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When Prophecy Repeats Itself: Recapitulation in Revelation

The issue of recapitulation in John's Apocalypse has been addressed in a previous article,¹ but a number of reasons make it necessary to take another look at the topic. First, the scholarly debate on the structure of Revelation including the issue of recapitulation has continued. Second, quite a number of Seventh-day Adventists have apparently become interested in futurism. They claim that what they believe to be major political, religious, cultural, and environmental events, happening right before their eyes, must be reflected and found in the Apocalypse and that the Adventist historicist interpretation falls short of being relevant enough today.

The book of Revelation contains broad outlines of history, but not every event in history. Adventists who accept historicism still believe that their interpretation is meaningful, that descriptions of past eras of Christian history contain valuable spiritual messages for today, and that a number of future events described in Revelation not yet fulfilled may be in the process of unfolding at the present time—but this is not satisfactory for all Adventists. Their curiosity leads them to embrace futurism, accepting at times fanciful interpretations. In the process they abandon the concept of recapitulation and choose the concept of progression.² That means, for example, that for them the seven trumpets do not go over the same ground the seven seals have already covered. Rather the trumpets grow out of the seventh seal, being an extension of the seals.

Third, several Adventist pastors and Adventist scholars have suggested that Adventists should interpret passages in Revelation by using two approaches simultaneously: the historicist interpretation plus a futurist approach. For example, Erwin R. Gane, a retired Bible teacher, claims that the seven trumpets of Revelation have been fulfilled throughout history (historicist interpretation), but will have another

¹ See Ekkehardt Mueller, "Recapitulation in Revelation 4–11," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 9.1–2 (1998): 260–277.

² Progression as opposed to recapitulation recognizes only one final climax in the Book of Revelation. This challenges the idea that some of the visions repeat the same events, including the climax of history, from different perspectives.

major future fulfillment in the time after the end of probation.³ On a chart he suggests that the historical fulfillment of the seven trumpets contains in the seventh trumpet an end-time fulfillment of all seven trumpets.⁴ This is a serious departure from the Adventist historicist interpretation and reminds us, to some extent, of Desmond Ford's multiple fulfillments of apocalyptic prophecy. Opening the door to more than one interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy may encourage others to look for an indefinite number of fulfillments.⁵ In addition, it weakens and, to some extent, abandons the concept of recapitulation.

Although the issue of recapitulation seems to be somewhat academic and sometimes even complicated, its implications and practical effects can be far-reaching. It is true; scholars should not maintain an interpretation of Scripture for the sake of a particular approach. Only if the biblical text itself suggests a different way or method of its interpretation should this be pursued and defended. So we have to take another look at the issue of recapitulation in the book of Revelation. We will spend a moment with the scholarly debate, before turning to the question of recapitulation in Revelation.

The State of Affairs in the Scholarly Debate

In approaching the book of Revelation, or at least certain sections of the book, one has basically two options: recapitulation or progression. Recapitulation in the book of Revelation was already used in the third century AD by Victorinus of Pettau⁶ Later it lost its attractiveness until the concept was revitalized by Günther Bornkamm.⁷ Since then, it has been acknowledged by a great number of scholars,

³ Erwin R. Gane, *Trumpet after Trumpet: Will Revelation's Seven Trumpets Sound Again?* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2012).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁵ While Gane talks about "applications," a look at his publication confirms that he uses the term "application" interchangeably with the term "interpretation," not distinguishing—as is normally done—between the two approaches. With regard to the second, third, and fourth trumpets Gane speaks about the "historical application" (pp. 95, 111, 127) and the "future" or "end-time application" (pp. 98, 116, 131). As soon as he discusses the fifth and sixth trumpets his language reverts to "historical interpretation" (pp. 149, 164) and "end-time interpretation" (pp. 156, 166). The two charts that summarize his approach contain the headings "The Dual Interpretation of the Trumpets" (p. 293) and "The Historical and End-Time Interpretations of the Trumpets" (p. 312). The latter contains the subheadings "Historical Interpretation" and "Eschatological Interpretation." It should be added that Gane understands the historicist interpretation just as a type of the real antitypical end-time understanding. This is a use of typology not in harmony with the text of Revelation or Scripture as a whole.

