

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SEALS, TRUMPETS, AND BOWLS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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What relationship do the seals, trumpets, and bowls in the Revelation bear to each other? To ask this is to pose a long recognized hermeneutical problem.<sup>1</sup> The *basic* options are two: either they are parallel and simultaneous or they are sequential and successive.<sup>2</sup> Does one series recapitulate the same ground as a preceding series (even though it may include additional aspects) or is each series to be taken as generally chronological to its predecessor? The thesis of this paper is that each of these series of judgments is primarily sequential to the preceding one(s), but that the end of each series is parallel to the end of the other series (i.e., that the sixth and seventh seals, the seventh trumpet, and the seventh bowl are parallel to each other).<sup>3</sup>

### EVIDENCE FOR A BASICALLY SEQUENTIAL VIEW

The first issue is to determine whether the writer intended us to regard the seals, trumpets, and bowls as sequential. What evidence does the text yield that might justify the sequential or successive view? (Here it must be said that the concern is not whether the specific judgments *within* a series succeed each other,<sup>4</sup> but, primarily, whether the events of one series are, in the main, intended to break forth after those described in the preceding series).

1. The rise in the intensity of the judgments is more consonant with the sequential, rather than the simultaneous, view. To be sure, the seals are no frolic, yet they are not incredibly severe. The famine conditions of

1. Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), p. 71; Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 93; Glenn W. Barker, William L. Lane, and J. Ramsey Michaels, *The New Testament Speaks* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 370.
2. Some would doubtless accuse us of seeking to be over-precise in discerning a definite plan here.
3. Obviously, to even commence such an investigation in the Revelation is to invite frustration for both writer and reader. Presuppositions and specific interpretations differ; and there is no chance or time to discuss such prolegomena here. Suffice it to say that this writer regards the book as intended to be revelation (1:1) and not confusion, even though communicated in symbolic terms (1:2, *semainein*; see Tenney, p. 186). Moreover, our position is basically futurist, although this must be understood as also insisting on the book as a message to the first century Asian Church and as recognizing the then contemporary models which corresponded to and foreshadowed the fuller realities of which John wrote.
4. This would be difficult to maintain at some points, as, e.g., in the first four seals (6:1-8), where there would be some overlapping.

the third seal are quite acute but partial nevertheless (6:6).<sup>5</sup> Note that in the fourth seal Death and Hades are given power over *one-fourth* of the earth (6:8). Under the trumpets, the dominant fraction is *one-third*, whether reference is to their impact on vegetation, marine life and activity, fresh water, the heavenly bodies, or mankind (8:7, 9, 10-12; 9:15). The final pitch is reached with the seven bowls "which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is ended" (15:1).<sup>6</sup> It is then eloquent that no fractions are mentioned as the bowls are set forth in chapter 16. Clearly, each series raises the crescendo of divine judgment to a higher pitch, and some form of sequence would best fit this framework.

2. The sequence within each series is diverse from the sequence within another series, and even where they are apparently similar the *content* of the judgment reveals a disparity. It is the trumpets and the bowls which show greatest similarity to one another,<sup>7</sup> and yet the divergences are too marked to prove that essentially the same ground is being covered, i.e., the recapitulation view. For example, both the fourth trumpet and the fourth bowl affect the sun; yet in the former case it is partially darkened, whereas in the latter its heat is intensified and it scorches men (8:12 and 16:8). Again, the Euphrates River is mentioned in the sixth member of both series, and yet in reference to totally different purposes. This factor does not so much support a sequential view as it tends to disprove a recapitulation or simultaneous view.<sup>8</sup>

3. There are contextual clues which appear to indicate a sequential progression. The relation of 9:4 (fifth trumpet) to 7:1-8 is a case in point. The latter passage describes the protective sealing of the 144,000 before judgment could break forth, while the former text suggests demonic locusts who attack only those without the divine protective seal. Therefore, the sealing of 7:1-8 must have taken place before 9:4. Since 7:1-8 is enfolded via an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals, it would be most natural to understand it as belonging to the seals in some way.<sup>9</sup> Hence, John depicts an event under the trumpets as clearly following after another event under the seals.<sup>10</sup>

In a similar fashion, 16:2 (first bowl; men bearing mark of the beast) certainly presupposes 13:16-18. Again, a sequence is implied, though it must be said that chapter 13 does not belong explicitly to any series of judgments as such but is placed between the conclusion of the trumpets and the beginning of the bowls. It does at least demonstrate, however, that there are indications of a sequential pattern in the process of judgment in chapters 4-16.

