



# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

## Bible Study 40

Text: Rev. 16:10-21

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1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ ἀποστόλου τοῦ ἡμετέρου ἡν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσημάνει ἅ τὰς ἐπιλήψεις διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἁγίου ἰωάννη, 2 ἵνα κηρύξησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἄδατος ὅσα εἶδεν. 3 Μακάριοι οἱ ποιοῦντες τὰς ἐπιλήψεις τούτων ἢ γεγραμμένα

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2. What the text means.

**The Bowls 5-7, pt. 2**

### Greek NT

10 Καὶ ὁ πέμπτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον τοῦ θηρίου, καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ ἐσκοτωμένη, καὶ ἐμασῶντο τὰς γλώσσας αὐτῶν ἐκ τοῦ πόνου, 11 καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸν θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐκ τῶν πόνων αὐτῶν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐλκῶν αὐτῶν καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν.

12 Καὶ ὁ ἕκτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν ποταμὸν τὸν μέγαν τὸν Εὐφράτην, καὶ ἐξηράνθη τὸ ὕδωρ αὐτοῦ, ἵνα ἐτοιμασθῇ ἡ ὁδὸς τῶν βασιλέων τῶν ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου. 13 Καὶ εἶδον ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ δράκοντος καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ ψευδοπροφήτου πνεύματα τρία ἀκάθαρτα ὡς βάτραχοι· 14 εἰσὶν γὰρ πνεύματα δαιμονίων ποιοῦντα σημεῖα, ἃ ἐκπορεύεται ἐπὶ τοὺς βασιλεῖς τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης συναγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν πόλεμον τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς μεγάλης τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος. 15 Ἴδου ἔρχομαι ὡς κλέπτης, μακάριος ὁ γρηγορῶν καὶ τηρῶν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ, ἵνα μὴ γυμνὸς περιπατῇ καὶ βλέπωσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην

### La Biblia de las Américas

10 **El quinto ángel** derramó su copa sobre el trono de la bestia; y su reino se quedó en tinieblas, y se mordían la lengua de dolor. 11 Y blasfemarón contra el Dios del cielo por causa de sus dolores y de sus llagas, y no se arrepintieron de sus obras.

12 **El sexto ángel** derramó su copa sobre el gran río Eufrates; y sus aguas se secaron para que fuera preparado el camino para los reyes del oriente. 13 Y vi salir de la boca del dragón, de la boca de la bestia y de la boca del falso profeta, a tres espíritus inmundos semejantes a ranas; 14 pues son espíritus de demonios que hacen señales, los cuales van a los reyes de todo el mundo, a reunirlos para la batalla del gran día del Dios Todopoderoso. 15 (He aquí, vengo como ladrón. Bienaventurado el que vela y guarda sus ropas, no sea que ande desnudo y vean su vergüenza.) 16 Y los reunieron en el lugar que en hebreo se llama Armagedón.

17 Y **el séptimo ángel** derramó su copa en el aire; y una gran voz salió del templo, del trono, que decía: Hecho está. 18 Entonces hubo relámpagos, voces y truenos;

### NRSV

10 **The fifth angel** poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness; people gnawed their tongues in agony, 11 and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores, and they did not repent of their deeds.

12 **The sixth angel** poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up in order to prepare the way for the kings from the east. 13 And I saw three foul spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet. 14 These are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. 15 (“See, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and is clothed, not going about naked and exposed to shame.”) 16 And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Harmagedon.

17 **The seventh angel** poured his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” 18 And

### NLT

10 Then **the fifth angel** poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. And his subjects ground their teeth in anguish, 11 and they cursed the God of heaven for their pains and sores. But they refused to repent of all their evil deeds.

12 Then **the sixth angel** poured out his bowl on the great Euphrates River, and it dried up so that the kings from the east could march their armies westward without hindrance. 13 And I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs leap from the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. 14 These miracle-working demons caused all the rulers of the world to gather for battle against the Lord on that great judgment day of God Almighty. 15 “Take note: I will come as unexpectedly as a thief! Blessed are all who are watching for me, who keep their robes ready so they will not need to walk naked and ashamed.” 16 And they gathered all the rulers and their armies to a place called Armageddon in Hebrew.

17 Then **the seventh**

αὐτοῦ. 16 Καὶ συνήγαγεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν τόπον τὸν καλούμενον Ἐβραῖστί Ἀρμαγεδῶν.

17 Καὶ ὁ ἕβδομος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν ἀέρα, καὶ ἐξῆλθεν φωνὴ μεγάλη ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου λέγουσα· γέγονεν. 18 καὶ ἐγένοντο ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμοὶ ἐγένετο μέγας, οἶος οὐκ ἐγένετο ἀφ' οὗ ἄνθρωπος ἐγένετο ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς τηλικούτος σεισμοὶ οὕτως μέγας. 19 καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη εἰς τρία μέρη καὶ αἱ πόλεις τῶν ἔθνων ἔπεσαν. καὶ Βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη ἐμνήσθη ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ δοῦναι αὐτῇ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ. 20 καὶ πᾶσα νῆσος ἔφυγεν καὶ ὄρη οὐχ εὐρέθησαν. 21 καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη ὡς ταλαντιαία καταβαίνει ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν θεὸν ἐκ τῆς πληγῆς τῆς χαλάζης, ὅτι μεγάλη ἐστὶν ἡ πληγὴ αὐτῆς σφόδρα.

y hubo un gran terremoto tal como no lo había habido desde que el hombre está sobre la tierra; fue tan grande y poderoso terremoto. 19 La gran ciudad quedó dividida en tres partes, y las ciudades de las naciones cayeron. Y la gran Babilonia fue recordada delante de Dios para darle el cáliz del vino del furor de su ira. 20 Y toda isla huyó, y los montes no fueron hallados. 21 Y enormes granizos, como de un talento cada uno, cayeron sobre los hombres; y los hombres blasfemaron contra Dios por la plaga del granizo, porque su plaga fue sumamente grande.

there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a violent earthquake, such as had not occurred since people were upon the earth, so violent was that earthquake. 19 The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. God remembered great Babylon and gave her the wine-cup of the fury of his wrath. 20 And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found; 21 and huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, dropped from heaven on people, until they cursed God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague.

angel poured out his bowl into the air. And a mighty shout came from the throne of the Temple in heaven, saying, "It is finished!" 18 Then the thunder crashed and rolled, and lightning flashed. And there was an earthquake greater than ever before in human history. 19 The great city of Babylon split into three pieces, and cities around the world fell into heaps of rubble. And so God remembered all of Babylon's sins, and he made her drink the cup that was filled with the wine of his fierce wrath. 20 And every island disappeared, and all the mountains were leveled. 21 There was a terrible hailstorm, and hailstones weighing seventy-five pounds fell from the sky onto the people below. They cursed God because of the hailstorm, which was a very terrible plague.

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## INTRODUCTION

In this continuation of the seven bowls of wrath we are following the 4 + 3 structure that is built into the sequence of seven here. As we have noted in previous studies, this 4 + 3 structure in the first two series of sevens -- the seals and the trumpets -- develops a theme of divine punishments in the two series of 4 and of divine protection of His people in the two series of 3. But here the orientation moves somewhat differently with all seven essentially being divine punishments, and at the same time God's actions in behalf of His people. The section of 3 in vv. 10-21 place primary focus upon the beast and God's punishment of this evil world leader who first appeared in chapter thirteen.

These develop the theme of the great battle between Satan and God, especially in the sixth bowl, which was first introduced in the sixth trumpet (9:13-21). In 16:16, this conflict is introduced as Harmagedon or Harmagedon,<sup>1</sup> but both the identity and nature of this

<sup>1</sup>If one goes directly from the Greek Ἀρμαγεδῶν into English the spelling is **Harmagedon**, but if one follows the Latin Vulgate Armagedōn[ ] into English the most common spelling is **Armageddon**. Predominately down through the centuries from the 1500s the different versions of the English Bible have followed the Latin

event is filled with profound interpretive challenges.<sup>2</sup> The battle is not fought in the sixth bowl, but in 19:19-21 and 20:7-10. And when it actually takes place, it isn't much of a battle since God overwhelms all of the gathered armies with one soldier (19:11-16) in one quick action. Concentrated evil convinces itself that it is unstoppable, but, when God intervenes to block it, all this concentrated evil is destroyed completely by God using but a tiny amount of His power.

More importantly these final three bowls set up the detailed depiction of the collapse of the great Babylon described in 17:1-19:10. As a symbol of Rome to John's initial readers, this affirmation of the collapse of the Roman empire had much more interest to them. Vulgate rather than the Greek in their spelling.

<sup>2</sup>These difficulties include the connection of Rev. 16:16 to 19:19 and 20:9 inside the book. Outside are the challenges of connections to Joel 3:2; Zech. 14:2; Ezek. 38-39. Added to that are possible links to the Jewish apocalyptic literature in 1 Enoch 56:7; the Sibylline Oracles 3:663-68 etc. Once proper linkage to all these possible other ancient texts is established, then comes the almost impossible interpretive issues about the meaning both symbolic and historical of this image. Anyone who thinks he or she has all of the clearly sorted out is living in self delusion!

And a highly graphic depiction of the city's fall is provided.

There is much for us to learn from this text. In order to get to a clear picture, one has to wade through a tremendous amount of commentary dung. But the effort is worth while.

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

Consideration of relevant background issues come first as always, before we attempt an exegesis of the text itself.

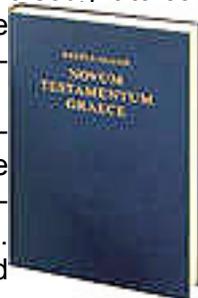
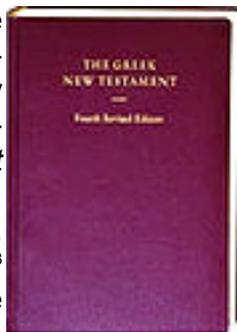
### Historical Aspects:

Here the more relevant history aspects center on the transmission of the text through hand copying of it during the first several centuries after its composition at the end of the first Christian century.

**External History.** The *Transmission History* reflects a rather stable text in 16:10-21 with only one issue arising in the Text Apparatus of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed) in v. 17.

16.17. ναοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου, out of the temple from the throne.<sup>3</sup> The very unusual stacking of these two prepositional phrases back to back was puzzling to later copyists who sought to correct it with a variety of solution.<sup>4</sup> But the majority of evidence follows the adopted reading.

Of course, as we typically observe, many more variations surface in a comparison of all of the still existing manuscript copies of this passage. The text apparatus of the Nestle-Aland



<sup>3</sup>{A} ναοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου P<sup>47</sup> A (1006 ἀπὸ τοῦ ναοῦ ἐκ) 1611 1841 2053 2062 (2329 ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ after θρόνου) it<sup>ar</sup> vg syr<sup>ph, h</sup> cop<sup>sa</sup>, bo<sup>ms</sup> (arm) (eth) Primasius Beatus // οὐρανοῦ (051\* ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) it<sup>gig</sup> // οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου 1854 2344<sup>vid</sup> Andrew // ναοῦ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου (051c ἀπὸ τοῦ ναοῦ) 205 209 Byz [046] // ναοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ κ // ναοῦ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ 2027

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, 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>4</sup>“The phrase ναοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου, which has very good manuscript support, has undergone a variety of changes in various manuscripts. It is replaced by ναοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ (from the temple of God) in manuscript κ, by ἀπὸ οὐρανοῦ (from heaven) in the original writing of manuscript 051, and is expanded by the addition of τοῦ οὐρανοῦ and/or τοῦ θεοῦ in still other witnesses.” [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.]

*Novum Testamentum Graece* (28th rev. ed.<sup>5</sup>) lists some 35 places where variations of wording surface.<sup>6</sup> Close

<sup>5</sup>Note that finally at last the digital edition of this Greek New Testament has been released in a ‘critical edition’ with the new, updated Text Apparatus. The Greek text remains the same, but the Text Apparatus has been updated and modified to accommodate the updates.

This 28th edition of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* is, on the one hand, a thoroughgoing revision of the 27th edition and remains closely related to it in many respects. On the other hand, the new edition presents a fundamentally new conception, at least with respect to the Catholic Letters, because for this part of the New Testament the *Editio Critica Maior* (ECM) is already available. The ECM represents a new level of scientific research on the text of the Greek New Testament and offers a text newly established on this basis. New insights and results had to be incorporated into the present hand edition.

[Holger Strutwolf, “Foreword,” in Nestle-Aland: *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. Barbara Aland et al., 28. revidierte Auflage. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).]

### 10

\* αγγελος 051. 2329. 2344 M<sup>A</sup> ar vg<sup>cl</sup> syr<sup>ph</sup> sy; Prim Bea (ἄγγελος is added after πέμπτος)

\* εσκοτισμενη κ<sup>2</sup> 046. 1611 (alternative spelling of ἐσκοτωμένη is used)

\* απο κ 051 (alternative preposition used for ἐκ)

### 11

\* εβλασφημιουν P<sup>47c</sup> gig sa bo<sup>ms</sup> (alternative spelling for ἐβλασφήμισαν)

\* κ gig; Bea (ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν is omitted)

### 12

\* αγγελος 051. 2329. 2344 M<sup>A</sup> it vg<sup>cl</sup> syr<sup>ph</sup> sy; Prim Bea (ἄγγελος is added after ἕκτος)

° κ P 046. 051. 1854. 2053. 2062. 2344 M<sup>K</sup> (the article τὸν is omitted before Εὐφράτην)

| txt P<sup>47</sup> A C 1006. 1611. 1841. 2329

°<sup>1</sup> 2344 M<sup>A</sup> (αὐτοῦ omitted after τὸ ὕδωρ)

\* ανατολων A 051 M<sup>A</sup> syr<sup>ph</sup> (alternative spelling for ἀνατολῆς)

### 13

\* κ\* C vg<sup>ms</sup> (ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ δράκοντος καὶ is omitted)

\*<sup>1</sup> κ\* 2053. 2062 bo<sup>ms</sup> (ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ θηρίου καὶ is omitted)

\* 046. 2053. 2062 M<sup>K</sup> (reversed sequence for τρία ἀκάθαρτα)

\* ωσει βατραχους P<sup>47</sup> κ\* (alternative wording for ὡς βάτραχοι)  
| – 2344

### 14

\* δαιμονων 051 M<sup>A</sup> (alternative spelling for δαιμονίων)

\* εκπορευεσθαι P<sup>47</sup> κ\* 051. 1006. 1841 M<sup>A</sup> (ἃ ἐκπορεύεται is replaced by the infinitive)

° P<sup>47</sup> 051. 1854 M<sup>A</sup> (the article τὸν before πόλεμον is omitted)

\* 1 4 2P<sup>47</sup> A 1611. 1841. 1854 (sequence & wording variation in τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς\* μεγάλης)

| τῆς ημερας εκεινης της μεγαλης 046. 051. 2344 M sy

| – 1006

| txt κ 2053. 2062. 2329 gig; Bea

### 15

\* ερχεται κ\* syr<sup>ph</sup>; Prim Bea (alternative spelling for ἔρχομαι)

\* βλέπουσιν P<sup>47</sup> 051. 1854. 2329 M<sup>A</sup> (alternative spelling for βλέπωσιν)

examination again reveals that the vast majority of the variations reflect stylistic improvement efforts. None of them change the basic meaning of a portion of the text.

