

SESSION 5

(Tribulation—Part Three—Revelation 15-19)

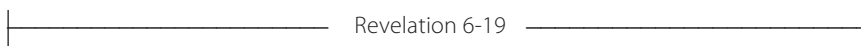
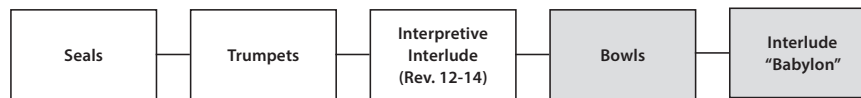
I. PRAYER

II. BOOK OF REVELATION: CHARTED

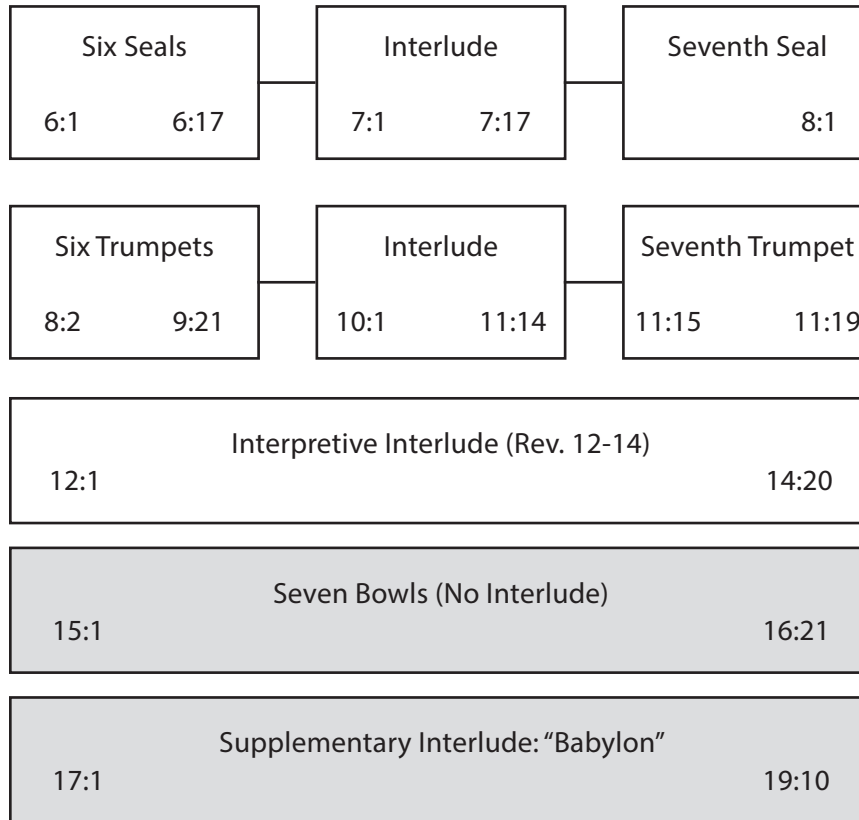
| REVELATION | | | |
|--|---|---|----------------------------|
| Outline: "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later." (Rev. 1:19 NIV 84) | | | |
| Chapter 1 | Chapters 2-3 | Chapters 4-22 | |
| "what you have seen" | "what is now" | "what will take place later" | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salutation (prologue/greeting) • Vision ("have seen") • Outline (1:19) <p style="text-align: right;">1</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 Letters to 7 Churches (historical) (representative) (prophetic?) <p style="text-align: right;">2 3</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Throne Scene</p> <p style="text-align: center;">4 5</p> | |
| | | Tribulation | 6 19 |
| | | Second Coming & Millennium | 19 20 |
| | | Eternal State | 21 22 |

III. INTERTEXTUAL STRUCTURE

A. Broad Overview: "Tribulation"



B. Expanded Context: "Tribulation"



Note: Session 5 will complete the final boxes, "Seven Bowls" and Supplementary Interlude: "Babylon."