5. This takes "do not harm oil and wine" as indicating necessities along with wheat and barley, and not as luxuries, which gives rise to a different view (cf. Morris, p. 106).
6. Quotations are from the RSV unless otherwise indicated.
7. See Barker *et al.*, p. 374, for illuminating similarities.
8. Cf. W. Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1939), p. 26. Hendriksen does not seem to observe the distinctions along with the more obvious similarities.
9. This will be dealt with more specifically later.
10. Cf. Tenney, p. 75.

4. The general sequential connection between the seals and the trumpets appears to be quite clear in 8:1-2: "When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them." As Tenney notes: "The vision of the angels with the trumpets follows the seals directly, and conveys the impression that the seals and the trumpets are successive."<sup>11</sup> The seven angels with the seven trumpets are woven into the very fabric of the description of the seventh seal. Though more will be said on these verses later, it is felt that a *general* sequence is clearly taught here.

5. Yet perhaps the strongest argument for the sequential view arises from the theological sector. It is transparent that the seals, trumpets, and bowls are indeed judgments upon man in rebellion against God. Nevertheless, throughout these judgments are notations that men "did not repent" (9:20-21; 16:9, 11, 21). Place alongside these notations the fact of the graduated intensity of the judgments already noted above (observation no. 1). Does not, then, the very mention of their impenitence imply that God was yet extending to men the opportunity to repent? Does not the *gradual* rise in the intensity of the judgments bespeak a kind of divine reluctance to bring that last climactic stroke? Do we not sense something of the agonizing patience of God with profane men as He continues to offer grace in the midst of judgment and in wrath remembers mercy? It is a patience we cannot fully appreciate for we share neither the perfection of His holiness nor of His love! The beauty of this theological perspective is fully highlighted in its full splendor in the sequential view, but it can be well nigh obliterated in a strictly simultaneous pattern.

In light of the foregoing considerations, this writer opts for an over all sequential pattern as best satisfying the data of the Revelation itself.

#### EVIDENCE FOR AN ELEMENT OF PARALLELISM

The suggestion now advanced is that the end of each judgment-series is parallel to the end of the other judgment-series; that, although the series are sequential in the main, the seventh members of each are simultaneous or parallel. (In the case of the seals, we hold the sixth seal as being included with the seventh in this parallelism; see below). The question is then: does the conclusion of each series bring us to the End, i.e., the immediate prelude to the second coming of Christ?<sup>12</sup> In seeking to support the position taken here, four primary lines of evidence are relevant, the first two being general, the latter two more specific and involved.

Before presenting the lines of evidence, it would be well to state that we take it as fixed that the seventh bowl is the immediate prelude to or introduction of the parousia. It is the final number of that series explicitly said to be the "last" (15:1); it follows immediately after the sixth bowl which depicts the *assembling* for Armageddon; and the next truly sequential event described is the second coming (19:11-21), the *conquest* of Armageddon. In regard to this last contention, it should be observed that: (1) all of chapters 17 and 18 are a "close-up" describing the fall of Babylon

in detail and therefore relates to 16:19, to be placed under the seventh bowl; (2) 19:1-10 is in bulk (vs. 1-8) a response to 18:20 and therefore related to chapters 17-18. Hence 19:11-21 is the next event described, sequentially speaking, after the seventh bowl. With this in mind, the question remains—are the concluding members of the seals and of the trumpets parallel with this seventh bowl?