Thus we can exegete the adopted reading of the scripture passage in full confidence that it represents the original wording of the text.

**Internal History.** The apocalyptic vision nature of the text underscores the time and place references in the passage as visionary rather than historical. The one reference often treated as though it were historical is Ἀρμαγεδών, *Harmagedon*, is linked to text variations and more properly is an exegetical issue than a background issue. Thus it will be treated below, rather than here.

### Literary Aspects:

Again as is normally the case inside Revelation 4-22 especially the literary aspects will play a more important role for proper understanding of the scripture

16

\* συνηγαγον κ vg<sup>ms</sup> (alternative spelling for συνήγαγεν)

° κ (article τὸν before τόπον omitted)

Μαγε(δ)δων 046. 1611. 2053. 2062 M<sup>K</sup> vg<sup>mss</sup> sy<sup>ph</sup>.h<sup>mg</sup> bo<sup>mss</sup> (Ἀρμαγεδών is replaced)

17

\* αγγελος κ(\*) 2051. 1854. 2329. 2344 A it vgcl syph sy; Prim Bea (ἄγγελος is added after ἑβδομος)

\* εις 051. 1854. 2053. 2062. 2329 M<sup>A</sup> (alternative preposition used for ἐπι)

° A 2344 M<sup>A</sup> (μεγάλη is omitted)

\* ουρανου 051\*. 1854 M<sup>A</sup> gig (ναοῦ is replaced)

| ναου του ουρανου 046. 051c M<sup>K</sup>

| txt P<sup>47</sup> κ A 0163<sup>vid</sup>. 1006. 1611. 1841. 2053. 2062. (2329)

lat sy

\* του θεου κ (ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου is replaced)

| - 051\* gig

18

\* 1 4 5 2 3 P<sup>47</sup> 051. 2329 M<sup>K</sup> sy<sup>h</sup> (variations of sequence in ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ)

| 5 4 1-3 κ(\*) 2 bo

| 1 4 5 2344 sy<sup>ph</sup> sa<sup>mss</sup>

| 1-3 046

| txt A 0163. 1006. 1611. 1841. 1854. 2053. 2062 lat sa

° 046 M<sup>K</sup> (ἐγένετο is omitted)

\* (+ οι M<sup>K</sup>) ἀνθρωποι ἐγενοντο κ 046. 051. 1006. 1611. 1841. 1854. 2053. 2062. 2329. 2344 M latt sy (alternative spellings for ἄνθρωπος ἐγένετο)

| txt (P<sup>47</sup>) A

19

\* αι P<sup>47</sup> (αι inserted before τῶν ἐθνῶν)

° κ 1006. 1841. 1854. 2062 (τὸ before ποτήριον is omitted)

°1 κ (τοῦ before οἴνου is omitted)

°2 κ (αὐτοῦ is omitted)

21

\* αὔτη 1006. 1611. 2030 M<sup>K</sup> (alternative spelling for αὐτῆς)

| - 046 lat

[Eberhard Nestle and Erwin Nestle, *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus*, ed. Barbara Aland et al., 28. revidierte Auflage. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 771-772.]

passage.

**Genre:** The continuation of John's apocalyptic vision is present in 16:10-21, and thus defines how the passage should be understood. This is not a historical depiction of an event, but rather an apocalyptic depiction. Through graphic imagery John presents the ultimate clash between God and Satan along with the outpouring of divine wrath upon evil people on the earth. Thus the imagery reflects the spiritual perspective taking place at any time historically when evil people lash out against God and His people. The intensity of the seven bowls with the declaration by the seventh angel in 16:17, γέγονεν, *it is completed*, point toward a final huge confrontation at the end of human history.

No particular sub genre units emerge in vv. 10-21, although established patterns of formulaic introduction in the last three bowls are followed from the pattern in the first four bowls in vv. 2-9: ὁ ----- ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ..., *the ----- angel poured out his bowl upon....* The heavy dependency upon the imagery of the ten Egyptian plagues from Exodus that we discovered in vv. 2-9 continues here as well. Also the 'stitching' together of images from earlier references especially in chapter 13 and then to chapter 19 continues in the final three bowls.

An interesting parallel between vv. 12-16, the sixth bowl, and the Jewish apocalypse probably written about the same time,<sup>7</sup> *First Enoch 56:5-8* surfaces.<sup>8</sup>

5 And in those days the angels will gather together, and will throw themselves towards the east upon the Parthians and Medes; they will stir up the kings, so that a disturbing spirit will come upon them, and they will drive them from their thrones; and they will come out like lions from their lairs, and like hungry wolves in the middle of their flocks. 6 And they will go up and trample upon the land of my chosen ones, and the land of my chosen ones will become for them a tramping-ground and a beaten track. 7 But the city of my righteous ones will be a hindrance to their horses, and they will stir up slaughter amongst themselves, and their (own) right hand will be strong against them; and a man will not admit to knowing his neighbor or his brother, nor a son his father or his mother, until through death there are corpses enough, and their punishment — it will not be in vain. 8 And in those days Sheol will open its mouth,

<sup>7</sup>“The Book of Enoch (also 1 Enoch;<sup>[1]</sup> Ge'ez: *māts'hafā he-nok*) is an ancient Jewish religious work, ascribed by tradition to Enoch, the great-grandfather of Noah, although modern scholars estimate the older sections (mainly in the Book of the Watchers) to date from about 300 BC, and the latest part (Book of Parables) probably to the end of the first century BC” [“Book of Enoch,” [wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org)]

<sup>8</sup>David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 867

and they will sink into it; and their destruction — Sheol will swallow up the sinners before the face of the chosen. (tr. Knibb, Enoch)

Both depict a gigantic clash between the people of God and the evil people of the world. First Enoch sees evil people as those rejecting the Torah while covenant Israel is assumed to be Torah obedient Israelites.<sup>9</sup> One should acknowledge the considerable controversy over whether Enoch is looking back in time or forward into the future.<sup>10</sup> Probably more the latter is the case. John's

<sup>9</sup>“56:5–57:3 These verses diverge from the geographically oriented journey narratives in 52:1–56:4 and recount two events that continue the eschatological scenario that was narrated in the future tense in chaps. 50 and 51. The first of these events is the eschatological assault on Jerusalem predicted by the prophets (56:5–8), which is described in the future tense. The second event, of cosmic proportions — whether the approach of another army, the return of the dispersion, or the pilgrimage of the mass of gentiles (57:1–3) — is recounted as something that Enoch has seen. The two sections complement and are contrasted with each other. The first ends with the destruction of the foe; the second ends with the principals falling down and worshipping the Lord, an appropriate ending for the parable.” [George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch 2: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 37–82*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, Hermeneia — A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 209.]

<sup>10</sup>“■ 56:5–8 Verbs, nouns, and imagery that denote violence run like a thread through this section: ‘hurl themselves, stir up, agitation, shake, break out like lions ... and hungry wolves, trample, war, corpses, slaughter, destruction, devour.’ There is, moreover, a causal sequence to the events depicted here. The angels gather; they set out for the East, where they force the kings into action, who react like vicious beasts of prey, trampling the furrows of the land into a beaten, rock like surface. When blocked from the city, the enemies turn on one another, and eventually all are devoured by Sheol.

“Since Laurence’s publication of *1 Enoch* in 1821, these verses have been the subject of intense scholarly scrutiny and debate because of their possible bearing on the dating of the Parables. Does this section refer to an actual Parthian invasion of Palestine, and if so, when? Or is it a general eschatological prediction that anticipates such an invasion?

“Laurence (1821) and Hoffmann (1833) discussed the subject in considerable detail and identified the events described here with the Parthian invasion of 40 B.C.E., which occurred in conjunction with the power struggle between Antigonos, Hyrcanus II, and Herod the Great (J.W. 1.13.1–11 §§248–73; Ant. 14.13.3–14.6 §§330–93).<sup>1</sup> Dillmann, discerning echoes of Joel 2:4–5, Zechariah 12; 14; and Ezekiel 38–39, contested this interpretation and argued that the section has an eschatological flavor and anticipates an incursion yet to come.<sup>2</sup> Martin (1906) and Charles (1912) agreed with Dillmann on this point.<sup>3</sup> Sjöberg argued, however, that the evidence here and elsewhere in the Parables indicates a date between 40–38 B.C.E. and 70 C.E., probably in the reign of Herod the Great or Archelaus.<sup>4</sup> Hindley (1966) disputed this and claimed that v. 7a does not tally with the accounts of Josephus.<sup>5</sup> The city of Jerusalem, far from being a hindrance to the Parthians, was actually taken by them. Perhaps more significant, as Josephus notes, the Parthian invasion of 40 B.C.E. was welcomed by the Jews rather than being perceived as emphatically hostile, as is the case in 56:5–7a. The

perspective is much broader and reflects a clear Christian perspective between the people of God (= Christians) and the evil people of the world under the leadership of the beast.

event to which this text refers is, rather, the Parthian campaign of Trajan in 113–17. Milik (1971, 1976), noting the absence of the Parables among the Qumran MSS., identified the Medes with the Palmyrenes (called *mdy* and *md* in some Safitic inscriptions), attributed the book to a Christian author, and dated it ca. 270 C.E.<sup>6</sup> Subsequent discussions have, by and large, rejected Hindley’s and Milik’s respective identification of the events described here.<sup>7</sup> With two exceptions, the tendency has been to see in these verses a more or less clear or vague reference or allusion to, or remembrance of, the events of 40 B.C.E.<sup>8</sup> Bampfylde excludes this invasion because ‘the Parthians were too successful and had Jewish support. The writer could not have expected Jerusalem to stand against the Parthians in these conditions.’ She posits a slightly earlier date in 51–50 B.C.E.<sup>9</sup> This reasoning, however, is problematic. We have no way of knowing that all Jews, including this author, welcomed the Parthians, nor can we be certain that no Jew might have hoped for miraculous divine intervention in the circumstances of 40 C.E. Different from Bampfylde’s date, Knibb’s dating for the Parables roughly coincides with that of Hindley, albeit on other grounds. With regard to the present passage, he dismisses it as grounds for dating the Parables, because, on the one hand, its biblical echoes elude specific dating, and, on the other hand, the passage (56:5–57:3) is ‘completely out of character with the remainder of the Parables, and it may well be ... an independent piece ... taken over by the author of the Parables.’<sup>10</sup>

“Clearly, a simple identification of 56:5–8 as a summary of the events of 40 B.C.E. is not without its problems. First, the narratives of Josephus assert that the Parthians did, in fact, succeed in breaking through into the walled city of Jerusalem (J.W. 1.13.2–3 §§250–53; Ant. 14.13.3–4 §§335–39).<sup>11</sup> Second, one must account for the fact that these verses are not a straightforward description of a historical event but are expressed in the language of biblical eschatological texts. Perhaps the best way to deal with these disparate data is as follows. These verses may, in fact, recall the Parthian invasion of 40 B.C.E., but they are a genuine prediction of a future event in which the Parthians will be stopped, as the prophets had predicted. This would allow us to take seriously two facts. Verse 5b identifies unnamed or mythically named enemies (Gog of Magog) as the Parthians and the Medes, and it is the only line in the entire Book of Parables that uses the proper name of a historical person or place. This suggests either that at the time these lines were composed the Parthians and Medes were a clear and present danger, or that a Parthian invasion was a remembered event from Israel’s past. With the help of the prophets, this author could expect that this time the invasion would be a failure.

“All this having been said, one should exercise caution in employing these verses in the construction of an argument for the dating of the Parables. They may be consonant with a date after 40 B.C.E. and may even provide support for such a date, but they are not a firm foundation on which to base such an argument. One must look elsewhere in the text, and this seems to be the view of the scholars who espouse such a date.<sup>12</sup> See further §5.2.1.1–7 above, pp. 58–63.”

[George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch 2: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 37–82*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 209–210.]



490 **blessed (is) the one watching and keeping his garments,**  
       so that he doesn't walk around naked  
               and  
               they see his shame.

16.16       And  
 491 **he assembled them**  
       into the place  
               that is called in Hebrew Harmagedon.

16.17       And  
 492 **the seventh one poured out his bowl**  
               into the air,  
       and  
 493 **went out a voice**  
               a loud  
       out of the temple  
       from the throne  
               saying,  
 A                       *"It is done."*

16.18       And  
 494 **there happened flashes of lightning,**  
               and  
               **rumblings**  
               and  
               **peals of thunder,**  
       and  
 495 **an earthquake happened a great one**  
       which had not happened  
       |                       from the time when man was  
       |   upon the earth  
       such a great earthquake as this.

16.19       And  
 496 **the great city became**  
               into three parts  
       and  
 497 **the cities of the Gentiles fell.**

      And  
 498 **the great Babylon was remembered**  
               before God  
               in order to give it the cup  
   of wine  
   of wrath  
   of His anger.

16.20       And  
 499 **every island fled**  
       and  
 500 **no mountains were found.**

16.21       and  
   about a talent in weight (= 100#s)  
 501 **great hailstones...are coming down**  
               out of heaven  
               upon the men,

out of the wounds from the hailstone  
because great is its wound  
exceedingly.

### Summary of Rhetorical Structure

Clearly at the first level of division the three bowls form the basic units of text material: 1) #s 480-484; 2) #s 485-491; 3) #s 492-502. These are the fifth, sixth, and seventh bowls of wrath out of the seven in 16:2-21. The formula introduction repeated three times signals this: Καὶ ὁ ----- ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ....

In **the fifth bowl** (#s 480-484), a threefold sequence of actions take place:

- 1) angel dumps the bowl upon the throne of the beast (#480);
- 2) the beast's kingdom turns into darkness (#481);
- 3) the people in the kingdom respond in pain (#482), blaspheming God (#483), and not turning to God (#484).

In **the sixth bowl** (#s 485-491) the pattern is different:

- 1) the angel dumps his bowl on the river Euphrates and it dries up (#s 485-486);
- 2) John sees three frog like demons come out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (#s 487-488);
- 3) An surprising insertion with the announcement of the coming of Christ followed by a beatitude blessing is made (#s 489-490);
- 4) The assembling of the world's kings at Harmagedon is announced (# 491).