⁶ See David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary 52A (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1997), xci.

⁷ See Günther Bornkamm, "Die Komposition der apokalyptischen Visionen in der Offenbarung Johannis," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 36 (1937): 132–149.

but not all. For example, David Aune who uses a source-critical approach writes:

This means that no form of recapitulation theory is valid for the present text of Revelation. That does not mean, however, that many of the constituent visions and traditions used as sources by the author could not have referred to essentially the same eschatological events from different perspectives and used variegated imagery.⁸

Some scholars express their consent to some form of recapitulation cautiously.⁹ Robert H. Mounce rejects “some predetermined theory of recapitulation” without denying that certain units “seem to go together.”¹⁰ Grant R. Osborne suggests that “no single structural scheme for the book will suffice.”¹¹ While others would agree with these caveats,¹² they support recapitulation in more positive terms. For instance, Louis A. Brighton holds that “Revelation cannot be interpreted on a linear, chronological scale.”¹³ Adela Yarbro Collins finds recapitulation in all visions of the Apocalypse with the exception of the first septet (the seven churches). In her opinion, the recurring pattern in these septet visions is (1) persecution, (2) judgment, and (3) salvation.¹⁴ “Each cycle of visions tells the story of the end in

⁸ Aune, xciii. Marko Jauhiainen, “Recapitulation and Chronological Progression on John’s Apocalypse: Toward a New Perspective,” *New Testament Studies* 49.4 (2003): 543–559, suggests that Revelation is shaped to a larger degree by progression than by recapitulation. While recapitulation is being used, it does not occur with the classical passages normally suggested. For instance, the sixth seal is not a description of the end but introduces the Day of the Lord which reaches its climax in the vision of the bowls.

⁹ E.g., M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1989), 32, talks about “a kind of impressionistic, interrelated spiral.” Jürgen Roloff, *Revelation*, A Continental Commentary (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 15, considers “the theory of recapitulation . . . more probable.” Joseph L. Mangina, *Revelation*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010), 31, also talks about a spiral.

¹⁰ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, revised edition, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 32.

¹¹ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 29.

¹² Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1989), 190, states, “Recapitulation does not imply mechanical repetition of content, but recapitulation becomes the occasion for *new emphases*.”

¹³ Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 1999), 29.

¹⁴ Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 32–44; idem, “‘What the Spirit Says to the Churches’: Preaching the Apocalypse,” *Quarterly Review* 4 (1984): 73.

its own way. The story of the opening of the scroll with seven seals is the whole story of the end. This story is told again in the cycle of the trumpets from another point of view.”¹⁵ Although Bruce M. Metzger understands the seventh seal as an introduction to a new series of visions, he notes:

The trumpets more or less repeat the revelation of the seven seals, though they present it more from God’s standpoint The development . . . is . . . a product of the Semitic mind, which runs through the whole picture again and again. Thus, the seven seals and the seven trumpets essentially tell the same thing, each time emphasizing one or another aspect of the whole.¹⁶

Generally, Adventist scholars use recapitulation. In his chiastic structure¹⁷ of the Apocalypse Kenneth Strand strongly supports recapitulation.¹⁸ Jon Paulien noted, “The sixth trumpet is the exact historical counterpart of Revelation 7:1–8. . . . The seven trumpets, therefore, do not follow the events of Revelation 7 in chronological order.”¹⁹ Richard Davidson pointed out that the introductory scenes to the visions of Revelation—compared with each other—show progression, whereas the sections to which they belong often present recapitulation.²⁰ Ranko Stefanovic cautiously observes, “The recapitulative parallels between the seals and trumpets series appear to be evident.”²¹

One’s view on the composition and structure of Revelation may determine whether one opts for recapitulation, progression, or a mixture of the two. The issue of recapitulation is also related to the question which of approach to the interpretation of Revelation is chosen—a preterist, historicist, futurist, idealist, eclectic, or some other approach. In other words, presuppositions as well as actual research may contribute to choosing a particular method of interpretation.

