

The Theory of Recapitulation Revelation

The theory of recapitulation proposes that the multiple cycles of judgment in Revelation are not chronological and sequential (trumpets following after seals, and bowls following after trumpets), but rather that these cycles (and others within Revelation) repeat the same sequence of judgment, each culminating with final judgment and the establishment of the kingdom, though doing so in different words and with different imagery, and each increasing in intensity. In other words, the seventh seal, trumpet and bowl each relate the final climax of history at the time of the end.

Arguments FOR Recapitulation	
<i>Similarities between Seals, Trumpets and Bowls</i>	Trumpet + Bowl #1 = against the earth (8:7 + 16:2) Trumpet + Bowl #2 = against the sea (8:8b-9 + 16:3) Trumpet + Bowl #3 = against the rivers (8:10-11 + 16:4) Trumpet + Bowl #4 = against the sun (8:12 + 16:8) Trumpet + Bowl #5 = resulted in darkness (9:1-3 + 16:10) Trumpet + Bowl #6 = call an army from Euphrates (9:13-16 + 16:12-14) Trumpet + Bowl #7 = completion of judgment (11:15 + 16:17) lightning/thunder/earthquake/hail (11:19 + 16:18, 21)
<i>Arrival of Kingdom and Final Judgment before 20—22</i>	<u>Judgment (11:18a) → Salvation (11:18b = 20:12)</u> “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever ... The nations rages but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants” (11:15b, 18b) “As clear a statement as possible of final judgment comes in 11:14–18 after the sounding of the seventh trumpet, where the kingdom of this world is said to have become the kingdom of God and of Christ, where the dead have been judged and the saints have received their reward. Note also that 20:12, a further clearly parallel final judgment scene, repeats the same words as 11:18 regarding the judgment of small and great.” (Beale, Revelation: Shorter Commentary, 23) <u>Salvation (14:14-16) → Judgment (14:17-20 = 19:15)</u> “¹⁴ Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. ¹⁵ And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come”” (14:14-15a) “¹⁷ Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle ... ¹⁹ So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.” (14:17, 19)

<i>Climactic 6th Seal</i>	<u>6th Seal: Finality (6:14 = 20:11)</u> “¹²When he opened the sixth seal ... ¹³the stars of the sky fell to the earth ... ¹⁴The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.” (6:12-14) <i>“The first scene of judgment occurs in 6:12–17 after the breaking of the sixth seal. This speaks of the destruction of the earth and heavens and of the great day of the wrath of the Lamb. It is hard to imagine how this could refer to anything other than the final judgment, or how any other judgment could possibly come after it.” (Beale, 22-23)</i>
<i>“It Is Done” before the Book is Done...</i>	The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” (16:17) “And he who was seated on the throne said ... “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.”” (21:5, 6) <i>“The phrase “It is done” in 16:17 and 21:6 appears in both instances to refer to the completion of the same final judgment. On both occasions the words come from the throne of heaven.” (Beale, 24)</i>
<i>Storm Theophany with each Seventh Member</i>	<u>7th Seal = 7th Trumpet = 7th Bowl</u> “¹When the Lamb opened the seventh seal ... ⁵Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.” (8:1, 5) “¹⁵Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet ... ¹⁹Then God’s temple in heaven was opened ... There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.” (11:19) “¹⁷The seventh angel poured out his bowl ... ¹⁸And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake ... ²¹And great hailstones ... fell from heaven” (16:18, 21) <i>“The same language of God’s judgment through thunders and sounds and flashes of lightning as recorded in Exod. 19:16 is used in 8:5 (the conclusion of the seven seals); 11:19 (the conclusion of the seven trumpets); and 16:18 (the conclusion of the seven bowls). Each of these texts in Revelation also mentions in context the heavenly temple or altar. Each text thus narrates the last judgment, so that the latter two recapitulate the first.” (Beale, 23-24)</i>

