pleas of the martyred saints in 6:9-11. Their plea was οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς<sup>23</sup> τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν, *will You not judge and avenge our blood?* The structure of the larger forming of the question does not raise doubt about whether or not God would take action. Instead, the introductory ἕως πότε, *how long*, poses the issue as how much delay before God took action.

The motif of the blood of saints and prophets, αἷμα ἁγίων καὶ προφητῶν,<sup>24</sup> v. 6, is repeated in 17:6 as τῆν

<sup>23</sup>Both the verb ἐκδικέω and the noun ἐκδίκησις mean “to give justice to someone who has been wronged.” [Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 556.]

<sup>24</sup>“The term ‘prophets’ is used of envoys of God who are also heroes of the faith (Luke 10:24; Matt 13:17; John 8:52; Heb 11:32–38; Jas 5:10; see J. Barton, *Oracles of God* [New York: Oxford UP, 1988] 96–98). The phrase αἷμα ἐκχεῖν, found only here in Revelation, can be literally translated ‘to shed blood’ or ‘to pour out blood’ (Hebrew שָׁפַךְ שָׁפַךְ *šāpak dām*) and means ‘to murder’ (Gen 9:6; Deut 19:10; Jer 7:6; 1 Enoch 9:1; T. Levi 16:3; T. Zeb. 2:2; Pss. Sol. 8:20; Sib. Or. 3.311, 320; Vit. Proph. 23.1; Aeschylus Eum. 653; cf. Schwemer, “Vita Prophetarum” 2:287). This meaning is clearly expressed in Sib. Or. 3.311–12 (tr. Collins in Charlesworth, OTP 1:369):

Then you will be filled with blood, as you yourself formerly poured out [ἐξέχεας] the blood of good men and righteous men, whose blood even now cries out to high heaven.

“Betz (JTC 6 [1969] 139–54) adduces a number of ancient texts in which the four elements (earth, air, fire, water) cry out to

γυναῖκα μεθύουσαν ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ, *the woman was drunk from the blood of the saints and from the blood of the witnesses to Jesus*, and in 18:24, ἐν αὐτῇ αἷμα προφητῶν καὶ ἁγίων εὐρέθη καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐσφαγμένων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, *in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and all those slaughtered upon the earth*.

The subtle irony in this is the verb ἐξέχεαν. The evil people of the earth ἐξέχεαν, *poured out*, the blood of God’s people. Now God’s angel ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ, *pours out his bowl*, of divine wrath upon them. The same verb ἐκχέω is used in both expressions. To pour out blood comes from the Hebrew מָרַד שָׁפַךְ *šāpak dām* and means “to murder” as expressed in Gen 9:6; Deut 19:10; Jer 7:6.<sup>25</sup>

The second part of this ὅτι clause is more challenging to understand: καὶ αἷμα αὐτοῖς [δ]έδωκας πιεῖν, *and You gave them blood to drink*. The key uncertainty is who the pronoun αὐτοῖς, *them*, refers to? It goes back either to the implicit ‘they’ in the third plural verb ἐξέχεαν, *they poured out*. Or, it refers back to the ἁγίων καὶ προφητῶν, *saints and prophets*.<sup>26</sup> When all of the

God for purification from the pollution of bloodshed. In 1 Enoch 7:6, the earth complains of the lawless ones, and in 1 Enoch 9:1 it becomes clear that the complaint is based on the blood that has been shed on the earth (passages that clearly reflect Hellenistic presuppositions). The same motif from a pagan context occurs in Corp. Herm. 23.54–70, which includes a complaint from Water (58; tr. W. Scott, *Hermetica* 1:489):

Next, my magnanimous son, Water was given leave to speak, and spoke thus: “O Father, self-begotten, and Maker of Nature, that power which generates all things to give thee pleasure, it is high time for thee to give command that my streams be kept pure; for the rivers and seas are ever washing off the defilement of the slayers, and receiving the corpses of the slain.

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 887.]

<sup>25</sup>David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 887.