IV. BIBLICAL DEVELOPMENT: REVELATION 15-16

("Seven Bowls")

A. Announcement of the Seven Bowls Judgment (15:1-8)

1. Heavenly scene (1)

Revelation 15:1

*I saw in heaven another great and marvelous **sign**: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them **God's wrath** is completed.*

The last set of judgments (seven bowls) begins from a heavenly perspective ("saw in heaven") and is described as another "great and marvelous sign" (see the earlier sign; 12:1 ff).

2. Heavenly song (2-4)

Revelation 15:2-4

And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God³ and sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations. ⁴Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

- a. "Fire" refers to judgment completed (2).
- b. "Victorious" ones refer to martyred saints who did not yield to the beast or take on his number (2; cf. 13:11-18).
- c. Reference to the song of Moses hearkens to the Red Sea "exodus event" (deliverance) even as the song of the Lamb likely refers to the deliverance/redemption of believers.

3. Heavenly activity (5-8)

The scene changes ("after this") to a new vision of the heavenly temple. From this place come the seven angels with "seven golden bowls."

Revelation 15:7-8

Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. ⁸And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

B. Seven Bowls Judgment (16:1-21)

Revelation 16:1

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."

The climactic judgments of the Great Tribulation are at hand. Constable quotes G.E. Ladd (*Notes*, 159-60):

“These plagues are not the expression of God’s wrath against sin in general, nor are they punishments for individual wrongdoing. They are the outpouring of His wrath upon him who would frustrate the divine purpose in the world—the beast—and upon those who have given their loyalty to him.

These plagues are God’s answer to Satan’s last and greatest effort to frustrate the divine rule.”

Reflection:
“Who has the right to rule?”

1. The first bowl (2): “painful sores”

Revelation 16:2

The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly, festering sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

2. The second bowl (3): “sea to blood”

This judgment is similar to the second trumpet (8:9; see also Ex. 7:20-21). The difference here is that all life perishes.

3. The third bowl (4): “fresh water to blood”

Interruption (5-7)

Revelation 16:5-7

Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: “You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were;⁶ for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.”⁷ And I heard the altar respond: “Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.”

4. The fourth bowl (8-9): “intense heat of the sun”

While the fourth trumpet judgment darkened the sun, the fourth bowl intensifies the sun’s heat apparently upon the people of the beast (what of the faithful believers?). The judgment does not bring about repentance.

Revelation 16:9

They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

5. The fifth bowl (10-11)

Revelation 16:10-11

The fifth angel poured out 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 their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

6. The sixth bowl (12-16)

This bowl (and the seventh) brings the Great Tribulation judgments to a climax with geo-political results.

Highlights of this judgment include:

- a. The miraculous drying up of the Euphrates River (12)
- b. The menacing arrival of the kings of the East (12)
- c. The demonic activity from the "unholy Trinity" (13-14)
- d. The gathering of armies to the place called Armageddon (16)

The Lord's response:

Revelation 16:15

Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed.

7. The seventh bowl (17-21)

- a. The loud voice (17)

Revelation 16:17

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!"

When the sacrificial atonement was completed at the Cross, Jesus cried, "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30). When the final bowl judgment was at hand, God ("the loud voice") announced "It is done!"

- b. The effects of judgment (18-21^a)
 - 1. Lightning, thunder, earthquakes
 - 2. Great city (Jerusalem) and cities of the earth greatly affected.
 - 3. Babylon the Great (literal and rebuilt or metaphorical for opposition to God) experiences the “fury of His wrath.”
- c. The response of men (21^b)

Revelation 16:21^b

...And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

Insight: Rebellious man and the Bowl Judgments

For the entire history of the human family rebellion against God has been escalating. The temporary and local judgments in which he manifested his fury against sin have all been warnings. Now, at the end of the great tribulation and the outpouring of the seven bowls of wrath, God’s judgment escalates to such an extent that the world witnesses the incredible wrath of God.