1. The *parallel phenomena* associated with the concluding member of each series may well imply that John intended them to be taken as parallel. Following the seventh seal there were “peals of thunder, loud noises, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake” (8:5). The description of the seventh trumpet closes with “flashes of lightning, loud noises, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail” (11:19). The seventh bowl reveals similar manifestations—“flashes of lightning, loud noises, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake...and great hailstones...” (16:18, 21). Surely, this recurrence of such similar phenomena cannot be accidental. Moreover, in each of these cases there is a connection with the heavenly altar or temple in the context.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, there are slight variations to be noticed beyond the order in which the phenomena are mentioned in each case. “Heavy hail” is added in reference to the seventh trumpet which was not noted under the seventh seal. And the earthquake under the seventh bowl is described as utterly without parallel in all of history (16:18b) while the hailstones are described in terms of “the weight of a talent” (16:21, Greek). These variations by no means overthrow the marked parallelism. In fact, they may merely help explain it. The description of the earthquake in 16:18 (seventh bowl) may only make explicit what was implicit in the simple “an earthquake” (note the singular here too) under the seventh seal and seventh trumpet. What was previously mentioned is only here described in greater detail and certainly in more vivid colors. The more elaborate description of the hail under the seventh bowl (16:21) is, likewise, perfectly consonant with the “heavy hail” of the seventh trumpet (11:19).

2. The *placing of interludes* between the sixth and seventh seals and between the sixth and seventh trumpets but *not* between the sixth and seventh bowls may be another structural clue that the final members of each series are parallel. This distinctive way of setting off the seventh seal by the visions of chapter 7 and the separation of the sixth and seventh trumpets by the interlude of chapters 10 and 11 may mean that the events of the seventh seal and seventh trumpet do not occur in immediate succession to the events which precede them. Rather, they yet await a later time.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

12. By “immediate prelude” is meant that time at the conclusion of the Great Tribulation *after* which Christ returns in power and great glory (Matt. 24:29-30, Mark 13:24-26). Any reference in these pages to the second coming, the return, the coming, or the parousia of Christ refers to that coming *after* the Tribulation. It should also be said that this writer takes the Great Tribulation as a real, though brief, period of time, utterly unique in its intensity. In light of Matt. 24:21, this position seems unavoidable.

13. Cf. Tenney, pp. 34-35.

Yet in the case of the bowls, the sixth gives way to the seventh without interruption implying a more immediate sequence between the two. This factor does not furnish a conclusive argument, but it is at least evidence that is most consonant with the view that the seventh members of each series are concurrent.

3. In the way of more detailed matters, the viewing of the sixth seal (6:12-17) as portraying the immediate threshold to Christ's parousia is crucial. Hence, this writer feels that the sixth seal forms the conclusion of and not the introduction to the Great Tribulation, and that therefore it portrays the phenomena associated with the immediate appearance of the Lord. Should this position be sustained by the evidence, it would then appear that we would be forced to acknowledge the seventh seal (8:1-5) as relating to the parousia or its impact, rather than merely serving as the introduction to the seven trumpets.

The sixth seal is commonly taken as the inception of the Great Tribulation, part of which is thought to be set forth in chapter 7 (see especially 7:14). However, there may well be a fallacious assumption here, for simply because chapter 7 follows the sixth seal in order of description does not mean that it is meant to follow in order of occurrence. The order of the visions does not at all *necessarily* indicate the order of events.<sup>14</sup> The sequence of the first six seals might be compared to a movie, whereas the interludes are like close-ups from a slide projector. The slides do not necessarily take up where the movie left off but relate to some aspect of it. The question which must be answered is: which part of the movie is the slide depicting? Hence, there is no *a priori* necessity for assuming that the sixth seal introduces the Great Tribulation period.

One must, however, be most cautious in correlating the phenomena of 6:12-17 with similar biblical phenomena, for similarity of imagery does not necessarily indicate identity of event either. But, to begin, there is one positive clue: "Every mountain and island was removed from its place" in 6:14 is strikingly parallel to "and every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found" in 16:20, under *the seventh bowl*. Moreover, the very intensity of the description of the sixth seal bespeaks climax rather than inception.<sup>15</sup> It far supersedes the partial disablement of the heavenly bodies under the fourth trumpet (8:12). (Would not this imply that it follows the fourth trumpet in time-sequence?). To say that this seal only opens the Great Tribulation appears to relegate it to the realm of anticlimax.