<sup>26</sup>“The chief exegetical problem here is to identify the αὐτοῖς, ‘to them.’ Should they be identified with the unidentified third-person plural subject of ἐξέχεαν, ‘they poured out’ (i.e., the murderers), or with ‘the holy ones and prophets’? The phrase ‘to give someone blood to drink’ can mean ‘to die’ (Isa 49:26 [NRSV], ‘I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine’), in which case this phrase expresses the principle of lex talionis. But it more frequently means ‘to kill’ (Rev 17:6; Num 23:24; 2 Sam 23:17; 1 Chr 11:19; Jer 46:10; Ezek 39:17–19; Zech 9:15; 1 Enoch 7:5; Aeschylus Cho. 577–78; Sophocles Electra 1417–21; Sophocles Oed. Col. 622; PGM IV.2594–95, 2656–57). According to Charles, the meaning of this clause (which he renders ‘drink each other’s blood’) is that God will cause internecine war between Rome and her allies, yet the Johannine editor, he claims, did not understand this but took the clause to mean that as Rome shed the blood of Christians, so it will be forced to drink actual blood (2:123). Such internecine conflict is clear in 1 Enoch 7:5, but that is not what is said here in v 6. Despite

signals are assessed carefully the most likely meaning of them is those with the ‘mark of the beast’ implicit in the ‘they’ of the verb ἐξέχεαν. With the sea, rivers, and springs having been turned into blood in the first three bowls, these evil people who so readily shed the blood of God’s people now only have blood to drink from their sources of water on the earth. Thus they are doomed to die.

The added declaration ἄξιοί εἰσιν, *they are worthy*, then takes on an ironical meaning via the contextual impact. The NRSV in a dynamic equivalent translation gets the sense exactly correct with “*It is what they deserve!*” The literal sense is ‘*they are worthy of their punishments.*’

This praise of God by the angel parallels in content and emphasis that by the heavenly multitude in 19:1-3.

Μετὰ ταῦτα ἤκουσα ὡς φωνὴν μεγάλην ὄχλου πολλοῦ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ λεγόντων·

ἀλληλουϊά·

ἡ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν,

**ὅτι ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαιαι αἱ κρίσεις αὐτοῦ·**

**ὅτι ἔκρινεν τὴν πόρνην τὴν μεγάλην ἣτις ἔφθειρεν τὴν γῆν ἐν τῇ πορνείᾳ αὐτῆς, καὶ ἐξεδίκησεν τὸ αἷμα τῶν δούλων αὐτοῦ ἐκ χειρὸς αὐτῆς.**

Καὶ δεῦτερον εἶρηκαν·

ἀλληλουϊά·

καὶ ὁ καπνὸς αὐτῆς ἀναβαίνει εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying,

“*Hallelujah!*

*Salvation and glory and power to our God,*

***for his judgments are true and just;***

***for he has judged the great whore who corrupted the earth with her fornication,***

***and he has avenged on her the blood of his ser-***

the parallels adduced above, it seems inappropriate to construe this clause to mean that God allows the saints and prophets to die. If this were so, the αὐτοῖς would refer to the prophets and saints. However, it seems more appropriate to construe the αὐτοῖς to refer to those responsible for the deaths of the prophets and saints. This group could be ‘those people who have the brand of the beast and who worship his cultic statue’ (v 2); see Jörens, *Evangelium*, 134. Clearly, ‘giving them blood to drink’ refers to the fact that the rivers and the springs have been turned to blood, and that the inhabitants of the earth are being punished by literally being forced to drink blood as repayment for the blood that they have shed. Of course, people cannot drink blood, and therefore the symbolic interpretation proposed in the hymn seems secondary. The adjective ἄξιοι, ‘worthy,’ is used ironically in comparison with its use in 3:4. The symbolic interpretation of the turning of the rivers and springs of the earth into blood suggests that the hymn in vv 5–6 has been inserted into an existing narrative. Charles (2:120–24) thought that 16:5–7 was displaced and thought it appropriate to insert it after 19:4.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 887–888.]

vants.”

Once more they said,

“*Hallelujah!*

*The smoke goes up from her forever and ever.”*

Both celebrate God’s taking action against the evil people who have shed the blood of His people on earth. In so doing He demonstrates His righteous and holy character that always addresses evil with destruction.

**The altar’s response:** Καὶ ἤκουσα τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου λέγοντος· ναὶ κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαιαι αἱ κρίσεις σου.