In **the seventh bowl** (#s 492-502) still a different pattern is used for the contents:

- 1) The seventh angel dumps his bowl into the air and a heavenly announcement follows that it is done (#s 492-493).
- 2) Natural phenomena of a great storm and an earthquake then happen (#s 494-495).
- 3) Consequently the city of Babylon is split into three parts along with the collapsing of other cities (#s 496-498). This causes islands and mountains to disappear (#s 499-500). A huge hailstorm with hail a 100 pounds in weight hits men upon the earth causing them to blaspheme God in response (#s 501-502).

John follows the general pattern of expansion along the basic lines of the first four bowls of wrath with the angelic action, impact on the world, and human response. But in these last three bowls the expansion elements are more detailed while going their own separate directions within the core threefold framework for all seven of the bowls of wrath. This helps to mark off the 4 + 3 pattern that we observed in the seven seals and seven trumpets.

### Exegesis of the Text:

The exegesis of this passage will follow the natural elements inside the scripture text as explained above from the block diagram. This will help us correctly understand what John is attempting to communicate.

#### A. The fifth angel obeys, vv. 10-11.

10 Καὶ ὁ πέμπτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον τοῦ θηρίου, καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ ἔσκοτωμένη, καὶ ἔμασῶντο τὰς γλώσσας αὐτῶν ἐκ τοῦ πόνου, 11 καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸν θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐκ τῶν πόνων αὐτῶν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐλκῶν αὐτῶν καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν.

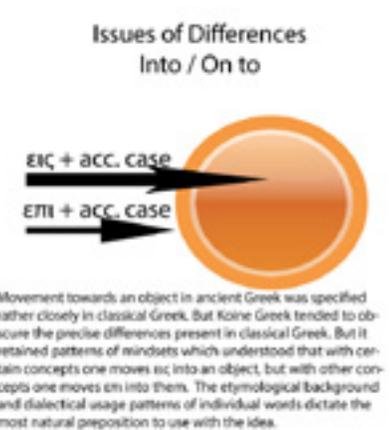
10 The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness; people gnawed their tongues in agony, 11 and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores, and they did not repent of their deeds.

As described above, these two verses sub divide naturally into a threefold sub grouping of ideas.

1) **Angelic action, v. 10a.** The standard introductory formula for all seven bowls units of text is used here: Καὶ ὁ πέμπτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ.... This abbreviated form is exactly the same for bowls two through seven. The abbreviated forms assume by ellipsis the full expression found in verse two for the first angel. As mentioned in the previous study, the shift between the two prepositions εἰς and ἐπὶ is appropriate to the naturally used preposition for the distinctive target of the dumping action. The basic idea is the same of movement into / on to something.<sup>11</sup>

Only the first form is complete in order to establish clearly what John is referencing: Καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν γῆν, **And the first one went out and poured out his bowl upon the earth.** Unquestionably he is referencing each of the seven angels, τοῖς ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλοις, mentioned in verse one. Interesting in the text variations, a number of manuscript copyists -- 051.

<sup>11</sup>The English language reader needs to be cautious here because the first century Greek mind set did not perceive into / on to in a manner parallel to the English language patterns.



2329. 2344 *M<sup>A</sup> ar vg<sup>cl</sup> sy<sup>ph</sup> sy*; Prim Bea -- added ἄγγελος after the number to each of the seven references for clarity's sake, just as do most modern English translators.

The distinctive here is the specification of ὁ πέμπτος, the fifth angel and also the target of the dumping of his bowl of wrath: ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον τοῦ θηρίου, upon the throne of the beast. The first mention of the throne of the beast comes in 13:2,

καὶ τὸ θηρίον ὃ εἶδον ἦν ὅμοιον παρδάλει καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὡς ἄρκου καὶ τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ ὡς στόμα λέοντος. καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ δράκων τὴν δύναμιν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξουσίαν μεγάλην.

And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And the dragon gave it his power and his throne and great authority.

The throne is linked to the power and authority of Satan which is transferred to this human ruler. He functions on earth in behalf of Satan with the full backing of satanic powers. For John's initial readers the identity of this beast was clear, the Roman emperor who reigned over the empire.<sup>12</sup> His seat of power, i.e., his throne, was the imperial capital Rome. At the end of the first century when Revelation was composed this would have been Domitian who unleashed a vicious persecution of Christians outside Rome for a couple of years before he was assassinated in 98 AD.

Additionally a further linkage goes back to 2:13 where Pergamum as the center of Roman province government and of emperor cultic worship was identified as the throne of Satan:

οἶδα ποῦ κατοικεῖς, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ, καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπᾶς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῖν, ὅπου ὁ σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ.

I know where you are living, where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives.

From the apocalyptic vision perspective no single historical identification fully covers the point of the image. The spiritual principle at the heart of the image is the bottom line point of the apocalyptic presentation. The image of the throne of the beast affirms the presence of authorities viciously hostile to God and to His people.

<sup>12</sup>“The throne of the beast is mentioned only in Rev 13:2, where it is said that the dragon gave his throne to the beast along with great authority. Many commentators think that ‘the throne of the beast’ refers to Rome (Swete, 204; Bousset [1906] 397; Charles, 2:45; Behm, 89; Lohse, 92; Mounce, 297).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 889.]

Wherever one encounters such vicious hostility, he is staring the throne of the beast square in the face. For those readers in the church at Pergamum this image in 16:10 was particularly poignant.

## 2) Impact on the kingdom of the beast, v. 10b.

The impact of the angel's dumping actions is described as καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ ἔσκοτωμένη, and his kingdom turned into darkness. This picks up the image of the fourth trumpet in 8:12 but with an emphasis upon completeness rather than partial.

Καὶ ὁ τέταρτος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν· καὶ ἐπλήγη τὸ τρίτον τοῦ ἡλίου καὶ τὸ τρίτον τῆς σελήνης καὶ τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀστέρων, ἵνα σκοτισθῇ τὸ τρίτον αὐτῶν καὶ ἡ ἡμέρα μὴ φάνη τὸ τρίτον αὐτῆς καὶ ἡ νύξ ὁμοίως.

The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light was darkened; a third of the day was kept from shining, and likewise the night.

The territory of the beast was plunged into darkness as the punishment of God. Both of these images of darkness in the fourth trumpet and fifth bowl play off the ninth Egyptian plague.<sup>13</sup> The ten plagues upon the

<sup>13</sup>“Exod. 10:23 explains that the darkness was so dense that the Egyptians were visually separated from one another (‘no man saw his brother’). Wisdom 17 understands the darkness of this Egyptian plague as symbolizing spiritual separation from the true God (v 2: they were ‘exiled from the eternal providence’) and the eternal darkness of hell that awaited the Egyptians (v 20[21]; likewise Midr. Rab. Exod. 14.2 on Exod. 10:22). The darkness caused horror and fear (Wisdom 17–18). The height of the spiritual anguish was that the Egyptians’ contemplation of their own wretchedness became ‘more burdensome than the darkness’ itself (Wis. 17:21).

“In Rev. 16:10 the darkness has the same figurative significance. It is metaphorical for all ordained events designed to remind the ungodly that their persecution and idolatry are vain, and it indicates their separation from God. As with the Egyptians, this darkness induces anguish, figuratively expressed by the phrase ‘they gnawed their tongues because of the pain.’ God causes all who follow the beast to have times of anguish and horror when they realize that they are in spiritual darkness, that they are separated from God and that eternal darkness awaits them. The ‘darkening’ of the fifth trumpet woe also led to spiritual and psychological ‘torment’ (cf. βασανισμός in 9:5–6 and βάσανος in the description of the plague of darkness in Wis. 17:12[13]). The fifth trumpet also afflicted the realm of the beast (‘those not having the seal of God on their foreheads,’ 9:4). Perhaps the demonic scorpions of the fifth trumpet are the agents of the ‘pain’ of the fifth bowl. Like the woe in 9:1–11, the ‘pain’ (πόνος) in 16:10 may also be linked with the removal of some forms of earthly security, which causes the wicked to focus on their lack of spiritual security (as is evident from 21:4, where πόνος refers to the ‘pain’ or ‘distress’ of forms of earthly suffering). The temporal judgment here is a precursor of the final judgment, when unbelievers will be ‘cast into the outer darkness,’ where ‘there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’” (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30).

“‘Darkness’ is also metaphorical for a realm of judgment for the reprobate in 2 Pet. 2:17; Jude 13.”

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

1. Water into blood (מַדְּמָה): [Ex. 7:14-25](#)
2. Frogs (צְפַרְדֵּי): Ex. 7:25-8:11
3. Lice (כִּנִּים): Ex. 8:16-19
4. Wild animals or flies (עָרוֹב): Ex. 8:20-32
5. Diseased livestock (דִּבְרָר): Ex. 9:1-7
6. Boils (שִׁחִין): Ex. 9:8-12
7. Storms of fire (בְּרָד): 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 implications of this kind of darkness are far greater than any physical darkness could ever be. Physical darkness would mean discomfort and inconvenience but not much more. The darkness that John describes here is far more profound and has grievous consequences upon people.<sup>14</sup>

**3) Response of the people, vv. 10c-11.** Three reactions by the people are depicted here, one physical and two spiritual.

**First** is the physical consequence upon the people: *καὶ ἔμασῶντο τὰς γλώσσας αὐτῶν ἐκ τοῦ πόνου, and they began gnawing at their tongues out of pain. How this darkness led to people gnawing at their tongues in severe pain is not clear at first glance.*<sup>15</sup> The Egyptian

[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), 824.]

<sup>14</sup>“This plague calls to mind the ninth plague of the Exodus tradition in which thick darkness covered the land of Egypt for three days (Exod 10:21-29; cf. Wis 17:1-18:4), as well as the fourth trumpet plague (8:12) in which the light of the sun, moon, and stars was partially obliterated (a typical apocalyptic event; cf. Isa 13:10; Joel 2:10; 3:15; Amos 8:9; Hab 3:11; Sib. Or. 5.344-49; Bib. Ant. 19:13; T. Mos. 10:5; Mark 13:24 = Matt 24:29; Acts 2:20 [Joel 2:10]). The crucifixion of Jesus was reportedly followed by a miraculous eclipse of the sun (Mark 15:33 = Matt 27:45 = Luke 23:44), to be understood as a sign (TDNT 7:439).

“Darkness is a symbol of judgment (1 Sam 2:9; Amos 5:20 [the day of Yahweh will be darkness and not light]; Joel 2:2; Zeph 1:15), ignorance and wickedness (Ps 82:5; Prov 2:13; Eccl 2:14; 4 Ezra 14:20), death (Ps 143:3), and the underworld as a place of punishment (Jub. 5:14; 1 Enoch 17:6; 2 Enoch 7:1; Pss. Sol. 14:9; Bib. Ant. 16:3; 51:1; Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Jude 13 = 2 Pet 2:17). Satan is called a מַלְאֲךְ רוּשׁׁר *mal'ak hōšek*, ‘angel of darkness’ (1QS 3:20-21). Darkness resulting from disturbances of the sun, moon, and stars became part of the apocalyptic scenario of the last days (Isa 13:10; Joel 2:10; 3:15; Amos 8:9; Hab 3:11; Sib. Or. 5.344-49; Bib. Ant. 19:13; T. Mos. 10:5; Mark 13:24 = Matt 24:29; Acts 2:20 [Joel 2:10]; Rev 8:12; 9:2).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 890.]

<sup>15</sup>“It is not immediately evident why the plague of darkness should inflict pain on people who are part of the kingdom of the beast. Charles saw this as a reference to the first woe, i.e., the fifth trumpet plague, in 9:1-12, for there the smoke from the abyss darkened the sun and the air (9:2), and people were tormented by

plague background throws some light on this connection with the interpretive declaration by Isaiah in Isa. 8:21-22, where aspects of the plague were applied to the coming Day of the Lord in the Babylonian invasion of Judah,

18 ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ καὶ τὰ παιδιά, ἃ μοι ἔδωκεν ὁ θεός, καὶ ἔσται εἰς σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰσραὴλ παρὰ κυρίου σαβαωθ, ὃς κατοικεῖ ἐν τῷ ὄρει Σιών.† 19 καὶ ἐὰν εἴπωσιν πρὸς ὑμᾶς Ζητήσατε τοὺς ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς φωνοῦντας καὶ τοὺς ἐγγαστριμύθους, τοὺς κενολογοῦντας οἱ ἐκ τῆς κοιλίας φωνοῦσιν, οὐκ ἔθνος πρὸς θεὸν αὐτοῦ; τί ἐκζητοῦσιν περὶ τῶν ζώντων τοὺς νεκρούς;† 20 νόμον γὰρ εἰς βοήθειαν ἔδωκεν, ἵνα εἴπωσιν οὐχ ὡς τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦτο, περὶ οὗ οὐκ ἔστιν δῶρα δοῦναι περὶ αὐτοῦ.† **21 καὶ ἦξει ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς σκληρὰ λιμός, καὶ ἔσται ὡς ἂν πεινάσητε, λυπηθήσεσθε καὶ κακῶς ἐρέϊτε τὸν ἄρχοντα καὶ τὰ παταχρα, καὶ ἀναβλέψονται εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἄνω† 22 καὶ εἰς τὴν γῆν κάτω ἐμβλέψονται, καὶ ἰδοὺ θλίψις καὶ στενοχωρία καὶ σκότος, ἀπορία στενὴ καὶ σκότος ὥστε μὴ βλέπειν,**† 23 καὶ οὐκ ἀπορηθήσεται ὁ ἐν στενοχωρίᾳ ὢν ἕως καιροῦ.

18 See, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. 19 Now if people say to you, “Consult the ghosts and the familiar spirits that chirp and mutter; should not a people consult their gods, the dead on behalf of the living, 20 for teaching and for instruction?” surely, those who speak like this will have no dawn! **21 They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry; when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will curse their king and their gods. They will turn their faces upward, 22 or they will look to the earth, but will see only distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be thrust into thick darkness.**

Here darkness imposed as divine punishment by God is linked to famine and illness. Perhaps also the torments of the locusts in the fifth trumpet (9:1-11), described as the first woe, are linked to the darkness of the fourth trumpet. Some make this connection but the biblical text doesn’t clearly make it. Whatever the background links elsewhere in the Bible to this darkness, it does produce this inward tormenting of the people inside the kingdom of the beast.<sup>16</sup> The subsequent re-hordes of demonic locusts. Charles assumed that several clauses in which the causes of the darkness and the suffering of humanity were narrated have dropped out of the text here (2:45; cf. Behm, 89; Lohmeyer, 135). Swete thought that the pain was the result of the previous plagues, particularly the fourth plague narrated in vv 8-9 (204; see also Kraft, 207; Sweet, 246).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 890.]