(Patterson, *Revelation*, 316)

V. BIBLICAL DEVELOPMENT: REVELATION 17-18

A. Broad Context: Review

| Book of Revelation | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| "4 Periods (Ages) of Time" | | |
| Revelation Chapters | Time Period | Length |
| 1-3 | Church Age | 2000+ years |
| 4-19 | Tribulation Age | 7 years |
| 20 | Millennial Kingdom Age | 1000 years |
| 21-22 | Eternal Age (to come) | Endless years |

(Adapted from Hitchcock, *The End*, 77)

Broadly speaking, Revelation 17-18 is textually located amidst the Tribulation section of the Book of Revelation. Note again the diagram of the Tribulation (specifically chapters 6-19) at III. INTERTEXTUAL STRUCTURE, p. 57. The shaded area is the focal point of this fifth session. Revelation 15-16 has focused on the Bowl Judgments. Revelation 17-18 is an Interlude dealing with "religious" and "commercial" Babylon.

Note also that the end of the Bowls judgments, the campaign of Armageddon was introduced. This Interlude (Rev. 17-18) pauses the chronological end of the Great Tribulation and answers the question, "What will happen to 'Babylon'?"

B. Identity of "Babylon"

1. Historically

- a. Site of man-centered, prideful worship at Tower of Babel in Shinar (i.e. Babylonia) (Gen.11:1-9).
- b. Established by Nimrod (10:8-10) as key city of his empire.
- c. Capital of the powerful Babylonian Empire of King Nebuchadnezzar who destroyed Jerusalem and razed the Temple in 586 BC.
- d. One of four prophesied empires that would rule over a subjugated Jewish people (cf. Dan. 2, 7).

2. Metaphorically

Whenever the literal city is not meant, Babylon refers to political and religious opposition to the rule of God. Leon Morris noted, "She (i.e. Babylon) stands for civilized man apart from God, man in organized but godless community." Babylon, then, is the resistant, anti-God culture of the world system as noted and described in the Book of Revelation.

With respect to Revelation 17-18 and "Babylon," note the following chart.

| Two Metaphorical "Babylons" | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Religious | Commercial |
| Revelation 17 | Revelation 18 |
| Destroyed by Antichrist and 10 kings | Destroyed by God |
| Falls (perhaps) near the midpoint of the Tribulation | Falls at the end of the Tribulation |

(Adapted from Hitchcock, 369)

C. Religious "Babylon": Revelation 17:1-18

1. The angelic invitation (1-2)

Revelation 17:1-2

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters. ²With her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."

The "great prostitute" (1) symbolizes idolatry and religious apostasy, thus false religion. This "woman" is one of four used as images to represent something of importance:

- a. Jezebel (2:20) represents apostasy and immorality creeping into the church (Thyatira).
 - b. Woman pregnant with child (12:1-2 ff) represents the nation of Israel, the people of the Messiah.
 - c. Great prostitute (17:1-2) represents the apostate, religious world system.
 - d. The bride (19:7) represents the Church at the Second Coming of Christ.
2. The angelic vision (3-6)

Revelation 17:3-6

Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. ⁴The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. ⁵The name written on her forehead was a mystery:

*BABYLON THE GREAT
THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES
AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.*

⁶I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.

Note the unclean descriptions:

- a. On a beast covered with "blasphemous names"
- b. Holding a cup filled with "abominable things" as well as "filth of her adulteries"
- c. Drunk with the blood of the saints
- d. Note the title on her forehead (see v. 5)

3. The angelic explanation (7-18)

a. About the "beast" (7-14)

The woman (prostitute) is the anti-God world system supported by the beast (the Antichrist who supports the woman initially but will destroy her – see 15-17).

The beast (i.e. the Antichrist; cf. 13:1-3) was referred to by the angels as the one who "once was, now is not, and will come." Some believe the Antichrist will live, die and be resurrected. Others believe that a close association exists between the beast (Antichrist) and his nations ("seven heads and ten horns") such that the miraculous resuscitation actually refers to a once-dead nation that is revived.