One should note the erroneous translation pattern commonly adopted in English translations, e.g., the NRSV, *And I heard the altar respond.*<sup>27</sup> Although the verb ἀκούω can and frequently does take a genitive case object, which τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου could be so considered, the context here requires the partitive genitive case function which is equally if not more common. This renders the object as “*someone from the altar saying.*”<sup>28</sup> John does not personify the altar with speaking capability here, but rather alludes back to 6:9b-10a where the martyred saints speak from the altar to God:

εἶδον ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐσφαγμένων διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον. καὶ ἔκραξαν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγοντες·

I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given; 10 they cried out with a loud voice,

In responding to the angelic chant, these martyred saints who have been waiting for this time of vindication speak out in agreement with the words of the angel: ναὶ κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαιαι

<sup>27</sup>“Here it is not a question of the personified altar that cries out, as in 9:13 (a view reflected in several modern translations including the RSV, ‘And I heard the altar cry’; the NRSV, ‘Then I heard the altar respond’; and the NIV, ‘And I heard the altar respond’ [Charles, 2:123–24]), for the object of ἤκουσα, ‘I heard,’ is the partitive genitive τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου, ‘[someone] from the altar.’ Within the narrative context of the final version of Revelation, the voice may perhaps belong to one of the martyrs under the altar in 6:10, whose request for vengeance has not yet been answered (Bousset [1906] 396).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 888.]

<sup>28</sup>The literal sense in English is “*I heard speaking out of the altar.*” In the standard 8 case system of understanding ancient Greek, the proper classification of τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου would be ablative of source, which is often made more explicit with the preposition ἐκ. Examples in Revelation include 9:13; 10:4, 8; 11:12; 14:2, 13; 16:1; 18:4 ; 21:3. Rev. 8:5 is helpful with ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου, *out of fire from the altar.*

No where in Revelation are any of the inanimate objects such as the altar, the throne, the glassy sea, the temple etc. ever personified so as to be able to speak. Only the living creatures in heaven ever speak in Revelation.

αἱ κρίσεις σου, “Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, your judgments are true and just!” These words will be echoed again by the heavenly multitude of saints in 19:2a, ὅτι ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις αὐτοῦ, because true and just are His judgments.

The *vai*, yes, at the beginning signals the typical antiphonic style of temple worship in Jerusalem where the Levitical choir presented in chant form the appropriate psalm of praise to God and the worshipers responded with ἡλῶ, *selāh*, in Hebrew that had the formal significance of ἀμήν and the functional meaning of *vai*.<sup>29</sup> That is, the respondents agreed with the declaration and affirmed commitment to it.

Just as the praise chant of the angel was directed to God, so also is the response from those in the altar: κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, Lord God Almighty. The appropriate titles of God’s power and authority are used in connection to His rendering judgments upon the evil of this world.

#### E. Fourth angel obeys, vv. 8-9

8 Καὶ ὁ τέταρτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν ἥλιον, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ καυματίσαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐν πυρί. 9 καὶ ἐκαυματίσθησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καῦμα μέγα καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἔχοντος τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τὰς πληγὰς ταύτας καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν δοῦναι αὐτῷ δόξαν.

8 The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire; 9 they were scorched by the fierce heat, but they cursed the name of God, who had authority over these plagues, and

<sup>29</sup>“The term *vai* means ‘yes’ and is used here to mark the emphatic affirmation of the judgment doxology in vv 5–6 (Louw-Nida, § 69.1); as such, it functions in hymnic contexts as part of antiphonic style. *vai*, a synonym of ἀμήν, ‘amen,’ is used in affirmative responses four times in Revelation (1:7; 14:13; 16:7; 20:12). The expression *vai*, κύριε is found in Matt 9:28; 15:27 in responses to Jesus, and it also occurs in some magical texts (e.g., Daniel and Maltomini, Supplementum Magicum I.42, line 35 [commentary], II.57, line 14 [commentary]). This is a brief judgment doxology paired as a response to that found in vv 5b–6 (Deichgräber, Gotteshymnus, 45, 56; K. Berger, Formgeschichte, 238). On the divine title κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, which occurs five times in Revelation (4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 21:22), see Comment on 4:8. The phrase ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις σου, ‘true and just are your judgments,’ occurs again verbatim in 19:2. The attributes δίκαιος and ἀληθινός are paired three times in Revelation but are never predicated directly of God (as they are in Jos. J. W. 7.323; Ant. 11.55); rather they occur in the plural of God’s ὁδοί, ‘ways’ (15:3), or his κρίσεις, ‘judgments’ (16:7; 19:2). An emphasis on God as a righteous judge is found in LXX Ps 7:12[MT 7:11], ὁ θεὸς κριτὴς δίκαιος, ‘God is a righteous judge’; 2 Macc 12:6, τὸν δίκαιον κριτὴν θεόν, ‘God the righteous judge’; and 2 Tim 4:8; ὁ κύριος ... ὁ δίκαιος κριτὴς, ‘the Lord ... the righteous judge’; see also 1 Clem. 27:1; 60:1.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 888.]