<sup>16</sup>“It can hardly be assumed that the darkness and pain are results of stinging scorpions which darken the sun (9:1ff.), or that

actions make it clear that these evil people recognize the origin of the darkness to be God and curse Him because of it. The image of ἔμασῶντο τὰς γλώσσας αὐτῶν is literally the biting or chewing of their tongues.

The problem here is that only one other instance of this image is known in ancient literature. This is the [Apocalypse of Peter 28](#): *And over against these again other men and women gnawing their tongues and having flaming fire in their mouths: and these were the false witnesses.* This is a depiction of Hell by the late second century writer of this document. And it is but one part of a much large schema of the various torments of Hell contained in the document. The only insight to be gleaned about the meaning of the image is that gnawing the tongue depicts intense torments of some kind.

**Second**, the torments of the people cause them to curse God: καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸν θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐκ τῶν πόνων αὐτῶν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἑλκῶν αὐτῶν, *and they blasphemed the God of heaven out of their pains and out of their boils.* The beast is the first one mentioned in Revelation to blaspheme God in 13:5-6

5 Καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ στόμα λαλοῦν μεγάλα 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 haughtily 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.**

Its foul mouth is evidently passed on to the people of its kingdom who follow the same pattern. Three of the four uses of βλασφημέω occur here in chapter 16, verses 9, 11, 21, with the fourth one in 13:6. Both this verb and the noun βλασφημία are used in connection to the beast and those connected to it, except for the Jewish synagogue at Smyrna in 2:9.<sup>17</sup> The core idea is to slant the darkness alone is πόνος, or that there is textual confusion.<sup>5</sup> It seems rather that there is reflected here the genuine experience of the divine. In hallucinations men bite their own tongues in circumstances of great excitement; the confusion of images shows that the sense of pain on experiencing the vision was so strong that it could not find adequate plastic expression.<sup>6</sup>

“The same experience is to be seen in Apc. Pt. Akhmim text, 28 f., though here it is worked into the retribution schema of the Apc. and rationalised.<sup>7</sup> Men and women who blaspheme God or the way of righteousness are forced in punishment to bite their lips, and false witnesses their tongues.<sup>8</sup>”

[Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 4:515.]

<sup>17</sup>On the other hand, the noun βλασφημία is found five times in Revelation: 2:9 (Jews blaspheming God); 13:1, 5, 6 (the beast); 17:3 (the whore called Babylon).

der God by false statements about Him.

Just as with the fourth bowl the blaspheming of God by these evil people reflects the same pattern found in the Egyptian plagues by the pharaoh.<sup>18</sup> The interesting phrase ἐσκλήρυνεν κύριος τὴν καρδίαν Φαραῶ, *the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart*, הַרְדִּי לִבְ-תַּאֲרַחֵי קַרְדֵּי, occurs repeatedly through these two chapters in Exodus and beyond.<sup>19</sup> The image of hardening one's heart is simply stiffening one's resolve to do / not do something. In Hebrew it had to do with the Pharaoh's will, not with his feelings. The Greek interprets this as covering one's heart, i.e., the center of the will, with thick, stiff scabs. Every time God confronted him through Moses with the demand to let the Israelites leave Egypt, those scabs grew thicker and harder. God is very good at confronting folks with His demands even knowing it will have this kind of impact.

Here the motivation for their cursing God comes ἐκ τῶν πόνων αὐτῶν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἑλκῶν αὐτῶν, *out of their pains and out of their boils.* The πόνος, *pain*, comes out of this fifth bowl of wrath dumped upon the earth. The ἑλκος, *boil*, comes out of the first bowl of wrath in 16:2, and serves to tie these five bowls together so that too much distinction should not be read into each of them. The seven bowls come as one package, not seven different ones.

**Third**, They refused to acknowledge God and that these actions came from Him: καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν. This statement compares to the one in the fourth bowl (v. 9c): καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν δοῦναι αὐτῷ δόξαν, *and they did not turn to give Him glory.* This Hebrew based idiom stands as the opposite of blaspheming. To give God glory is to acknowledge the authority and power of His name over one's life. But their blaspheming action is redefined as refusing to acknowledge God's authority over their lives. Here in v. 11 they refuse to acknowledge God by turning from their evil deeds. That is, they recognized that these punishments were the works of God but they would not admit

<sup>18</sup>“As in the case of Pharaoh, the ultimate effect of the plague is only further hardness: ‘they did not repent from their works.’ οὐ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν might reflect Hebrew šûb min (“turn away from”) and could be rendered “they did not turn away from their works,’ focusing on intractability in a lifestyle of sin rather than simple mental intransigence.<sup>64</sup> They now recognize that God is the cause of their suffering, but this does not soften them toward contrition but only embitters them against their Creator. Contrary to the assessment of some,<sup>65</sup> the lack of repentance here and throughout ch. 16 (vv 9, 11, 21) is not penultimate or reversible but irremediable according to the theological pattern of the hardening of Pharaoh and the Egyptians.” [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), 825.]

<sup>19</sup>Exod. 4:21; 7:3, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 35; 10:1, 20; 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8.

to this at all.<sup>20</sup>

One interpretive issue that has some implications is the literary nature of these three declarations. Considerable signaling is present suggesting that these three should be taken together as synonymous parallelism:

- a) **καὶ ἐμασῶντο** τὰς γλώσσας αὐτῶν ἐκ τοῦ πόνου,
- b) **καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν** τὸν θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐκ τῶν πόνων αὐτῶν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐλκῶν αὐτῶν
- c) **καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν** ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν.

The nature of such a parallelism is to make one central point, normally found in the first stycche, here a). Their chewing their tongues is redefined as blaspheming words being uttered against God and no words of acknowledgment of God begin spoken. When seen together as a package expression, the picture is rather dramatic.

## B. The sixth angel obeys, vv. 12-16.

12 Καὶ ὁ ἕκτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν ποταμὸν τὸν μέγαν τὸν Εὐφράτην, καὶ ἐξηράνθη τὸ ὕδωρ αὐτοῦ, ἵνα ἐτοιμασθῇ ἡ ὁδὸς τῶν βασιλέων τῶν ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου. 13 Καὶ εἶδον ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ δράκοντος καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ ψευδοπροφήτου πνεύματα τρία ἀκάθαρτα ὡς βάρραχοι· 14 εἰσὶν γὰρ πνεύματα δαιμονίων ποιοῦντα σημεῖα, ἃ ἐκπορεύεται ἐπὶ τοὺς βασιλεῖς τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης συναγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν πόλεμον τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς μεγάλης τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος. 15 Ἴδου ἔρχομαι ὡς κλέπτης, μακάριος ὁ γρηγορῶν καὶ τηρῶν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ, ἵνα μὴ γυμνὸς περιπατῇ καὶ βλέπωσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην αὐτοῦ. 16 Καὶ συνήγαγεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν τόπον τὸν καλούμενον Ἑβραϊστὶ Ἄρμαγεδών.

12 The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up in order to prepare the way for the kings from the east. 13 And I

20 “The same principle is at work again in the Apocalypse’s woes of trumpets and bowls. The remnant from the world who repent do so only because they have been sealed by God (7:1–4; 14:1–2). The rest do not believe because they have not been sealed but can only give allegiance to the beast, whose mark they gladly receive (13:8, 16–17; see below on the theological problem this raises in connection with “hardening”).

“The sinful ‘works’ from which ‘they did not repent’ include murder and thievery (no doubt directed against Christians), as well as idol worship, sorcery, and fornication. These vices are implied by the verbatim parallel of 16:11 with 9:20, the latter of which is followed by the listed vices:

“9:20 οὐδὲ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν (“they did not repent from the works of their hands”)

“16:11 οὐ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν (“they did not repent from their works”)

[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), 825–826.]

saw three foul spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet. 14 These are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. 15 (“See, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and is clothed, a not going about naked and exposed to shame.”) 16 And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Harmagedon.

Here a somewhat similar sequence of action, impact, and response is used by John to develop the details of the sixth bowl of wrath. But it has its distinctives as well:

- 1) the angel dumps his bowl on the river Euphrates and it dries up (#s 485-486);
- 2) John sees three frog like demons come out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (#s 487-488);
- 3) An surprising insertion with the announcement of the coming of Christ followed by a beatitude blessing is made (#s 489-490);
- 4) The assembling of the world’s kings at Harmagedon is announced (# 491).

These points can be simplified as the following.

### 1) **Angelic action**, v. 12a.

Once more the formula introduction specifying the angelic action is used by John: Καὶ ὁ ἕκτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ.... Here the sixth angel dumps out the contents of his bowl in a manner exactly like the previous five angels.



This time the target of the dumping action is ἐπὶ τὸν ποταμὸν τὸν μέγαν τὸν Εὐφράτην, upon the great river Euphrates. As the largest river in the Fertile Crescent, it played a significant role in many ways, and not the least was as a territorial boundary for groups on either side of it.<sup>21</sup> As a sidenote, the ignoring of these an-

<sup>21</sup>“The Euphrates is mentioned in connection with both the  
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cient patterns of territorial markers in the drawing up of the boundaries of the Arab states in the middle east by the Allies after World War I has contributed significantly to the perpetual chaos in this part of the world fro the past century. Interestingly this river is only mentioned in the entire New Testament in Revelation at 9:14 and 16:12, and functions in both places in Revelation as a symbol of violent chaos.

Once more parallels surface with the series of trumpets, as well as with the Egyptian plagues. With the sixth trumpet the focus is upon the Euphrates river as with here (cf. 9:13-15):

13 Καὶ ὁ ἕκτος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν· καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν μίαν ἐκ τῶν [τεσσάρων] κεράτων τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τοῦ χρυσοῦ τοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ, 14 λέγοντα τῷ ἕκτῳ ἀγγέλῳ, ὁ ἔχων τὴν σάλπιγγα· λῦσον τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀγγέλους τοὺς δεδεμένους ἐπὶ τῷ ποταμῷ τῷ μεγάλῳ Εὐφράτῃ. 15 καὶ ἐλύθησαν οἱ τέσσαρες ἄγγελοι οἱ ἠτοιμασμένοι εἰς τὴν ὥραν καὶ ἡμέραν καὶ μῆνα καὶ ἐνιαυτόν, ἵνα ἀποκτείνωσιν τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

13 Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, 14 saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." 15 So the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of human-kind.

Here the four angels that are release in preparation for the assembling of an army of over two hundred million soldiers (9:16) whose horses would kill off a third of the population of the world (9:18). This would in both the sixth trumpet and the sixth bowl become a part of the preparation for a gigantic battle at the end.

## 2) **Impact of his action**, v. 12b.

Whereas in the sixth trumpet, the releasing of the four angels at the Euphrates sets in motion the assembling of a huge army, here the dumping of the wrath of God on the river dries its up to prepare for a military crossing of the river similar to what the Persian ruler [Cyrus](#) did when he diverted the waters temporary to suddenly and unexpectedly attack Babylon and subdue it.<sup>22</sup> No numbers of an army are given in the

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sixth trumpet (9:14) and the sixth bowl. The river Euphrates, the largest river in southwest Asia, has been mentioned in connection with the sixth trumpet (9:14), which causes the four angels bound at the Euphrates to be liberated, thereby unleashing a demonic army that kills one-third of humanity (9:15–19). The Euphrates, sometimes called 'the river' (Deut 11:24) and 'the great river' (Gen 15:18; Deut 1:7; Josh 1:4), was one of the great natural boundaries in the ancient world (Exod 23:31; Deut 1:7; Josh 24:2; 1 Kgs 4:21; 2 Kgs 24:7; 1 Macc 3:32)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 890.]

<sup>22</sup>"The OT prophesies that this judgment would include the

sixth bowl, the strong assumption is that the listing for the sixth trumpet applies here since that reference the same thing.

How the river was dried up is not stated in the depiction καὶ ἐξηράνθη τὸ ὕδωρ αὐτοῦ, **and its water was dried up**. In an apocalyptic vision account such as here one would assume it happened by some divine intervening action. Of course, God can use any means He desires, even actions such as a massive earthquake in a pass where the river flows through that would collapse the sides of the cliffs on either side and close off the flow of water.

The intention of drying up the water of the river is stated simply as ἵνα ἐτοιμασθῇ ἡ ὁδὸς τῶν βασιλέων τῶν ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου, **so that the path for the kings from the east might be prepared**. In the sixth trumpet nothing is mentioned about a dry path across the river being necessary, but just that two hundred million mounted soldiers -- modeled somewhat after the Parthian calvary in the first Christian century -- came out of that region to wage war on human kind. The picture in the sixth bowl stresses the leaders of this army as kings of the east. The stress here will now move to the three demonic frog like figures who emerge to take leadership control of this army assembled by these kings. They compare somewhat to the four bound angels in the sixth trumpet.

Another image clearly in the background here is God's parting of the waters of the Sea of Reeds to enable the Israelites to escape the pharaoh and his army in the Exodus (cf. Exod. 14:1-31. In the Exodus the dry waters enable God's people to escape their enemies. But here the drying up of the Euphrates enables the enemies of God people to prepare to attack. In both images violent conflict with God and His will are present, as He utterly destroyed the Egyptians by closing in the waters and will destroy the armies coming to attack

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drying up of the Euphrates River (Isa. 11:15; 44:27; Jer. 50:38; 51:36; cf. Zech. 10:11). The prophecy was fulfilled by Cyrus's diversion of the river (cf. Isa. 44:27–28), which allowed his army to cross the river, enter Babylon unexpectedly and defeat it (Herodotus 1.190–91; Xenophon, *Cyropedia* 7.5.1–36). The means by which God delivers the godly — drying up water — are sometimes used as the means by which he punishes the ungodly (according to the principle enunciated in Wis. 11:5 and 16:24 to explain the exodus plagues).<sup>66</sup> God executed judgment against Babylon by 'raising up' Cyrus and his 'princes,' who were to come 'from the east' (Isa. 41:2), 'from the rising of the sun' (Isa. 41:25 LXX; likewise Isa. 46:11). God made 'his [Cyrus's] ways straight' (αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ εὐθεῖαι, Isa. 45:13; Jer. 50:41 and 51:11, 28 refer to 'kings' whom God was preparing to bring against Babylon). The victory by Cyrus led to Israel's release from captivity (Isa. 44:26–28; 45:13)." [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), 827.]

God's people rather dramatically by one soldier on a white horse who does not even work up a sweat in destroying two hundred million mounted enemy soldiers (cf. 19:11-21).