In addition, the changes in the sun, moon, and stars in 6:12b-13 are most similar to those described in our Lord's Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:29 (and Mark 13:24-25). In the context of that Discourse it should be

14. A principle Walvoord recognizes in regard to ch. 12ff. but does not follow here. See John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), pp. 138-139, 213.
15. Walvoord (p. 137) fails to distinguish this in reference to the "earthquake" (note the singular), linking it with "earthquakes" (plural) of Matt. 24:6-7, which ones constitute but "the beginning of birth pains" and do not radiate the intense pitch that Rev. 6:12ff. betrays.

observed that these phenomena describe what will occur *immediately after* the Great Tribulation. They do not introduce but conclude it. They presage the coming of Christ. Nor is the comparison with Matthew 24 and parallels inept, for it is axiomatic that the seals in the Revelation show marked resemblances to the Oilvet Discourse.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly enough, there is a possible contextual clue which gives reason to think the fifth seal portrays conditions under the Great Tribulation. The martyred saints of the fifth seal are given a "white robe" (*stole leuke*, 6:11). The very same attire (*stolas leukas*) is ascribed to the great multitude which came out of *the great tribulation* (7:9, 13, 14). Though some identify the martyrs of the fifth seal in a more general sense, does not this contextual clue linking the multitude of 7:9-17 with the martyrs of the fifth seal deserve respect? And should it not be observed that if this link be granted we have the same sequence of Great Tribulation-End Phenomena in the seals as in the words of our Lord?

If not conclusive, at least these factors constitute some remarkable correlations. The diverse strands when woven together seem to compose a strong case. The way in which the sixth seal parallels the seventh bowl (which *does* introduce the parousia); the climactic and cosmic pitch of the description; the close similarity with Matthew 24:29 in regard to the effects on the heavenly bodies (which occur after the Great Tribulation); and the real likelihood of the fifth seal referring to the conditions under the Great Tribulation, which, if so, would merely confirm John's sequence as being parallel to our Lord's and the sixth seal as concluding the Great Tribulation period; all these when bound together appear to make a strong case for fixing the sixth seal as immediately preceding the parousia.<sup>17</sup>

This of necessity affects the seventh seal (8:1-5). If the sixth seal is fixed as suggested, then the seventh must relate to conditions that follow it. It has already been affirmed that the seventh seal serves, to some degree, to introduce the seven trumpets. Indeed, Ladd takes this to be the sole main function of the seventh seal. For him, the seventh seal has no content of its own.<sup>18</sup> We disagree on the latter score and affirm that the seventh seal does have a content of its own, readily apparent from 8:1, 3-5. It seems as likely that the "silence in heaven for about half an hour" (8:1) would itself be indicative of the content of the seventh seal. But what then is the meaning of, or reason for, the silence? Some believe it to import the entrance of the people of God into their promised Sabbath rest.<sup>19</sup> Yet it may be that the following context furnishes a clue, for the dominant concern of verses 3-5 is "the prayers of the saints" (see 6:9-11)—their cries for vindication and deliverance from their oppressors. The contents of the angel's censer being thrown upon the earth (v. 5) would seem to signify

16. Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958 reprint), IV, p. 249. G. E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), p. 98.

17. So also Alford, IV, pp. 249, 622-623.

18. Ladd, p. 122.

19. Alford, IV, p. 630. Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. J. M. Trout et al. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1953 reprint), III, p. 396.

the (final?) answer to the pleas of these afflicted saints. Hence it would be appropriate to say that the "silence" conveys the idea that these are awesome moments, a time of reverent suspense, a time of holy and honorable hearing of these precious prayers prior to their final vindication at the parousia (the latter signaled by the familiar phenomena of the End in 8:5).

Our position then causes us to hold that the seventh seal is both introductory, in some sense, to the seven trumpets (see page 38), as 8:2 clearly suggests, and conclusive in regard to the seals, representing the impact of the parousia itself. It may appear as if this is an attempt to have-one's-cake-and-eat-it-too, but we think not—it is only a matter of seeking to affirm the truth of two lines of evidence, holding that neither excludes the other.<sup>20</sup> This matter may be laid to rest pending the consideration of the following major issue.