they did not repent and give him glory.

The fourth angel completes the damage done to the material world in these judgments. Of course, these four judgments are targeting the evil people, but they focus on aspects of their world necessary for people survival.

The standard formula introduction sets up the text unit: Καὶ ὁ τέταρτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ.... And the fourth one poured out his bowl upon.... Here the wrath of God falls ἐπὶ τὸν ἥλιον, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ καυματίσαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐν πυρί, upon the sun, and it was granted to him to burn men with fire. This verbal expression is clearly a Hebraism that reflects thinking in Hebrew while writing in Greek. The Hebrew infinitive absolute expressing a circumstantial clause stands behind the Greek here, as is also found in 17:6 and 18:6.<sup>30</sup> It highlights the divine permission for this action.

The targeting of the sun here does not contradict the specification of the divine command in verse one: ἐκχέετε τὰς ἑπτὰ φιάλας τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς τὴν γῆν, pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God upon the earth. The ancient conceptualization of the elements that made up the material world normally included the sun as a part of the earth.<sup>31</sup> Inside Judaism all of this comprised the created order by God and stood in distinction to His dwelling place above the canopy of the created world.

What is of greater interest is the earlier promise of protection to the people of God on earth from the scorching heat of the sun in 7:16,

οὐ πεινάσουσιν ἔτι οὐδὲ διψήσουσιν ἔτι οὐδὲ μὴ πέση ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς ὁ ἥλιος οὐδὲ πᾶν καῦμα,

They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat;

The people referenced here are, according to one of the heavenly elders, οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ ἐρχόμενοι ἐκ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης καὶ ἔπλυναν τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν

<sup>30</sup>“There is the question of the Hebrew circumstantial clause (Black3 87–89), introduced by *waw*, and rendered in Biblical Greek by *kai autos*; it is very frequent in Revelation (3:20; 14:10.17; 17:11; 18:6; 19:15 bis 21:7), and also in Luke-Acts and Paul. Rev 3:20 *while he sups with me*, 17:11 *while he is the eighth*.” [James Hope Moulton and Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek: Style.*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976–), 152.]

<sup>31</sup>“In 16:1, the bowl angels are commanded to pour out their libation bowls upon the earth. While this plague is not closely related to the others, it does result in the affliction of the four elements, considered basic from the time of the Greek natural philosophers (e.g., Empedocles, frags. B96, B98, B107, B115 in H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th ed. [Zürich; Hildesheim: Weidmann, 1951]): (1) earth (v 2), (2) water (sea, v 3; rivers and springs, v 4; the Euphrates, v 12), (3) fire (sun, v 8), and (4) air (v 17); the throne of the beast (v 10) is obviously missing from this schema.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 899.]



καὶ ἐλεύκαναν αὐτὰς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ ἀρνίου, “These are they who have come out of great affliction; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14b). That is, they are Christian martyrs now in heaven with God, and thus protected from the punishments and torments being experienced on earth.

The image of a fiery sun scorching the earth and the people on it is found, especially in the aired regions of the ancient middle east.<sup>32</sup> But John here in 16:8 and 7:15-17 draws from Isa. 49:10

10 οὐ πεινάσουσιν οὐδὲ διψήσουσιν, οὐδὲ πατάξει αὐτοὺς καύσων οὐδὲ ὁ ἥλιος, ἀλλὰ ὁ ἐλεῶν αὐτοὺς παρακαλέσει καὶ διὰ πηγῶν ὑδάτων ἄξει αὐτούς·†

10 they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.