**3) Responses to his action, vv. 13-16.**

John capsules three responses in 13-14; 15; and 16 to the action of the sixth angel and the dried up river. These function primarily as announcements of impending actions that will be described as happening in subsequent chapters. Everything centers on the impending battle described in chapter 19.

**a) Three frog like demons, vv. 13-14.** 13 Καὶ εἶδον ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ δράκοντος καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ ψευδοπροφήτου πνεύματα τρία ἀκάθαρτα ὡς βάτραχοι· 14 εἰσὶν γὰρ πνεύματα δαιμονίων ποιοῦντα σημεῖα, ἃ ἐκπορεύεται ἐπὶ τοὺς βασιλεῖς τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης συναγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν πόλεμον τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς μεγάλης τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος. 13 **And I saw three foul spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet. 14 These are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.**

In the sixth trumpet the angel was told by God to release the four bound angels at the Euphrates. When he did they assembled a huge army at the river in order to kill off a third of humanity. Interestingly this conquering plan was carried out by their horses spewing out fire, smoke, and sulfur from their mouths. But now at the action of the sixth angel with the bowl being dumped into the Euphrates three foul spirits come out of the mouths of the dragon, the first beast, and the false witness who is the second beast. These demon spirits assemble a large army from the various rulers around the world at the river in order to march across on dry land to attack God and His people.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup>“Καὶ εἶδον ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ δράκοντος καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ ψευδοπροφήτου πνεύματα τρία ἀκάθαρτα ὡς βάτραχοι, ‘Then I saw three unclean spirits like frogs emerge from the mouth of the dragon and from the mouth of the beast and from the mouth of the false prophet.’ (On καὶ εἶδον, see Comment on 5:1.) This sentence lacks a main verb (the verb one must supply is ‘emerge’), though it is clearly implied that an unclean spirit resembling a frog emerged from each of the three figures. These three figures are all mentioned in Rev 13, though the beast from the land of 13:11–17 is here designated the false prophet. There is an interesting connection between 1 John 4:1–3 and Revelation; in 1 John 4:1, ‘false prophets’ are referred to, while in 4:3 that which false prophets say is called ‘the spirit of antichrist.’ Since Rev 13:11–18 is based on traditions of the eschatological antagonist, i.e., the Antichrist, this characterization suggests how the label ‘false prophet’ arose as an alias of the eschatological antagonist in Rev 16:13; 19:20; 20:10. The beast and the false prophet are again mentioned in 19:20 (the context of this passage, 19:11–21, was originally a continuation of 16:12–16) and 20:10. The term ψευδοπροφήτης, ‘false prophet,’ occurs

Each scenario paints a slightly different picture of armies gathering at the Euphrates river in order to attack God and His people. The kings of the east, τῶν βασιλέων τῶν ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου, alludes clearly in the first century to a variety of kingdoms incorporated under the label Parthian empire.<sup>24</sup>

The three figures of dragon, beast, and false prophet are first introduced in chapter thirteen. The second beast who functioned there as the religious PR agent of the first beast is now appropriately identified as τοῦ ψευδοπροφήτου, **the false prophet**. The rather crude depiction of a spirit, πνεύματα τρία ἀκάθαρτα ὡς βάτραχοι (**three spirits unclean like frogs**), emerging from the mouth of a living creature was rather common

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several times in the NT of OT figures (Luke 6:26), of opponents or heretics (Matt 7:15; Acts 13:6; 1 John 4:1; cf. Herm. Mand. 11.1–2, 4, 7; Did. 11:5–10; 16:3), and (as here) of eschatological figures (Mark 13:22 = Matt 24:11; 2 Pet 2:1). There is a traditional connection between evil spirits and the mouth or nostrils as a passageway for entering or leaving a person. According to Josephus (Ant. 8.46–49), the Jewish exorcist Eleazar drew demons out of the nostrils of the afflicted individual (see Ps.-Plutarch De fluv. 16; Eitrem, Demonology, 48). In Gk Ap. Ezra 6:3–15, angels try unsuccessfully to take the soul of Ezra, first by threatening to cast it forth from his mouth (6:5) and then by threatening to bring it forth through his nostrils (6:7). These conceptions reflect a belief in the way in which the breath of life, the soul (psyche), was breathed into the nostrils of the first man (see Gen 2:7). They also reflect the association of the psyche with breath, for, in early Greek thought, psyche was thought to leave the body from the mouth at death (Iliad 9.409). In an Egyptian instructional text from a Heracleopolitan king to his son Merikare from the early Middle Kingdom, he states that “he [Re] gave the breath of life to their noses, for they are likenesses of Him which issued from His flesh” (L. H. Lesko, “Egyptian Religion,” EncRel 5:41). In Hermas’s vision of the beast, fiery locusts are said to come out (ἐξεπορεύοντο; the same term used in Rev 16:14b) of its mouth (Vis. 4.1.6); see Brox, Hirt, 168.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 894.]

<sup>24</sup>“The phrase ‘kings of the east’ suggests that the east is not unified but is ruled by a coalition of kings, perhaps even more specifically by vassal kings subject to Rome. T. Mos. 3:1 mentions a king from the east who will come and burn the city and temple, referring to Nebuchadrezzar. 1 Enoch 56:5 mentions angels who assemble toward the east to incite the kings of the Parthians and Medes to invade Palestine and attack Jerusalem. In the view of many commentators, the phrase ‘the kings of the east’ refers to the Parthian kings led by *Nero redivivus* (Bousset [1906] 397). One variant of the *Nero redivivus* myth included the belief that Nero would return from the east leading a vast Parthian army (see **Excursus 13A: The Nero Redux or Redivivus Legend**). The Euphrates is specifically mentioned as the river past which the ‘great king’ (i.e., Nero redivivus) flees (Sib. Or. 4.120) and the river he will cross with an enormous army (Sib. Or. 4.139). It is worth noting that while there were many dynastic kingdoms in the Near East during the reign of Augustus, by the early second century all those west of the Euphrates had disappeared.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 891.]

place in the mechanical details of exorcisms in the ancient world.

The somewhat unusual phrase πνεύματα δαιμονίων, *spirits of demons*, is very helpful to interpreting this text.<sup>25</sup> For many of John's readers the phrase πνεύματα τρία ἀκάθαρτα, three unclean spirits, would have suggested that gods emerged out of the mouths of these three creatures. But the subsequent phrase πνεύματα δαιμονίων, *demonic spirits*, clarifies this as evil spirits.<sup>26</sup>

Also the coming *out of the mouth of*, ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ, assumes the verbal expression 'coming' since no Greek verbal expression was given by John. This may solve a minor interpretive problem of whether it was the frog like demonic spirits who organized the kings or whether the dragon, beast, and false prophet did this organizing. The demonic use of living beings' mouths as an organ for expressing themselves to humans is a standard form in exorcism narratives throughout the New Testament, and ancient literature generally. Thus

<sup>25</sup>In the phrase πνεύματα δαιμονίων, the genitive case noun δαιμονίων functioning as Descriptive Genitive, i.e., *demonic spirits*, or as Genitive of Apposition, i.e., *spirits that are demons*.

<sup>26</sup>In the phrase πνεύματα δαιμονίων, 'spirits of demons,' the plural genitive δαιμονίων (an adjective used as a substantive) can be either a descriptive genitive, so that the noun phrase should be translated 'demonic spirits' (unlikely because they have already been characterized as πνεύματα ἀκάθαρτα, 'unclean spirits,' in v 13), or a genitive of apposition in which spirits = demons, so that the phrase can be translated 'spirits, that is, demons.' Since δαιμόνιον is primarily a Hellenistic term, the phrase would then serve to clarify the meaning of a more ambiguous Semitic term πνεῦμα by providing a Greek equivalent. Josephus does this in Ant. 6.211 when he says that David 'drove out the evil spirit and the demons [τοῦ πονηροῦ πνεύματος καὶ τῶν δαιμονίων]' that afflicted Saul. Elsewhere Josephus (J. W. 7.185) finds it necessary to define δαιμόνια as πονηρῶν ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπων πνεύματα, 'spirits of wicked men' (a major way in which daemons were understood in the Greco-Roman world; cf. Plutarch De def. orac. 415B–C). This phrase, which exhibits an 'abundance of style' (Eitrem, Demonology, 38 n. 5), is less awkward than the similar phrase in Luke 4:33, πνεῦμα δαιμονίου ἀκαθάρτου, in which the two genitives are probably appositional, i.e., 'a spirit, that is, an unclean demon' (cf. Fitzmyer, Luke 1:544–45, who also suggests [less probably] that the πνεῦμα may be the man's spirit afflicted by an 'unclean demon'). A similar phrase, τὰ πνεύματα τῶν δαιμόνων, 'the spirits of the daimons,' occurs in PGM XV.15–16, where the plural genitive is similarly appositional. The phrase δαιμόνιον πνεῦμα, 'demonic spirit' (in which δαιμόνιον functions as an adjective), also occurs in magical texts (PGM IV.3038–39, 3065–66, 3075, a Jewish text also published in Deissmann, Light, 251–60; Denis, Fragmenta, 236–38; line 1 of the lead tablet from Hadrumetum written by a Hellenistic Jew and published with commentary in Deissmann, Bible Studies, 273–300). Yet in PGM IV.3081 these terms are used to refer to different types of supernatural beings: 'every spirit and daimon [πνεῦμα καὶ δαιμόνιον] will be subject to you' (cf. PGM XII.261). This may, however, reflect the magician's attempt to be inclusive.' [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 895.]

in all likelihood John's elliptical expression is intended more along these lines than to be understood that the three demonic literally came out of the dragon, beast, and false prophet in order to 're-invent' themselves as talking frogs.<sup>27</sup> The ὡς βάτραχοι would simply mean their speak had a disgustingly coarse sound like the croaking of frogs. John's point then was to paint the actions and speech of the dragon, beast, and false prophet in the most reprehensible manner imaginable.

The objective of their recruitment program to the kings of the world is stated here simply as συναγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν πόλεμον τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς μεγάλης τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος, *to assemble them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty*. In order to get that many political and military leaders to march their armies to one place -- and in the middle east at that<sup>28</sup> -- and at one time would indeed take supernatural powers of persuasion. No human being within his own powers of charisma could accomplish such a feat.<sup>29</sup> The power of the demonic was the key to assembling such an army in one place at the Euphrates.

**b) The announcement of Christ's coming**, v. 15. Ἰδοὺ ἔρχομαι ὡς κλέπτης. μακάριος ὁ γρηγορῶν καὶ τηρῶν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ, ἵνα μὴ γυμνὸς περιπατῆ καὶ βλέπωσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην αὐτοῦ. (*"See, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and is clothed, not going about naked and exposed to shame."*)

With almost no notice beyond the Ἰδοὺ at the beginning of the statement, John introduces an an-

<sup>27</sup>The relative clause ἃ ἐκπορεύεται ἐπὶ τοὺς βασιλεῖς τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης συναγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν πόλεμον τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς μεγάλης τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος, in v. 14 linked clearly to πνεύματα seems at first glance to argue against this understanding. Clearly in most of the exorcism narratives the occasional use of ἐκπορεύεται does imply a literal separation of the demon from its victim. But the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet are hardly 'victims' of demonic possession here. Thus ἐκπορεύεται in this case does not imply literal separation but instead these three evil creatures were going about with the voice of the demonic projecting itself to the kings, i.e., going out. Also the NT exorcism narratives are never so specific as to suggest which body part the demon makes his exit. However a few of the non-biblical, secular stories of exorcism will on isolated occasion suggest the demon makes his exit either through the mouth or more often the nostrils of the victim. See Aune, WBC, vol. 52b, p. 895, for more details.

<sup>28</sup>This region of the fertile crescent had historically been the military graveyard for the Roman armies that had repeatedly suffered its worst defeats against the Parthians in this very region. Alexander the Great succumbed to it while at the pinnacle of his conquests of the eastern Mediterranean in the 300s BCE. Other previous empires from the west had experience similar disasters when marching east to the Euphrates.

<sup>29</sup>Among the Romans, it took a *Nero redivivus* myth to be able to attribute sufficient personal power for a 'resurrected' Nero to convince the Parthians to form a huge army to support his efforts to regain control over the Roman empire. The historical Nero had no such ability.

nouncement of a coming that is obviously the voice of Christ speaking. What is the intended function of the two statements in verse fifteen?

Most commentators see these as an interruption to the flow of the text which resumes in v. 16 from v. 14. Without question the repetition of συναγαγεῖν αὐτούς, *to assemble them*, in v. 14 with συνήγαγεν αὐτούς, *he assembled them*, in v. 16 links the two statements closely together.

Even a few manuscript copyists<sup>30</sup> realized this connection and the changed the third singular συνήγαγεν, *he assembled*, to the third plural συνήγαγον, *they assembled*, in verse 16. But the overwhelming amount of evidence both externally and internally favors the third singular reading, with the possibly assumed verb subject being the person behind the voice in v. 15. Another alternative understanding with much greater likelihood is that the third singular συνήγαγεν in v. 16 assumed the very common tendency of ancient Greek to use a singular verb with a neuter gender plural subject, which clearly is the case here with πνεύματα in v. 14 the implied subject of συνήγαγεν in v. 16. This would follow the pattern in the relative clause ἃ ἐκπορεύεται..., *which go out...*, in v. 14. Here the neuter plural pronoun ἃ is unmistakably used with the singular verb ἐκπορεύεται.<sup>31</sup>

It is this ‘interruption’ that seems to reflect perhaps a second revision of the text by John in which these two statements were arbitrarily added later without clear transitional markers.<sup>32</sup> Although within the realm of plausible explanation, it doesn’t seem to reasonable that something like this would be added later without enclosing it with topic markers. Another explanation is more likely.<sup>33</sup> Here John inserts this text as he is com-

<sup>30</sup>Several early copyists of the Vulgate (vg<sup>ms</sup>) made this switch, but the very important early Greek text Sinaiticus, Ⲙ, also made the switch. The NRSV is one of many modern English translations that also follow the third plural reading.

<sup>31</sup>Sorry for the Greek grammar lesson here, but some alert reader with some knowledge of Greek is bound to read this and then notice the singular συνήγαγεν in v. 16 which at first glance does not seem to work right in the immediate context.

<sup>32</sup>“This is clearly an intrusive comment unrelated to what precedes or follows, and though the speaker is not identified, it is clear that it is the exalted Jesus. The metaphor of Jesus coming like a thief occurs in 3:3 (see Comment there). V 15 is therefore an interpolation derived from 3:3, which has a parenetic character and belongs to the Second Edition of Revelation, i.e., to the framework in 1:3–14; 2:1–3:22; 22:5–21.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 896.]