<i>Final Battle x3</i>	<u>The Same Final Battle</u> “demonic spirits ... who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle” (16:14) “the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse” (19:19) “come out to deceive the nations ... Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle” (20:8) <i>“The repetition of the phrase “gather together for war” in 16:14; 19:19; and 20:8 indicates that the same (final consummative) battle is being described three times.”</i> (Beale, 24)
<i>Fall of Babylon x3</i>	<u>How Many Times Can Babylon Fall?</u> “Another angel, a second, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great”” (14:8) “The great city was split into three parts ... and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.” (16:19) “I saw another angel coming down from heaven ... ² And he called out with a mighty voice, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!”” (18:1, 2) <i>“The declarations concerning the fall of Babylon occurring in 14:8 and 16:19 and in various places in chs. 17–19 must also be describing the same thing, thus revealing again recapitulated description of judgment.”</i> (Beale, 24)
<i>Logical Contradictions with Chronological Progression</i>	The 4th trumpet (8:12) cannot follow the 6th seal (6:12-17). Therefore, the 4th trumpet must come before the 6th seal. ¹² When he opened the sixth seal ... the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, ¹³ and the stars of the sky fell to the earth ... ¹⁴ The sky vanished like a scroll (6:12-14a) 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 might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night. (8:12)

This study will instead argue that Revelation should be read and understood as presenting a chronological sequence of events for the following reasons...

Arguments AGAINST Recapitulation										
Simplest Reading of the Text	A chronological, sequential progression is the simplest and most clear explanation of the narrative. It requires no clever division of the text into supposed repeated cycles. The lack of agreement of the nature and division of these cycles among scholars argues against this scheme as authorially intended.									
Differences between Seals, Trumpets and Bowls	While the Trumpet and Bowl judgments share many traits, these commonalities cannot be located in <u>the Seal judgments</u>. Even among the supposedly similar <u>Trumpet and Bowl judgments</u>, there are many and significant differences as well: <table><tr><td>Trumpet #1 (fire on the earth)</td><td>=/=</td><td>Bowl #1 (boils on the skin)</td></tr><tr><td>Trumpet #4 (third of light darkened)</td><td>=/=</td><td>Bowl #4 (sun scorches with fire)</td></tr><tr><td>Trumpet #5 (5 mo torment from locusts)</td><td>=/=</td><td>Bowl #5 (darkness on beast’s kingdom)</td></tr></table>	Trumpet #1 (fire on the earth)	=/=	Bowl #1 (boils on the skin)	Trumpet #4 (third of light darkened)	=/=	Bowl #4 (sun scorches with fire)	Trumpet #5 (5 mo torment from locusts)	=/=	Bowl #5 (darkness on beast’s kingdom)
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Intensification	One other noticeable difference between the cycles of judgment is their increasing severity, which would make sense if these judgments are progressing chronologically nearer to their climax. <u>Seals = one-fourth:</u> “⁷ When he opened the fourth seal ... Death, and Hades ... were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword” (6:7-8) <u>Trumpets = one-third:</u> “⁸ The second angel blew his trumpet ... and a third of the sea became blood. ⁹ A third of the living creatures in the sea died” (8:8-9a) <u>Bowls = every:</u> “The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.” (16:3) Additionally, as the seals turn to the trumpet and trumpets to bowls, humanity’s response to God becomes increasingly hardened and resistant: <u>Seals = desire to hide from God:</u> “¹² When he opened the sixth seal ... ¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth ... ¹⁶ calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb”” (6:12, 15a, 16) <u>Trumpets = unwillingness to repent:</u> “¹³ Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet ... ²⁰ The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands” (9:13a, 20a) <u>Bowls = outright blasphemy of God:</u> “¹⁷ The seventh angel poured out his bowl ... and they cursed God for the plague of the hail” (16:17a, 21b)									