The promise of God’s care of His people stands in stark contrast to the punishing heat of the sun reigning down on a pagan world: καὶ ἐκαυματίσθησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καῦμα μέγα, and men were burned with a great heat.<sup>33</sup> This is not fatal but carries with it intense torments.

The response of the evil people, however, is καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἔχοντος τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τὰς πληγὰς ταύτας καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν δοῦναι αὐτῷ δόξαν, but they cursed the name of God, who had authority over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory. The response here is much like that in the sixth trumpet to those not killed by the plagues of the first six trumpets (9:20-21) constituting the first two of three woes:

20 Καὶ οἱ λουποὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, οἳ οὐκ ἀπεκτάνθησαν ἐν ταῖς πληγαῖς ταύταις, οὐδὲ

<sup>32</sup>“The blessings enjoyed by the victorious martyrs, according to 7:16, include the promise that the sun will not strike them and the assurance that they will not be affected by scorching heat (an allusion to Isa 49:10). A myth of the near destruction of the earth by a fiery sun is preserved in Ovid *Metam.* 1.749–79, 2.1–366 (see also Lucian *Dial. Deorum* 25). Phaethon, the son of Helios (Sun) and Clymene, received a promise from his father, Helios, that he could have whatever he wanted. He rashly chose, against his father’s advice, to drive the chariot of the sun during one of its daily journeys between sunrise and sunset. His inexperience caused the horses to run wild and take the chariot off its normal course, coming too close to the earth and burning the mountains, forests, meadows, and cities of the earth. The scorching heat blackened the skin of the Ethiopians, turned fertile Libya into a desert (2.235–38), and dried up the Nile (2.254–56). It is striking that this is the only classical myth that narrates the scorching of the earth by the sun.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 889.]

<sup>33</sup>One fascinating aspect of the pagan myth of the earth being scorched severely by the sun with Helios’ wild chariot ride is that Lybia was a paradise beforehand and by this scorching sun was turned into a barren desert and its people became black skinned.

μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν, ἵνα μὴ προσκυνήσουσιν τὰ δαιμόνια καὶ τὰ εἰδωλα τὰ χρυσοῦ καὶ τὰ ἀργυροῦ καὶ τὰ χαλκοῦ καὶ τὰ λίθινα καὶ τὰ ξύλινα, ἃ οὔτε βλέπειν δύνανται οὔτε ἀκούειν οὔτε περιπατεῖν, 21 καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν φόνων αὐτῶν οὔτε ἐκ τῶν φαρμάκων αὐτῶν οὔτε ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῶν οὔτε ἐκ τῶν κλεμμάτων αὐτῶν.

20 The rest of humankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands or give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk. 21 And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their fornication or their thefts.

Just as with the sixth trumpet, the intent of these punishments was not to convert the evil world to the Christian faith. Rather, it was to unleash divine punishment upon them for their evil actions, especially in harming the people of God.

Instead, the logic of John in both instances is that common sense would suggest that in the face of such overpowering punishments obviously coming from the one true God that even evil people would recognize what was happening and would acknowledge however grudgingly that they were coming from God. But no their evil was so much of who they are that their only response was to curse God and dig in even deeper in their rejection of Him.

Their blaspheming of God reflected their unwavering loyalty to the beast who blasphemed God in 13:5-6.

5 Καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ στόμα λαλοῦν μέγала καὶ βλασφημίας καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἐξουσία ποιῆσαι μῆνας τεσσεράκοντα [καὶ] δύο. 6 καὶ ἤνοιξεν τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ εἰς βλασφημίας πρὸς τὸν θεὸν βλασφημῆσαι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν σκηνὴν αὐτοῦ, τοὺς ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ σκηνοῦντας.

5 The beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. 6 It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup>“They blasphemed the name of God’ because of the suffering they experienced from the plague of the fourth bowl. This blasphemy is a defiant slandering or defaming of the name of the true God (see on 13:5–6).<sup>59</sup> God’s ‘name’ represents his attributes and character.<sup>60</sup> The reprobates utter lies about God’s character as revenge for the punishments that they experience under his hand. The blasphemy shows that they have become like the false, beastly god that they worship, since elsewhere outside ch. 16 ‘blasphemy’ is attributed only to the beast (13:1, 5, 6; 17:3).<sup>61</sup> This connection is strengthened by the fact that, as with the idolaters of 16:9, 11, 21, the beast begins to engage in blasphemous activities only after he has been struck by a divine ‘plague’ (13:3–6). The focus of the blasphemy here is a denial that the blasphemers’ afflictions are

The synonymous parallelism of the response should be noted:

καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἔχοντος  
τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τὰς πληγὰς ταύτας  
καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν δοῦναι αὐτῷ δόξαν.