<sup>33</sup>“A parenthetical exhortation is addressed to believers. The voice exhorts them to be ever vigilant for Christ’s final appearing, since he will come unexpectedly, ‘like a thief’ (see on 3:3 and below for the biblical background of the thief saying). In context the exhortation appears abrupt and seems awkward, but on closer study it functions like the exhortations in 13:9 and 14:12 (and is therefore not a later interpolation, as some speculate). According to 20:8 the ‘war’ is directed first against the saints, and the same

posing the first rough draft in order to alert his readers to anticipate this great battle day with a warning and beatitude promise from Christ; cf. 13:9 and 14:12. This anticipates the role of Christ in the battle described in chapters nineteen and twenty. If the dragon works to get his warriors ready for this battle, Christ is also doing the same, but in a different way.

The twofold declaration in v. 15 begins with a warning: Ἴδου ἔρχομαι ὡς κλέπτης, *behold I am coming like a thief*. The image of Christ coming unexpectedly like a thief does is first used in 3:3 to the church at Sardis, ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσης, ἦξω ὡς κλέπτης, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποῖαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ, *Therefore if you do not watch I will come like a thief and you will under no circumstance know when I will come upon you*. Then it is used here for the two times in the book. The clear implication is that no one knows when a great battle like this one is going to happen. Such an intense conflict between God and evil can take place at any moment, and God’s people will never know in advance when it will occur. The use of the futuristic present tense function of the verb ἔρχομαι does underscore the certainty of His come to make war. It doesn’t project a specific date, however.

The second part of this expression is a beatitude that pronounces divine blessing upon believers who are prepared for Christ’s coming: μακάριος ὁ γρηγορῶν καὶ τηρῶν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ, ἵνα μὴ γυμνὸς περιπατῆ καὶ βλέπωσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην αὐτοῦ, *Blessed is the one watching and keeping his clothes on, so that he may not walk around naked and they see his shame*. This is the third of the seven beatitudes scattered through Revelation: 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14.<sup>34</sup> The

thought is implicit in 16:14 (and in 19:19, in the light of 17:14; 20:8; Zech. 14:2ff.; 4 Ezra 13; and 1 En. 56:5–8; see above on 16:14). A time will come when the beast will attempt to annihilate the entire community of faith (so 20:8–9 and 11:7). This onslaught will occur on ‘the great day of God’ and could come at any hour. Believers must be prepared to hold firm in faith and not compromise when it does happen (so NEB introduces v 15 with ‘That is the day I come like a thief’; similarly JB).” [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), 836–837.]

<sup>34</sup>**Rev. 1:3**, Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς. *Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.*

**Rev. 14:13**, μακάριοι οἱ νεκροὶ οἱ ἐν κυρίῳ ἀποθνήσκοντες ἀπ’ ἄρτι. *Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord*

**Rev. 16:15**, μακάριος ὁ γρηγορῶν καὶ τηρῶν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ, ἵνα μὴ γυμνὸς περιπατῆ καὶ βλέπωσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην αὐτοῦ. *Blessed is the one watching and keeping his clothes on so that he may not walk around naked and they see his shame.*

**Rev. 19:9**, μακάριοι οἱ εἰς τὸ δεῖπνον τοῦ γάμου τοῦ ἀρνίου κεκλημένοι. *Blessed are those invited to the wedding feast of the bride of the Lamb.*

theme of watchfulness in awaiting the coming of Christ is stressed to the church at Sardis (3:2, 3) and then here in the three uses of the verb γρηγορέω in all of the book of Revelation. Yet in the teaching of Jesus and of Paul it is commonly linked to the anticipation of Christ's return (19 uses total).

Being watchful in this beatitude means keeping your clothes on, τηρῶν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ. This is the only use of this image in all of Revelation. Interestingly in the surrounding Greco-Roman culture an account details the execution of a man not properly dressed while attending the theater.<sup>35</sup> The opposite is stated in the negative purpose clause: ἵνα μὴ γυμνὸς περιπατῆ καὶ βλέπωσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην αὐτοῦ, *lest he may walk around naked and they<sup>36</sup> see his shame*. Clearly here the individual's shame is in his nakedness and not in some defect of his body exposed by nakedness. The close linkage between naked and shame is extensive in Jewish literature.<sup>37</sup> And the same attitude existed among

**Rev. 20:6**, μακάριος καὶ ἅγιος ὁ ἔχων μέρος ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῆ πρώτης, *Blessed and holy is the one having a part in the first resurrection*.

**Rev. 22:7**, μακάριος ὁ τηρῶν τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου. *Blessed is the one keeping the words of the prophecy of this scroll*.

**Rev. 22:14**, Μακάριοι οἱ πλύνοντες τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν, ἵνα ἔσται ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τοῖς πυλῶσιν εἰσελθῶσιν εἰς τὴν πόλιν, *Blessed are those washing their robes, so that their right to the tree of life may exist and they may enter by the gates into the city*.

<sup>35</sup>“The importance of having appropriate garments (cf. 3:4) is underscored in the *Acta Alexandrinorum* 7.101–7 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 42), where the emperor is accused of condemning a man to death who sat in the theater without wearing a white festal garment (οὐκ ἐν λευκαῖς ἐσθῆσιν).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 897.]

<sup>36</sup>The ‘they’ here is generalized as a part of the beatitude and as a general spiritual principle. Although it does not exclude the specific situation of a day of battle, when the evil world warriors see the nakedness of the surprised believer, the principle is broad and general as a part of the inherent nature of the literary genre of beatitudes.

<sup>37</sup>“In the OT and early Judaism, the notions of ‘nakedness’ and ‘shame’ were closely associated (Gen 9:20–24; Isa 20:4; 47:3; Hos 2:10; 1 Cor 12:23; Apoc. Moses 20). See Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 3:10 (tr. Maher), where Adam reportedly says ‘I was afraid, for I was naked, because I neglected the commandment you gave me, and I hid myself for shame’ (italicized words not in MT). The Hebrew term נֶגְוָה *.erwā*, ‘nakedness, genitalia,’ is translated eight times in the LXX with the Greek term αἰσχύνη, ‘shame, disgrace’ (Isa 20:4; 47:3; Ezek 16:36, 38; 22:10; 23:10, 18, 29), suggesting that in Rev 16:15 αἰσχύνη also means ‘nakedness.’ The same idiom occurs in Apoc. Moses 20:4, where Adam says ‘I looked for leaves in my area to hide my shame [ὅπως καλύψω τὴν αἰχύνην μου].’ According to Israelite protology, nakedness had not always been associated with shame, as Gen 2:25 makes clear: ‘The man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed’ (RSV). The notions of ‘nakedness’ and ‘shame’ are also linked in Rev 3:18 in the phrase ἢ αἰσχύνη

the Romans, but not as much among the Greeks.

The Genesis account of Adam and Eve provides the foundational understanding here. Their shame prompted them to get dressed but not because they were embarrassed about their physical bodies. Their shame came in their sinful failure to follow God's instructions, which they wrongly thought that clothes could hide from God. Sinful faithful to obey drove a wedge between them and God. This understanding is foundational to the Jewish perspective on shame consistently into the Christian era. The Greek and Roman attitudes about nudity and shame, on the other hand, typically contained gender and sexual dynamics purely

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τῆς γυμνότητός σου, ‘the shame of your nakedness’ (the specific terms αἰσχύνη and γυμνότης occur only there in Revelation). Rev 16:15 may, then, be an allusion to the tradition of ‘Adam's coat’ (based on Gen 3:7, 10–11), a magical garment guaranteeing invincibility, which was venerated by his descendants and was eventually buried in the Cave of Machpelah, where it was preserved for twenty generations (Gen. Rab. 63.13; Ginzberg, *Legends* 1:177; 2:139; 5:199, 276–77; Jørgensen, “Gravhulen,” 102–15). One facet is reflected in the poetic mythological variant of the Adam tradition in Ezek 28:13, where the garment is described as a series of precious stones similar to those worn on the garments of high priests (Ginzberg, *Legends* 1:332; 5:104). Adam and Eve lost their celestial ‘garments of light’ (עֹר *.ôr*, ‘skin,’ in Gen 3:21, explained as though it were written אור *.ôr*, ‘light’) when expelled from Eden (Irenaeus Haer. 3.23.5; Tertullian *De pudicitia* 9; *De resurrectione* 7; Ginzberg, *Legends* 1:79; 5:42, 97, 103–4). Another strand of this tradition (linked exegetically in Jub. 3:26 to Gen 3:7, 9–10) is also reflected in Jub. 3:30, where the term ‘shame’ is a metaphor for nakedness (Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:60):

But from all the beasts and all the cattle he [God] granted to Adam alone that he might cover his shame. Therefore it is commanded in the heavenly tablets to all who will know the judgment of the Law that they should cover their shame and they should not be uncovered as the gentiles are uncovered.

“Nakedness is associated with shame, together with hunger, as divine punishments in 4Q166 = 4QHosea Peshera 2:12–13 (tr. García Martínez, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 192), ‘he has punished them with hunger and with nakedness so they will be shame [sic] and disgrace in the eyes of the nations on whom they relied.’

“There was a different attitude toward the body in the Greek world, though public nudity was always relatively unusual; nudity was considered shameful in some contexts, but not in others, e.g., athletics, battle (Odysseus 22.1; F. Pfister, “Nacktheit,” *PW* 16/2:1541–49; Kleine Pauly 3:1556–57). The first naked man presented in Greek literature is Odysseus, and he expresses shame at his nakedness in the presence of young women (Odyssey 6.127–29, 221–22; Pfister, *PW* 16/2:1545). Odysseus threatens to beat and strip Thersites and so shame him (Iliad 2.261–62), and dead enemy warriors were stripped as a final form of humiliation (Iliad 11.99–100; 22.510). The Romans, in contrast, tended to disapprove of Greek forms of public nudity (Cicero *Tusc. disp.* 4.70). In comparing Greek and Roman statuary, Pliny observes that Greek statues of prominent males are characteristically nude, while Roman statues are clothed (Hist. nat. 34.18).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 897–898.]

out of the human physical anatomy.

The image of nudity and resulting shame in this beatitude plays off the Jewish background and means that the believer has not been properly watchful in awaiting the coming of Christ.

Thus the critical aspect becomes the meaning of watchfulness. This is defined in the beatitude by the metaphor of keeping one's clothes on. Clarity here emerges out of a similar emphasis in the first beatitude in 1:3, where the blessing is pronounced on ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, [the one reading and hearing the words of this prophecy and obeying the things written in it](#). Central to watchfulness is exposing oneself to the spiritual principles made available in scripture and then obeying them in our living. Watchfulness has absolutely no connection to speculating when Christ will come. Instead, it is a daily life of obedience that keeps us fully prepared for His coming at any unexpected moment.

**c) The assembling of the armies at Harmagedon**, v. 16. Καὶ συνήγαγεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν τόπον τὸν καλούμενον Ἑβραϊστὶ Ἀρμαγεδών. [And they gathered them to a place called in Hebrew Harmagedon](#). This resumes the text flow cut off in verse 14, [συναγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν πόλεμον τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς μεγάλης τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος, to gather them to the battle on the great day of God Almighty](#).

The singular verb συνήγαγεν implies the neuter plural subject of the three spirits πνεύματα τρία in v. 13 at the voice piece of the dragon, first beast, and the false prophet second beast. See above discussion for details.

These armies are gathered at an unspecified place east of the Euphrates in v. 12 where they march across the dried river bed of the Euphrates westward to the location now designated as Ἀρμαγεδών in Hebrew.<sup>38</sup> The geographical location of this mythical battleground has never been explained satisfactorily.<sup>39</sup> This uncertainty

<sup>38</sup>The spelling of [Ἀρμαγεδών](#) in modern western languages has a history of its own. The Greek word used here Ἀρμαγεδών comes from the LXX handling of the Hebrew מְגִדּוֹ with Ἄρ Μαγε(δ)δών, i.e., city of Megiddo. The literal transliteration of this is Harmagedōn, But the impact of the Latin Vulgate on modern western translations remains substantial. The Late Latin word *Armagedōn* results in the English spelling, e.g., of Armageddon.

<sup>39</sup>“Thus far there has been no satisfactory explanation of the name. (a) Ἄρ Μαγεδών seems to comprise the name of the city Megiddo (מְגִדּוֹ; Zech. 12:11 with the final n: מְגִדּוֹ; LXX Μεγεδδῶ, Ju. 5:19; Μαγεδδῶ, Jos. 17:11; Μαγεδών, 2 Ch. 35:22). But we never hear of Mt. Megiddo, nor is Megiddo given eschatological significance in contemporary literature, nor does the earliest exegesis of Rev. 16:16 connect it with Megiddo. Loh.<sup>3</sup> tries to overcome the difficulty by translating ‘the Megiddo range’ and referring it to Mt. Carmel, where according to Lidz. Ginza, 121, 13 ff. (125, 4; 132, 4; 197, 20) Ruha and the planets gather to concoct

reaches back quite a ways. Starting around 500 AD several copyists (1611. 2053. 2062 M<sup>k</sup> vg<sup>mss</sup> syr<sup>ph.hmg</sup> bo<sup>mss</sup>) changed Ἀρμαγεδών to Μαγε(δ)δών in order to further identify the location with the Israelite town of Megiddo.<sup>40</sup> Although the word Ἀρμαγεδών is only found here in the entire NT, the concept of a gigantic battle between God and evil forces is present in several places in Jewish literature in addition to Rev. 19:19 and 20:9.<sup>41</sup> When Rev.

the mysteries of love. But this gives rise to the new problem of supposing that Carmel took on a new name, never attested elsewhere, from a ruined city which was situated about 7 miles away from its southern end, which had been ruined since 350 B.C. and which had now sunk into oblivion.<sup>4</sup> (b) F. Hommel<sup>5</sup> conjectures that Ἄρ Μαγεδών is originally a Gk. rendering of מְגִדּוֹ (mount of assembly), used in Is. 14:13 for the mountain on which the gods assemble and which the presumptuous king of Babylon seeks to climb in blasphemous pride. Ἄρ Μαγεδών is thus the demonic counterpart to the mount of assembly of the gods; the ending -ών is a later assimilation to Μαγεδών. This explanation fits the context well, but it does not show how we are to explain the rendering of ε in מְגִדּוֹ by γ since no underlying this ε. Unless we are to ignore this difficulty, we must conclude that the riddle of Ἄρ Μαγεδών still awaits solution.” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 1:468.]