7th Seal = Trumpets 7th Trumpet = Bowls	Sometimes called “telescopic progression,” the seventh seal appears to <i>contain</i> the seven trumpets, and the seventh trumpet <i>contains</i> the seven bowls. <u>No judgment after 7th Seal:</u> “When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.” (8:1) <u>7th Seal initiates 7 Trumpets:</u> “Then I saw the seven angels ... and seven trumpets were given to them.” (8:2) <u>No judgment after 7th Trumpet:</u> “Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord’” (11:15) <u>7th Trumpet initiates 7 Bowls:</u> <i>See discussion of “three woes” below</i> Therefore, trumpets must follow after the seals chronologically, and the bowls after the trumpets.
Three Woes	<u>After 4th Trumpet:</u> “Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blast of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow” (8:12) <u>After 5th Trumpet:</u> “The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come” (9:12) <u>After 6th Trumpet:</u> (no woe) <u>After interlude of two witnesses:</u> “The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.” (11:14) <u>After 7th Trumpet:</u> (no woe!) Therefore, the third woe must be contained within the 7 Bowl judgments and the Bowl judgments must follow after the Trumpet judgments chronologically.
“Last Plagues”	<u>Finality of Bowl Judgments vs. Non-Finality of Seal/Trumpet Judgments</u> “seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.” (15:1b) “The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’” (16:17) • If the Bowl judgments are the “last,” then some other judgments must have been the first. • If the wrath of God is “finished” with the Bowl judgments, then the wrath of God must have started with some other judgments.

<i>Martyrs Told to “Wait”</i>	<u>After 5th Seal:</u> “When he opened the fifth seal ... the souls of those who had been slain ... cried out with a loud voice, ‘How long before you will judge and avenge our blood?’ ... Then they were ... told to rest a little longer” (6:9-11) <u>Before 7th Trumpet:</u> “⁵ And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land ... swore ... that there would be no more delay, ⁷ but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled” (10:5-7) “The latter expression marks the end of the delay spoken of under the fifth seal ... The very next statement after the announcement of the end of delay connects that end with the days ushered in by the seventh trumpet blast (10:7)” (Robert L. Thomas, Exegetical Commentary, 539) <u>Conclusion:</u> The martyrs “waiting a little longer” in 6:11 is connected to announcement of “no more delay” in 10:6. Therefore, the 5th Seal must precede the 7th Trumpet.
<i>Sealing of the 144,000</i>	<u>Question of 6th Seal Answered by 144,000 Sealed:</u> “¹² When he opened the sixth seal ... ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (6:12a, 17b) “² Then I saw another angel ... we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” ⁴ And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000” (7:2, 3) <u>Seal Precedes Trumpets:</u> “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” (7:3) “⁷ The first angel blew his trumpet ... And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up ... ⁸ The second angel blew his trumpet ... and a third of the sea became blood.” (8:7-8) <u>Sealed Protected from 5th Trumpet:</u> “¹ And the fifth angel blew his trumpet ... ³ Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth ... ⁴ They were told not to harm the grass of the earth ... but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. (9:4) In other words, the 6th Seal (“Who can stand?”) must precede Trumpets #1-2 (harm earth, trees, sea) and Trumpet #5 (locust not harm sealed).
<i>Marking of Worshipers of the Beast</i>	<u>The Mark of the Beast (ch. 13) → Bowl Judgments against those Marked (ch. 16)</u> “So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.” (16:2) There appears to be yet another chronological link, this time between activity of the beast in chapter 13 and the judgments against him (16:10) and his followers (16:2) in chapter 16.

<i>Function of Interludes</i>	<u>Interludes</u> in the book of Revelation can sometimes <u>anticipate future events</u>... “Another angel, a second, followed, saying, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great’” (14:8; cf. 18:1) ...and <u>interludes</u> can also <u>reflect on past events</u>: “¹ And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars ... ⁵ She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was <u>caught up to God</u> and to his throne.” (12:1, 5)
<i>Actually God</i> <i>Actually in the throne room</i> <i>Actually performing actions</i>	“If the three series are independent of each other as this hypothesis usually holds, the organic unity of the whole apocalyptic section of the book is impaired. Ostensibly the vision of the seven-sealed scroll in chapter 5 introduces the remainder of the Apocalypse. A detachment of the trumpets and bowls from the seals leaves the last two cycles of judgment unrelated to the throne of God from which the seal judgments have proceeded.” (Thomas, 529)