The second line, **they did not turn to give Him glory**, underscores their slandering of God's name in spite of who He was as in charge of the plagues. The use of the English word 'repent' for μετενόησαν can easily be misleading since it is clear that there was no turning toward God in any kind of humbling of themselves before Him. The core meaning of μετανοέω as **to turn around**, especially in one's thinking, stresses a stubborn, persistent rejection of God. The infinitive phrase δοῦναι αὐτῷ δόξαν defines what would have been the intention had they turned toward God, that is, **to acknowledge God's name**, rather than what they did by blaspheming His name.

Thus these evil people are unmoved by all these punishments from God. Just as the Egyptian pharaoh their reaction is to bury themselves deeper in their evil.

Among Jewish and early Christian writers this punishment of the sun's scorching heat described as fire in v. 8 was equated with the seventh of the plagues on Egypt.<sup>35</sup> The ten plagues upon the Egyptians are listed below in the sequence of their depiction in Exodus 7-11:

1. Water into blood (דָּם): Ex. 7:14–25
2. Frogs (צְפַרְדֵּי): Ex. 7:25–8:11
3. Lice (כִּנִּים): Ex. 8:16–19
4. Wild animals or flies (עֲרֹב): Ex. 8:20–32

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sovereign punishments from God.

"They thus deny that 'God has authority over the plagues.' Plural 'plagues' (τὰς πληγὰς) suggests that the targets of the fourth bowl woe also suffer under the trials unleashed by the preceding and following bowls. That 'they did not repent so as to give glory to him' means that they become immovable in their refusal to acknowledge God's glorious character (on analogy with 9:20 δοῦναι ['to give'] is an exegetical infinitive of result). This underscores the prior mention of their blasphemies against the divine name (God's 'glory' is often synonymous with his 'name' in the OT—e.g., Isa. 48:9–11). The parallel with 9:20 suggests further that these people are unrepentant about their idolatrous commitments."

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 822.]

<sup>35</sup>Jewish writings that, like Rev. 16:8–9, understand the plagues of fire in Exod. 9:23 and Deut. 32:24 as involving a spiritual dimension of punishment include, e.g., Targ. Onk. and Neof. Deut. 32:24; Targ. Pal. Deut. 32:24; and Midr. Rab. Exod. 12.4. The Egyptians were also "scorched" by fire mixed with hail (Midr. Rab. Exod. 12.4) and by burning boils (Pesikta de Rab Kahana 7.11)." [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 823.]

5. Diseased livestock (דִּבְרָה): Ex. 9:1–7

6. Boils (שִׁחִין): Ex. 9:8–12

**7. Storms of fire (בָּרָד): Ex. 9:13–35**

8. Locusts (אַרְבֵּה): Ex. 10:1–20

9. Darkness (חֹשֶׁךְ): Ex. 10:21–29

10. Death of firstborn (מִכַּת בְּכוֹרוֹת): Ex. 11:1–12:36

The difference in the Egyptian plagues is that fire is combined with thunder and hail in a depiction of huge lightning strikes coming out of the sky with large chunks of hail that did enormous damage in ancient Egypt. It may well be that John's image assumes such accompanying phenomena without direct mentioning of them in the manner of Deut. 32:24. But it's not clear that this is implied.

## 2. What does the text mean to us today?

The application of 16:1-9 to our world is complex.<sup>36</sup> Several ongoing, timeless spiritual principles are present. Most importantly, is the re-affirmation of the justice of a holy God who always keeps His promises to His people. By his drawing upon the image of the martyrs in the altar in the fifth seal (6:9-11) together with these four bowls of wrath, especially in the celebration chants in 16:5-7, we are reminded by John of the faithfulness of God to always do what He promises to do.