<sup>40</sup>“Variants: (1) Ἀρμαγεδών] A κ 051 fam 1006 fam 1611<sup>2329</sup> Andreas Beatus syr<sup>ph</sup> arab eth. (2) Μαγε[δ]δών] fam 1611<sup>1611</sup> Oecumenius<sup>2053 2062</sup> Byzantine vg<sup>mss</sup> syr<sup>ph</sup> cop<sup>bo mss</sup>. Variants in the spelling of reading (1) are numerous: ἀμαγεδών] Andr a<sup>1</sup> 1773; ἀρμεγεδών] Andr a<sup>2186</sup> Andr c; ἀρμαγεδόν] Andr n; ἀρμαγεδῶμ] Andr g. The name ‘Harmagedon’ in reading (1) is found only in Rev 16:16. Since reading (2), ‘Megiddo,’ refers to a Palestinian town where many battles were fought in the OT (several spellings in Heb. and in Gk., the most common of which are Heb. מְגִדּוֹ *mēgiddō* and Grk. Μαγεδδῶ [Judg 5:19]; Μαγεδδῶρ [Josh 17:11 A]; Μαγεδαών [4 Kgdms 9:27 B]; Μαγεδδεῖ [1 Chr 7:29]; Μαγεδῶ [Judg 1:27 B; 4 Kgdms 23:29 B]). The various spellings are discussed in TCGNT 2, 755; TCGNT 2, 681. In Zech 12:11, the Heb. מְגִדּוֹ *mēgiddōn* is translated as ἐν πεδίῳ ἐκκοπτομένου, i.e., ‘in the plane of what is cut down,’ presumably understanding the word מְגִדּוֹ *mēgiddōn* to be derived from the Heb. root גָּדַד *gādad*, ‘to cut down.’ The known place name in reading (2) was therefore substituted for the unknown place name of reading (1), which is the *lectio difficilior*.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 858–859.]

<sup>41</sup>“The place name ‘Armageddon’ occurs only here, where it represents the mythical apocalyptic-world mountain where the forces hostile to God, assembled by demonic spirits, will gather for final battle against God and his people (other versions of this myth are preserved in Rev 19:19; 20:9; 4 Ezra 13:34–35; 1 Enoch 56:7; Sib. Or. 3.663–68; see Joel 3:2; Zech 14:2). In the Gog and Magog oracle in Ezek 38–39, the place where the enemy from the north assembles and is defeated is called simply ‘the mountains of Israel’ (38:8; 39:2, 4, 17), in agreement with the mention of Harmagedon, but in contrast to Rev 19:19 (where no gathering place is mentioned) and Rev 20:9 (where the enemy surrounds ‘the beloved city’). The name ‘Harmagedon’ has never been satisfactorily explained (Charles, 2:50–51; Joachim Jeremias, TDNT 1:468; KB3, 515–16). The most common explanation of the name is that har (הַר *hâr*) is the Hebrew word for ‘mountain(s), hill(s),’ while

20:9 describes the setting up of the anticipated battle happening as ἐκύκλευσαν τὴν παρεμβολὴν τῶν ἁγίων καὶ τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἠγαπημένην, *they surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city*, it becomes clear that at least the major point of Ἀρμαγεδῶν in 16:16 is not its geographical location but rather its linking of the

*magedon* refers to the biblical town of ‘Megiddo,’ with the entire construction meaning ‘mountain(s) of Megiddo.’ Megiddo was an ancient city located on a plain in the southwest portion of the Valley of Jezreel or Esdraelon, the site of several significant ancient battles, including the Battle of Megiddo, part of the campaign of Thutmose III against a coalition of Canaanite petty kings in 1468 B.C., the campaign of Merneptah in 1220 B.C., the battle led by Deborah and Barak against a Canaanite coalition (Judg 4:6–16; 5:19), the victory of Gideon over the Midianites (Judg 7), the defeat of Saul by the Philistines (1 Sam 29:1; 31:1–7), the campaign of Shishak in 924 B.C., and the clash between Josiah and Pharaoh Neco in 609 B.C. in which Josiah was killed (2 Kgs 23:29–30; 2 Chr 35:22–24). During the reign of Solomon, Megiddo (along with Hazor and Gezer) was rebuilt as a central fortress city (Ant. 8.151). During the reign of the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III, an Assyrian governor apparently resided at Megiddo, which was used as the name of a newly created province. During Roman times the site of Megiddo became a permanent Roman camp called Legio or Λεγεὼν ἐν τῷ μεγάλῳ πεδίῳ, ‘Legio in the great plain’ (Eusebius *Onomasticon* [ed. E. Klostermann] 14.31; 28.26; 58.1; 70.10; 90.12; 100.10; 108.6, 13; 110.21; 116.21; 140.1). The Valley of Jezreel, through which the Kishon River threads in a northeasterly direction to the Bay of Acco, was (and still is) the breadbasket of lower Galilee (Isa 28:1), providing a natural route for the invasion of Palestine. The ‘Way of the Sea’ (Isa 9:1[MT 8:23]), later called the Via Maris, ran along the coast north from Egypt and through the Valley of Jezreel to Megiddo across the volcanic causeway north of Mount Tabor, where it then split into two routes, one northwest to Acco on the coast and the other to Hazor and thence to Damascus. Another proposal is that that Ἀρμαγεδῶν is derived from מְגִדּוֹן עַר *’ir mēgiddōn*, ‘city of Megiddo.’

“This mention of the Hebrew name for the place may be classified grammatically as a parenthetical remark in the form of a relative clause that does not interrupt the structure of the sentence (G. Rudberg, “Parentesen i Nya Testamentet,” SEÅ 5 [1940] 136; BDR § 465; BDF §465). Other examples of such parentheses in Revelation are found in 9:11; 20:8. This verse is one small indication that the author knew Hebrew (see 11:11). Loasby, following F. Hommel (NKZ 1 [1890] 407–8), construes the Hebrew underlying Ἀρμαγεδῶν to be מוֹעֵד הָרַי *har mō.ēd*, ‘mountain of assembly’ (Hebrew ע is often transliterated with the Greek γ), referring to Mount Zion from where the Messiah will destroy the ungodly. This term, used in Isa 14:13, appears to mean ‘mountain [where the gods] assemble’ (J. D. W. Watts, Isaiah 1–33, WBC 24 [Waco, TX: Word, 1985] 207). Both Oecumenius (Hoskier, Oecumenius, 180) and Andreas of Caesarea (Schmid, Studien, 1/1:175) claim that Ἀρμαγεδῶν means διακοπή or διακοπτομένη, i.e., ‘cutting’ or ‘cut through,’ because it is the place where the hostile enemies of God will attempt to ‘cut through’ and conquer. This interpretation is probably derived from the LXX translation in Zech 12:11, ἐν πεδίῳ ἐκκοπτομένου (var. lect. ἐν πεδίῳ μαγεδδῶν; Ziegler, Duodecim prophetae, 320), ‘in the plain of that which is cut down,’ reflecting the LXX translators’ view that מְגִדּוֹן *mēgiddōn* in Zech 12:11 was derived from the Hebrew root גָּדַד *gdd*, ‘to cut down.’”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 898–899.]

imagery of this battle to the OT background. Megiddo had been the location of many significant battles and thus stood as a symbol of a big battle with powerful consequences.

### C. The seventh angel obeys, vv. 17-21.

17 Καὶ ὁ ἕβδομος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν ἀέρα, καὶ ἐξῆλθεν φωνὴ μεγάλη ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου λέγουσα· γέγονεν. 18 καὶ ἐγένοντο ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός ἐγένετο μέγας, οἷος οὐκ ἐγένετο ἀφ’ οὗ ἄνθρωπος ἐγένετο ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς τηλικούτος σεισμός οὕτως μέγας. 19 καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη εἰς τρία μέρη καὶ αἱ πόλεις τῶν ἐθνῶν ἔπεσαν. καὶ βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη ἐμνήσθη ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ δοῦναι αὐτῇ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ. 20 καὶ πᾶσα νῆσος ἔφυγεν καὶ ὄρη οὐχ εὐρέθησαν. 21 καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη ὡς ταλαντιαία καταβαίνει ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν θεὸν ἐκ τῆς πληγῆς τῆς χαλάζης, ὅτι μεγάλη ἐστὶν ἡ πληγὴ αὐτῆς σφόδρα.

17 The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” 18 And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a violent earthquake, such as had not occurred since people were upon the earth, so violent was that earthquake. 19 The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. God remembered great Babylon and gave her the wine-cup of the fury of his wrath. 20 And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found; 21 and huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds,<sup>b</sup> dropped from heaven on people, until they cursed God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague.

This final angel scene deviates some from the previous ones with just an emphasis upon the angel action and its impact, as the block diagram above illustrates:

- 1) The seventh angel dumps his bowl into the air and a heavenly announcement follows that it is done (#s 492-493).
- 2) Natural phenomena of a great storm and an earthquake then happen (#s 494-495).
- 3) Consequently the city of Babylon is split into three parts along with the collapsing of other cities (#s 496-498). This causes islands and mountains to disappear (#s 499-500). A huge hailstorm with hail a 100 pounds in weight hits men upon the earth causing them to blaspheme God in response (#s 501-502).

Some human response is included at the very end of the sub unit of text.

#### a) *Angelic action*, v. 17a.

For the final time the standard introductory  
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formula for these seven angels is used to introduce this last angel: Καὶ ὁ ἕβδομος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν ἀέρα, and the seventh one poured out his bowl into the air. This angel dumped the wrath of God into the air above the earth in order to trigger the divine impact upon the earth and its people. This is completely within the range of the command εἰς τὴν γῆν, into the earth, by the general thinking of the first century.<sup>42</sup>

In Revelation the air above the earth is a location for bad things happening on the earth. In 9:2 -- the other place where ἀήρ, air, is used in Revelation -- the sun and the air are darkened by the smoke from the bottomless pit by a swarm of apocalyptic locusts coming out and then descending from the air upon the people of the earth in the fifth trumpet. Now in the seventh bowl, out of the air will descend huge thunder and lightning storms with gigantic hail falling upon the earth. This bowl somewhat relates to the darkness of the fifth bowl of wrath (vv. 10-11).

One distinctive in this segment is that God speaks when the angel acts: καὶ ἐξῆλθεν φωνὴ μεγάλη ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου λέγουσα· γέγονεν, and there came out a loud voice of the temple from the throne saying, "It is completed." Although the exact source of the loud voice is not specified, the framing of it strongly suggests it was God who spoke.<sup>43</sup> The parallel of this with the similar expression in 16:1, μεγάλης φωνῆς ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ λεγούσης, serves to frame the seven bowls together as a unit expression. God's voice signals the beginning and the ending of the pouring out of these seven bowls of His wrath.

The cry of the Voice that γέγονεν, It is done, compares somewhat to the cry of Christ on the cross, τετέλεσται, it is finished, in John 19:30. On the cross Christ declared that the work of providing salvation for humanity was completed. Here God declares that His

<sup>42</sup>"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.]

<sup>43</sup>"A great voice' speaks 'from the temple' and 'from the throne' therein (on the textual problem see on 16:1). The voice is either Christ's, God's, or that of the four cherubim (see 2027 pc identify the voice explicitly as God). If it comes from the cherubim, they merely convey the divine decree. Probably, on analogy with 16:1, it is either God's or Christ's voice, especially since the voice comes from the throne itself." [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), 841-842.]

temporal judgments of the earth are finished.<sup>44</sup>

**b) Impact of the action**, vv. 18-21a 18 καὶ ἐγένοντο ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός ἐγένετο μέγας, οἷος οὐκ ἐγένετο ἀφ' οὗ ἄνθρωπος ἐγένετο ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς τηλικούτος σεισμός οὕτως μέγας. 19 καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ πόλις ἢ μεγάλη εἰς τρία μέρη καὶ αἱ πόλεις τῶν ἐθνῶν ἔπεσαν. καὶ βαβυλῶν ἢ μεγάλη ἐμνήσθη ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ δοῦναι αὐτῇ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ. 20 καὶ πᾶσα νῆσος ἔφυγεν καὶ ὄρη οὐχ εὐρέθησαν. 21 καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη ὡς ταλαντιαία καταβαίνει ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, 18 And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a violent earthquake, such as had not occurred since people were upon the earth, so violent was that earthquake. 19 The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. God remembered great Babylon and gave her the wine-cup of the fury of his wrath. 20 And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found; 21 and huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, dropped from heaven on people.

Here John again reaches back to the Egyptian plagues for background images coming mostly out of the seventh plague in Exod. 9:13-35.<sup>45</sup> The ten plagues upon the Egyptians are listed below in the sequence of their depiction in Exodus 7-11:

1. Water into blood (ⲁⲓ): Ex. 7:14-25
2. Frogs (ⲫⲓⲣⲏⲛⲓ): Ex. 7:25-8:11
3. Lice (ⲁⲓⲛⲓ): Ex. 8:16-19

<sup>44</sup>"The announcement is that 'it is done (γέγονεν),' which marks the historical realization of the purpose of the seven bowls stated in 15:1: 'in them [the bowls] God's wrath is consummated' (ἐτελέσθη). The declaration is the converse of Christ's accomplishment of redemption at the cross (cf. the cry 'it is finished' [τετέλεσται] in John 19:30). In this light, the declaration here refers to the final consummation of judgment. This is borne out not only from 16:18-21 but also from 21:3-6, where the same phrase 'a great voice from the throne' (φωνῆς μεγάλης ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου λεγούσης) is again followed by 'it is done' (γέγονεν). There the focus is on final punishment of the wicked, the destruction of the old cosmos, and the complete redemption of God's people in the new creation (cf. 21:1-8)." [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), 842.]

<sup>45</sup>"The bowl being poured out on the 'air' (ἀήρ) is best understood as part of the exodus plague imagery present in the trumpets and the preceding bowls and alluded to in 'the plague of hail' in 16:21 (cf. Exod. 9:22-34). Philo, *Vit. Mos.* 1.129, calls the hail in Egypt together with other trials 'plagues of heaven and air (ἀήρ)' (cf. also *Vit. Mos.* 1.114, 119-20). Already Rev. 9:2 has alluded to Exod. 10:15, where there were so many locusts that 'the land was darkened'; Rev. 9:2 reads, 'the sun and the air were darkened from the smoke of the pit.' Also, in Exod. 10:21 God says to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward the sky that there may be darkness.'" [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), 841.]