What is clear is that demonic deception will be rampant over the earth and the unbelieving world will be "astonished when they see the beast" (8).

Insight:

If (as some scholars suggest) the seven heads refer to seven ruling kings over their own kingdoms, can they be identified? From John's perspective, "five have fallen" (10) likely refers to Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece (all who subjugated Israel at some point). The nation spoken of as "one is" (10) would be Rome (of John's day). The "other" not yet come would be the kingdom of the beast being spoken of. These interpretations are tentative at best, but reasonable possibilities.

"Ten Horns" probably refer to ten important administrative districts. They support and seek to expand the Beast's devilish plans. But they will fail.

Revelation 17:12-14

The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. ¹³They have one purpose and will

give their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.

b. About the “woman” (prostitute) (15-18)

The woman personifies false religion extended over the waters (i.e. all the world’s peoples – see v. 15). At some point, likely at the midpoint of the Tribulation, the Antichrist will destroy “false religion” and institute worship of himself (thus ending the tenuous “covenant of peace”).

Note the following prophetic passages:

Daniel 9:27

He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.

Matthew 24:15

So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand...”

2 Thessalonians 2:4

He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

Revelation 13:8

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.

The Antichrist will succeed in putting away “the woman” (false worship). The reason it succeeds is that it is sovereignly permitted.

Revelation 17:17

For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to hand over to the beast their royal authority, until God’s words are fulfilled.

D. Commercial “Babylon”: Revelation 18:1-24

1. Angelic announcement (1-8)
 - a. First angel (1-3)

Revelation 18:1-3

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. ²With a mighty voice he shouted: “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for every impure spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal. ³For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.”

Insight (Tatford quoting Bruce Corbin, 523):

The commercial realm is not merely godless: it is controlled by evil forces and, when every spiritual restraint is withdrawn, those influences will be exerted to the full. Behind the purveyors of filthy and defiling pornography are impure spirits. At the back of frenzied finance and ruthless, dishonest commerce are spiritual forces. In many countries the political sphere is full of nepotism, jobbery and graft, and behind it all are unseen demoniacal powers. The whole cosmic system – essentially opposed to God as it is—is controlled by the devil himself (John 12:31).

- b. Second angel (4-8)

In light of the devastating, vile, and materialistic bent of commercial Babylon, the second angel urges Tribulation saints to “come out” and flee this evil. This dark day will be judged soon.

Revelation 18:8

Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.

2. People's lament (9-20)

- a. Kings of the earth will "weep and mourn" their loss (upon Babylon's destruction) (9-10).
- b. Merchants of the earth will "weep and mourn" over their economic loss.
- c. Merchants of the sea will "weep and mourn."

Revelation 18:19

"Woe! Woe to you, great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!"

3. Angelic pronouncement (21-24)

The aftermath of the fall of commercial, materialistic Babylon will be completely disruptive and destructive, as well as totally widespread in scope.

NT Warning:

During the Tribulation, many will "sell their souls" for the seeming comfort and benefits of "Commercial Babylon."

Hear the NT warning/encouragement for living in the midst of wealth.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 NLT

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸**Command** them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

VI. RECAP

A. Judgment and Joy

The final judgments (“bowls”) are sure and deserved. But in Revelation 15 we also have the joyous song of the martyred ones who did not bend the knee to the beast. The judgment of God is harsh and just, yet the judgment of God is also awe-inspiring to those who know and embrace Him as the Lord God Almighty.

B. Sovereign Authority

The bowl judgments not only express God’s wrath against sin but against the beast who would challenge God’s divine authority. The age old question arises again...“who has the right to rule?”

C. Babylon

Religious and commercial “Babylon” is judged in Revelation 17-18. It highlights two arenas of life where man can fail so miserably: what he worships and what he possesses. Ultimately there is but One who is worthy to be worshiped. All else is veneration of idols (anything, anyone, any pursuit, any desire that takes God’s rightful place).

1 John 5:21

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.