This justice of God is His δίκαιος at work in rendering sentences of judgment upon evil people: ταῦτα

<sup>36</sup>"The seven bowl plagues are enumerated in Rev 16:2–21: (1) The plague of sores or boils (v 2; the sixth plague of Exod 9:9) affects those who had received the brand of the beast and worshiped its image (continuing these motifs first mentioned in 13:15–16 and reiterated in 14:9–11). (2) The sea becomes blood, killing all sea creatures (v 3), parallel to the effects of the second trumpet plague in 8:8–9 and reminiscent of the first plague of Exod 7:20–21. (3) The rivers and wells become blood (v 4), also reminiscent of the first plague of Exod 7:20–21. This bowl plague is accompanied by a 'judgment doxology' sung by a mysterious angel of the water, emphasizing the justice of God in avenging the death of his prophets and saints (vv 5–7). (4) The sun scorches people (vv 8–9; partially resembles the fire from heaven of the seventh plague of Exod 9:22–24). (5) The throne of the beast (already mentioned in 13:2) and its kingdom are covered with darkness (v 10), reminiscent of the ninth plague of Exod 10:21. (6) The Euphrates dries up (an unheard of and therefore miraculous event, probably modeled on the Exodus story) to make possible an invasion by the kings of the east (v 12), perhaps an allusion to the Parthian menace. The unholy trinity of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet is identified as the cause of this rebellion against God (vv 13–14). This plague is similar to the sixth trumpet plague (9:13–21), where the release of the angels bound at the Euphrates made it possible for an enormous army (see 17:14; 19:19–21) to kill one-third of the human race. (7) The seventh bowl (16:17–21) causes the destruction of 'the great city' (v 19), i.e., Babylon-Rome. This unit of text concludes the narrative of the seven bowl plagues and also serves to introduce the extensive section on the fall of Babylon (17:1–19:10)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 903.]

ἔκρινας (v. 5). The severity of these judgments grows both out of God's absolute holiness (ἀληθιναὶ καὶ δίκαιαι αἱ κρίσεις σου, v. 7) and the utterly unchanging evil of those on the earth (v. 9). The three series of sevens from chapters six through sixteen highlights the growing severity of these judgments that culminate in the last series of seven bowls as the full expression of God's wrath upon an evil world. We must never ever forget God's justice and its certainty upon evil and evil people.

Behind this justice and holiness stands the God of all power who is celebrated in the heavenly praise: ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, ὁ ὄσιος, *the One who is and who was, the Holy One*, and κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, *Lord God Almighty* (vv. 6-7). Though sometimes with the explosion of evil and evil people in our day, we may wonder whether God is strong enough to do anything about this. But this text in Revelation, along with many others in the book, reminds us to be patient as God instructed the martyred saints in chapter six. He is both powerful enough to eliminate all this evil in one action, and in His own timing will do so with absolute certainty. Our challenge is to patiently wait on our mighty God to take action. And to do so in unconditional commitment to Him and His ways as we live day to day.

Another observation I hope is emerging as we notice the variety of praise expressions that take place in Heaven across these sixteen chapters. All of them center on both who God is and what He does. Ego-centralism is not present at all in any of them, unlike so many of the worship expressions in modern times. God never ever exists for our pleasure! Just the opposite. We exist for His! It is both our role and our privilege as His creatures to lift our voices in praise and adoration of Him. We exist solely for Him and our highest achievements in life are to glorify Him in our living and with our words. To approach God as a gigantic heavenly Coke machine, here to serve our needs and desires, is one of the most dangerous and prevalent heresies of modern Christianity.

With the response of evil people to these punishments (v. 9, along with 9:20-21), we come to better understand the profound depths of evil in the lives of those not the children of God. This horrible evil grows out of the evil of their leader, the beast, as described in 13:5-6. John's use of the imagery of the Egyptian plagues in Israelite history stands as a reminder of that this has been true for a long, long time. Thus we should not be surprised by the uncovering of just how deep evil dominates the non-believing world around us today. The vast majority of the world even in our day despises God and is completely unwilling to surrender to His demands.

The tragedy of this is the certainty of their spiritual

suicide in their rebellion against God. This text in 16:1-9 makes the certainty of this very clear. Most of the people will slide screaming and cursing into the fires of eternal damnation. None of them is able to recognize the hand of God in earthly punishments coming upon this earth even today. And even should some of them recognize this the evil that has them in its grip moves them to curse the name of God rather than acknowledge Him.