4. Wild animals or flies (עָרֹב): 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 (מִצְרַת בְּכוֹרוֹת): Ex. 11:1–12:36

In this plague, God promised to “cause the heaviest hail to fall that has ever fallen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now (ὕψ ταύτην τὴν ὥραν αὐριον χάλαζαν πολλὴν σφόδρα, ἥτις τοιαύτη οὐ γέγονεν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ ἀφ’ ἧς ἡμέρας ἔκτισται ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας ταύτης; 9:18). Then the text declares that “and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire came down on the earth. And the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt; there was hail with fire flashing continually in the midst of it, such heavy hail as had never fallen in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. The hail struck down everything that was in the open field throughout all the land of Egypt, both human and animal; the hail also struck down all the plants of the field, and shattered every tree in the field” (vv. 23b–25). This tradition provided rich imagery for John’s depiction of the dumping of the last bowl of wrath. But he uses it in his own creative manner rather than by a mechanical reproduction of it.

The essence of what happened when the angel dumped his bowl into the air was a huge thunder and lightening storm covering the earth: ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ. But also a mammoth earthquake shook the earth: καὶ σεισμός ἐγένετο μέγας, οἷος οὐκ ἐγένετο ἀφ’ οὗ ἄνθρωπος ἐγένετο ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς τηλικούτος σεισμός οὕτως μέγας. These images have an established symbolism of divine judgment upon the earth.<sup>46</sup> The dependency of v. 18b, καὶ σεισμός ἐγένετο μέγας, οἷος οὐκ ἐγένετο ἀφ’ οὗ ἄνθρωπος ἐγένετο ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς τηλικούτος σεισμός οὕτως μέγας, upon Daniel 12:1 is clear.<sup>47</sup> These dramatically point to the end of human

<sup>46</sup>“Lightnings, sounds, thunders, and a great earthquake’ is imagery of the last judgment. The phrase is based in large part on Exod. 19:16–18, which describes the Sinai theophany. The OT and Jewish writings allude to the same Exodus imagery to depict the last judgment, as in Rev. 4:5; 8:5; and 11:19 (see on 8:5 for discussion). In 6:12 ‘a great earthquake came about’ is part of another depiction of the last judgment. The reference to Exodus is in keeping with the preceding Exodus allusions, which have served as the pattern for the first six bowls.” [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), 842.]

<sup>47</sup> “V 18b alludes to Dan 12:1 and is closer to Theod Dan 12:1 (itself an allusion to Jer 30:7) than to the LXX or the MT: θλίψις οἷα οὐ γέγονεν ἀφ’ οὗ γεγένηται ἔθνος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἕως τοῦ καιροῦ ἐκείνου, ‘tribulation, such as had not occurred since a nation had appeared on the earth until that time.’ A prophecy that Babylon-Rome will be flattened by an earthquake is found in Sib. Or. 5.38–39. A very similar list of atmospheric and seismic phenomena in a context of divine punishment is found in Sib. Or.

history while using various historical event in the OT in order to describe them in understandable terms.

The impact of this storm and earthquake is then depicted in three ways:

i) *καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη εἰς τρία μέρη . . . καὶ Βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη ἐμνήσθη ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ δοῦναι αὐτῇ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ.* First, the large city of Babylon was split into three parts. Then, His amplification point in v. 19c is that God especially remembered<sup>48</sup> to pour out the full cup of His

3.689–92 (tr. Collins in Charlesworth, OTP 1: 377):

God will judge all men by war and sword  
and fire and torrential rain. There will also  
be brimstone from heaven and stone and much  
grievous hail.

“This may in turn be dependent on analogous lists like that in Isa 29:5b–6:

And in an instant, suddenly,  
you will be visited by the Lord of hosts  
with thunder and with earthquake and great noise,  
with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire  
(RSV)

“Another such list is found in Isa 30:30:

And the Lord will cause his majestic voice to be heard and the descending blow of his arm to be seen, in furious anger and a flame of devouring fire, with a cloudburst and tempest and hailstones.  
(RSV)

“The singularity and intensity of this occurrence is underlined by claiming that it is unique in the history of the world, or that an event of such magnitude had never before occurred, a topos that occurs in Israelite, early Jewish, Greco-Roman, and early Christian literature (Exod 9:18, 24 [for Egyptian parallels to the phrase ‘since the founding of Egypt,’ see C. Couroyer, “Un égyptianisme biblique: ‘Depuis la fondation de l’Égypte’ (Exode, IX,18),” RB 67 (1960) 42–48]; Joel 2:2; Jer 30:7; Dan 12:1; T. Mos. 8:1 [‘And there will come upon them punishment and wrath such as has never happened to them (*ira quae talis non fuit in illis*) from the creation till that time’]; 1QM 1:12; 4QDb frag. 3 iv 1–2; 1 Macc 9:27; Jos. J. W. 1.12; 5.442; 6.429; Herodotus 6.109; Thucydides 1.21; Mark 13:19 = Matt 24:21 [allusion to Dan 12:1]).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 900.]

<sup>48</sup>“The verb μνησθεσθαι, ‘to remember,’ occurs only here in Revelation (though a parallel that uses the verb μνημονεύειν occurs in 18:5, ‘God remembered her [Babylon’s] crimes’). In the OT, God is the subject of the verb זָכַר *zākar* more than fifty times (TDOT 4:69–72), and it is also a relatively common form of expression throughout ancient Near Eastern literature. The motif of remembering is also important in the context of ancient Greek prayer and votive offerings (Versnel, “Prayer,” 59–60). Divine justice is often intimately linked with the motive of divine remembrance, for the ancient Israelite and early Jewish view of God is that he does not let those who do good go unrewarded, nor does he allow those who do evil go unpunished. God’s ‘punitive remembrance,’ somewhat surprisingly, is mentioned with relative infrequency in the OT and early Judaism (Hos 7:2; 8:13; 9:9; Jer 14:10; Sir 49:9). In prayer, God can be asked to remember past wickedness and to punish the perpetrators (Ps 137:7; Neh 6:14; 13:29; 1 Macc 7:38; 2 Macc 8:4; see Comment on 6:9–11). On the redundant phrase ‘the fury of his wrath’ or ‘his furious wrath,’ see the similar expression ‘the fury

fury upon this evil city. Although the first statement in v. 19a has been taken to refer to Jerusalem on occasion, it is clear that it is the Babylon in v. 19c which is a symbol for ancient Rome. This is confirmed by 17:18; 18:10(2x), 16, 18, 19, 21 where the phrase ἡ μεγάλη πόλις is used of Babylon.<sup>49</sup> But from this later depiction in chapter seventeen God is not yet finished punishing it for its sins.

**ii) και αἱ πόλεις τῶν ἐθνῶν ἔπεσαν.** The earthquake destroyed the other cities completely.

**iii) και πᾶσα νῆσος ἔφυγεν και ὄρη οὐχ εὐρέθησαν.** The disappearance of islands and mountains is frequently associated with divine judgment in the OT and other Jewish writings.<sup>50</sup>

In v. 21 the explanatory note is added to the depiction of the huge thunder and lightening storm presented in v. 18: και χάλαζα μεγάλη ὡς ταλαντιαία καταβαίνει ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, and huge hailstones as much as a talent in weight (= ca. 100 pounds) come

of his great wrath' in 4Q375 = 4QApocryphon of Moses B 1:3.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 901.]

<sup>49</sup>“The identification of ‘the great city’ is problematic (see Comment on 11:8). A number of earlier commentators identify this city as Jerusalem (B. Weiss, *Johannes-Apokalypse*; Schlatter, *Apokalypse*; J. Weiss-Heitmüller, 301; Lohmeyer), though others understand it to be Babylon-Rome (Bousset [1906] 400; Charles, 2:52; Zahn; Behm; Hadorn, 166–67; Wikenhauser, 124). Supporting the view that the city must be Jerusalem is the fact that only in v 19c does the text say that ‘God remembered great Babylon,’ implying that the city in v 19a must be a different city. ‘The great city’ should probably be understood as Babylon-Rome, however, for the fact that the city was split into three parts by the earthquake does not mean that it had yet been adequately punished. Further, Babylon-Rome is certainly referred to as ‘the great city’ in Rev 17:18; 18:10(2x), 16, 18, 19, 21 (ἡ μεγάλη πόλις). The phrase is used once of Jerusalem (11:8), but the context here cannot refer to Jerusalem. Charles (2:52) regards this clause as an interpolation, although he does not provide adequate justification. There is evidence for historical earthquakes in Jerusalem in A.D. 30, 33, and 48, though they were all relatively slight (Amiran et al., *IEJ* 44 [1994] 260–305).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 900–901.]

<sup>50</sup>“The motif of the disappearance of mountains is often connected in the OT and early Judaism with a theophany or the eschatological judgment, conceptions that tend to merge (Ps 97:5; Isa 40:4; 42:15; 45:2; 54:10; Ezek 38:20; 4 Ezra 15:42), though more frequently the seismic phenomenon of the quaking of mountains is mentioned (Pss 18:7; 46:2, 3; Isa 5:25; 64:1, 3; Sir 43:16). The use of εὐρίσκειν in the passive with a negative particle can mean ‘disappear’ (BAGD, 324; this idiom does not appear in Louw-Nida). οὐχ εὐρέθησαν, ‘disappeared,’ is a Hebraism or Septuagintalism (LXX Isa 35:9; LXX Theod Dan 11:19; Pss. Sol. 14:10) that occurs a few times in the NT (2 Pet 3:10 [εὐρεθήσεται is emended to οὐχ εὐρεθήσεται by several scholars; see discussion in Bauckham, *Jude*, 316–21]; Rev 18:21).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 901.]

down out of heaven upon the men. The Egyptian seventh plague produced hailstones larger than any ever seen in Egypt up to that time (Exod. 9:24; cf. Ps. 105:32–33; Josephus, *Antiquities*, 2:305). But these are much larger than the Egyptian ones. Hailstones typically are seen in Jewish literature as divine punishment.<sup>51</sup>

**c) Response of the people**, v. 21b. With these gigantic hailstones falling -- and killing many of -- the people on earth, one would think that their plea would be for mercy. But given their evil disposition, και ἐβλασφήμησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν θεὸν ἐκ τῆς πληγῆς τῆς χαλάζης, ὅτι μεγάλη ἐστὶν ἡ πληγὴ αὐτῆς σφόδρα. and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague. Their response here was the same as in the fourth plague (v. 9) to the scorching sun, and to the darkness in the fifth plague (v. 11). They blasphemed God for sending the hail down on them.<sup>52</sup>

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

These seven bowls of wrath being poured out upon the earth bring us to the climax of God’s divine judgments on the earth. What now awaits is the final Day of Judgment and the issuing in of the eternal order. But what will trigger this is the futile attempt of Satan to muster all his forces on earth with his cohorts pushing all the evil people outside the kingdom of God to seek to crush God’s people in one last blow in the gigantic battle at the end. John has alluded to this battle several

<sup>51</sup>“Hail is sometimes mentioned as a divine means of punishment: Josh 10:11 narrates the punitive miracle of huge hailstones, which the Lord ‘threw down’ from heaven on the Amorites and killed large numbers of them (see Isa 28:17; Ezek 38:22; Hag 2:17; Job 38:22–23; Ps 78:47; Sib. Or. 3.691). If people are struck by such heavy objects, death appears inevitable, though that does not seem to be the result envisaged here (see Comment on v 21b). While hailstorms were not considered unusual in northern Mediterranean countries (Ovid *Metam.* 5.158), unusual hail was regarded by the Romans as a prodigy indicating a disruption in relations with the gods requiring diagnosis and reparation; E. S. McCartney, “Greek and Roman Weatherlore of Hail,” *Classical World* 28. See Excursus 6A: Ancient Prodigies and the Plagues of Revelation. Diodorus Siculus (19.45.2; Wettstein, *Novum Testamentum* 2:819) reports that there was a great rainstorm in Rhodes during which ‘hail of incredible size’ (χαλάζης ἀπίστου τὸ μέγεθος) weighing as much as one mina (= one English pound) fell, causing houses to collapse from the weight, resulting in many deaths.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 901–902.]

<sup>52</sup>“This is a repetition in slightly varied language of the human response to the fourth plague in v 9 and the fifth plague in v 11. It is clear that the phrase τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ in v 9 is equivalent to ὁ θεός here in v 21. Since such an unusual occurrence as the falling of gigantic hailstones would be regarded by ancients as a prodigy (i.e., a symbolic revelation) of the anger of the gods (see Comment on v 21a), it is remarkable that their response is so negative.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 902.]

times so that we as believers on earth are prepared for it. But when it does happen in chapters nineteen and twenty, God's people will be pleasantly surprised. Christ on His victory horse speaks one sharp devastating word out of His mouth and Satan, his cohorts, and all the evil people on earth are defeated and doomed to eternal punishment in Hell. He doesn't even raise a sweat in ridding the earth of all this evil. John holds his readers somewhat in suspense about this outcome until the proper moment in his narrative. But if you're like I am, reading the final chapter early on establishes a target that lets you know where the story is going. The really fun part then is seeing how we're going to get there.

The chart below provides a helpful summation of these seven bowls viewed in a Hebrew way of thinking where everything goes from right to left linguistically and then in thought patterns. The deep impact of the Hebrew mind on John has become unquestionably clear as we have worked our way through Revelation. The gradual intensification of each of the bowls becomes plain and reaches its most severe expression in the gigantic thunderstorm and earthquake at the end.

virtually impossible for that death grip to be broken.

For most of us Christians in today's world in the western hemisphere especially we struggle to understand just how deeply evil evil can become. We don't have direct, life threatening contact with profoundly evil people. But for many other Christians in our world, their experience is dramatically different. They face such evil almost daily.

My feeling is that these kinds of texts that we are studying in Revelation exists today more for them, than for us. The need of reassuring hope of the vast superiority of God to the powerful evil they come up against is critical and essential. In our rather comfortable setting, we read Revelation and then debate about what it might possibly mean. But for our brothers and sisters facing raw evil in its brute power daily, Revelation is not a book for debating. It is a marvelous book of hope and inspiration to stand faithful even until death!.

May we not ever forget this!

## THE SEVEN VIALS OF WRATH

Shamash

④ The Sun scorches men with fire

⑤ Kingdom of the Beast filled with darkness, sores

③ River and fountains to blood

⑥ Euphrates dried up, devil spirits gather world for battle

② Sea to blood, all sea life dies

⑦ Poured in the air, mightiest earthquake, "It is done"

① Noisome and grievous sore upon those with the mark



When reading these depictions, and then noticing the human reaction of cursing God, our first thought is how could anyone be so dumb? The text makes it clear that the activity of Almighty God and not some pagan idol is recognized by these people. Anyone with a lick of sense should plead for God's mercy in such suffering!

But we must never forget the deeps that evil as symbolized in the dragon and the beasts can go in order to get people in their grip. Their intent is never to protect them from God's punishments. Rather it is completely to clamp on to them so that these people slide right into the lake of fire with them at the very end. John has let us know that these evil beings already know their eternity destiny. Their determination is to carry as many of God's created people with them as possible. Once they get their strangle hold on people it becomes