4. Finally, it is proposed that the seventh trumpet (11:15-19) actually heralds the parousia and describes its impact, rather than merely introducing the bowl judgments by a proleptic announcement of them.

Such a position would appear to be the *prime facie* view of the text itself, for it had been emphatically asserted that "there shall be delay no longer: but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then is finished the mystery of God . . ." (10:6b-7, ASV). Hence, at the seventh trumpet the cry goes up, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever" (11:15). The impression given is that the seventh trumpet introduces the parousia and the consummated kingdom, rather than merely the time when they are about to be actualized.

Nevertheless Ladd holds that the seventh trumpet, which is the third "woe" (11:14), contains no plague or woe, and that therefore the seven bowls must constitute the woe-content of the seventh trumpet.<sup>21</sup> He supports, moreover, the RSV rendering of 10:7 ("in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel"), stressing "in the days of" as indicating that the seventh trumpet introduces a period prior to the parousia—a period that includes the time of the seven bowls.<sup>22</sup>

It appears, however, that there is a woe-content to this seventh trumpet, since in 11:18 we hear of the time when "thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, . . . and for destroying the destroyers of the earth." Surely this final, decisive judgment is sufficient to satisfy the demands of the third woe.

Furthermore, "in the days of" (10:7) does not necessarily indicate that the seventh trumpet embodies a period of time inclusive of the seven bowls. In the context of 10:6-7, "in the days" is primarily intended to correct a possible impression that the time when there will be "no more

20. This is essentially Alford's view; IV, p. 630.

21. Ladd, p. 160.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 144-145, 160.

delay" is immediate.<sup>23</sup> It is not; rather, the end of delay will be "in the days of the voice of the seventh angel" (ASV, quite literally), i.e., at that future time. The primary intent of the phrase is not to indicate a period of time as distinct from a point in time, but to generally distinguish a future time of fulfillment from the present moment of anticipation. Moreover, it would seem legitimate to say that the general time—"in the days of"—is more precisely defined by the following phrase introduced by *hotan*, "when he is about to sound, then..." (ASV, again closer to the Greek). The additional clause helps to define the more general preceding phrase.<sup>24</sup>

More positively, the "little scroll" of chapter 10 appears to indicate the nature of the events which are to precede the seventh trumpet and the consummation. John was to absorb the message of the little scroll (10:9), and having done so, found that his "stomach was made bitter" (v. 10), indicating that the message was one of judgment and woe.<sup>25</sup> It was bitter to him because the message of judgment is never a sadistic delight for the true prophet, but a solemn obligation. Then he is told: "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings" (v. 11). At the sounding of the seventh trumpet there will be no more delay, but before that time John must utter a message of universal (note the scope of v. 11) judgment. Though the parousia is imminent, it is not yet immediate. Between the sixth and seventh trumpet is a time-gap in which a message of universal judgment is still to be proclaimed.

Now it appears that what immediately follows in 11:1-13 could not be the content of the above message, for, whether one takes chapter 11 as dealing more particularly with Israel or more broadly with the church, its initial concern is with the protection of God's people and not with universal judgment. The focus of attention in chapter 11 is the trials of God's people—whether Israel or the church is immaterial to this specific point. Moreover, what judgment is displayed in chapter 11 seems to be fairly localized instead of cosmic (11:8, 13).<sup>26</sup>

What then constitutes John's message of universal judgment? It would not seem unjust to assume that John did in fact include this prophetic message in a work which is itself styled a "prophecy" (1:3). If chapter 11 does not really fulfill the specifications of John's charge in 10:11, then where do we look for this message? It would appear that a great deal of the second half of the Apocalypse would answer to this description. As Swete has written:

23. H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d., reprint), p. 129. Swete calls *etelesthe* (10:7) an aorist of anticipation.

24. Alford (IV, p. 652) helps to alleviate the difficulty pointed out by Ladd (p. 145).  
25. Both Morris (p. 142) and Ladd (pp. 146-147) have splendid comments on this point.

26. This, of course, assumes a literal, earthly Jerusalem, on which not all would agree with us. We think it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that John intends a literal view, especially in light of v. 8—"where their Lord was crucified." Ladd (p. 157) opts for the more literal view.



It is no one Empire or Emperor that is concerned in the prophecies of the second half of the Apocalypse; not merely Rome or Nero or Domitian, but a multitude of races, kingdoms, and crowned heads.<sup>27</sup>

Now although it was previously stated that chapter 11 did not specifically answer to the scope of 10:11, yet there are hints that a universal dominance of evil is in control in the locale of Jerusalem (11:7, 9a). However, the universal scope of John's prophecy becomes ever more apparent in chapters 12-16 which follow, as horrid shadows of Satan's apostle, the Antichrist, become fully visible across the pages. Here is one holding "every tribe and people and tongue and nation" (13:7-8) under his seemingly victorious thumb, in what appears to be a world-wide political, religious, economic dictatorship (chapter 13). At last, the final strokes of judgment fall in the bowl judgments, which are clearly leveled against a dominion of evil that has usurped universal sway (16:2, 10, 14; recall, too, the absence of any qualifying fractions under the bowls, as the one-third limitation under the trumpets, which factor indirectly implies a world-wide judgment). Hence, it does not seem at all unlikely that the bowl judgments of chapter 16 are to be assigned a part, even a major part, in the content of John's prophetic message, which message is to be proclaimed in the interlude before the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the completion of "the mystery of God" (10:7).<sup>28</sup>

On the view propounded here then, the seventh trumpet would be preceded chronologically by the first six bowl judgments and be parallel with the seventh bowl, and, as previously proposed, with the seventh seal as well.

#### CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made to do justice to what this writer feels are two lines of evidence in the Revelation in relation to the judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowls. On the one hand and in the main, the judgments seem to be successive or sequential as to intended occurrence. Yet there appears to be an element of parallelism discernible in the final member of each series. Our proposal, therefore, is that these respective

27. Swete, p. 132.

28. There is a very possible difficulty in the view advocated here, viz., that the seventh trumpet chronologically follows the first six bowls and coincides with the seventh. The difficulty arises in comparing 11:17 (seventh trumpet) and 16:5 (third bowl). In 11:17 the epithet "who art and who wast" relates to God. He had begun to reign and so "who is to come" is no longer appropriately added to this formula as in 1:8. He has come! Now 16:5 uses a similar formula, also omitting the future aspect. Hence, clearly, 16:5 takes up the already announced viewpoint of 11:17. This, of course, could quite naturally argue for the third bowl following the seventh trumpet chronologically rather than vice versa as we have argued. Though recognizing the dilemma and not seeking to sidestep it, it is nevertheless possible that 16:5 represents the standpoint of the anticipation of faith (though note that it is "the angel of water"—and not the people of God—who speaks in 16:5) based on what has already preceded it in the book by way of description. Again, the intent is not to ignore real problems but only to show that there is no necessary contradiction involved.

series of judgments should be regarded from a “successive-final” viewpoint. Schematically, the relationships would appear thus:<sup>29</sup>

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

It might then be asked: what possible motive could there be for John’s coming to a particular point in a judgment series and then—at the last member of that series—projecting ahead to the immediate precursor of the parousia? There is rationale for such an arrangement—both theological and practical. We cannot forget that the last days described by John meant the darkest of all times for the church. John’s intent is to never permit the Lord’s people to [permit] their gaze to drift from the invigorating Centre of their hope—their returning Lord Jesus (I Peter 1:13). Therefore, through all the judgments upon evil and through all the sufferings of the church,<sup>30</sup> the Spirit seeks to chain our vision afresh to the One who brings the final vindication, so that from that vision may come a new influx of divine power to endure. Again and again John brings this certainty before us. If once this vision is firmly caught, then even we ourselves can stand before any tribunal or be stretched under any sword and yet confess: “Jesus is *still* Lord!”

29. The trumpets are allowed to overlap with the seals, especially the fifth, since, if that seal does portray a condition under the whole Great Tribulation, the time span included therein would overlap with events under the trumpets.
30. This reflects my own post-tribulation position in regard to the rapture of the church. This raises a lively issue not to be debated here! Nor does this issue, whatever one’s position on it may be, materially affect the main thrust of this paper.