¹⁵ Idem, *The Apocalypse*, New Testament Message, Biblical-Theological Commentary (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1979), 43.

¹⁶ Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993), 55–56.

¹⁷ A chiasm or chiastic structure is an inverted parallelism. See the chiastic structure on page 17.

¹⁸ See Kenneth A. Strand, “The Eight Basic Visions in the Book of Revelation,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 25 (1987): 107–121.

¹⁹ Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretations of Revelation 8:7–12*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 11 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988), 196–197.

²⁰ See Richard M. Davidson, “Sanctuary Typology,” in *Symposium on Revelation—Book I: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, ed. F. B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 115–116.

²¹ Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 28.

Recapitulation of major parts of Revelation is at times supported by preterists who see the message of Revelation primarily limited to the first century.²² However, it is more or less meaningless to idealists who only look for spiritual messages without being concerned with history. For example, Stephen Smalley writes, “Establishing the exact sequence of the material in the Apocalypse, then, is difficult and ultimately unimportant. It is more crucial to perceive the timeless truth about God’s salvific purposes for his creation, now and in the future.”²³ Smalley does not seem to be an idealist, and with his statement he may have a point; yet to discern at least a rough sequence of events, even if details cannot be pinpointed, may not be useless and its disclosure may even be one of the intentions of the Apocalypse.

Typically, futurists do not subscribe to recapitulation. However, there are exceptions. For instance, G. R. Beasley-Murray uses a futurist approach and yet opts for recapitulation of the seals, trumpets, and bowls.²⁴

Recapitulation is of vital importance to historicists. Their understanding of the book of Revelation is strongly influenced by this concept. If, for example, the seven trumpets follow the seven seals chronologically, one ends up with an understanding of end-time events that differs widely from that of a recapitulationist who views the two visions as largely parallel. Brighton suggests, “The visions of the seven seals (6:1–17; 8:1–5), the seven trumpet-angels (Revelation 8:6–9:21; 11:15–19), and the seven angels with censers (15:1–16:21) are all parallel and cover the same time period, namely events on earth from Christ’s ascension to his parousia.”²⁵

²² However, there are also preterists who choose progression, e.g., James L. Papandrea, *The Wedding of the Lamb: A Historical Approach to the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 89. He sees the seals representing “events surrounding the war with Rome of 66–70 CE, especially the siege of Jerusalem;” the trumpets deal with “the events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 CE,” and the bowls with “events surrounding the fall of Rome.”

²³ Stephen Smalley, *The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 19.

²⁴ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, *The New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 27, states, “For the three series of messianic judgments, represented under the imagery of the seals, trumpets, and bowl-cups, are almost certainly intended to portray from three different aspects a single, short period of judgment in history. Many readers, failing to recognize the parallelism, have received the impression that John narrates wave after wave of judgments in apparently sickening and senseless profusion, and so have gained an exaggerated estimate of the place of judgment in John’s thought.”

²⁵ Brighton, 29. Adventists would take exception to Brighton’s understanding of the bowls but would include Revelation 12–14 and, to some extent, Revelation 2 and 3 in recapitulation.

Understanding Recapitulation

1. Definition

Aune has pointed out that apart from the prologue and epilogue, Revelation consists of one “vision report, which begins at 1:9 and continues to 22:20.”²⁶ This is affirmed by Revelation 1:10, 11. John was on the island of Patmos, and on the Lord’s day he was ordered to write down what he would see and send it to the seven churches. Yet this extensive and all-encompassing vision and audition experience clearly contains subsections that are part of the larger visions in the book. Various septets and even sections not numbered can easily be recognized. It is also obvious that something new begins with Revelation 4:1. So arises the question of how these parts relate to each other. This presents the interpreter with the option to choose between recapitulation and progression.

In this article, recapitulation is understood as a technique used by an ancient author that places several parts of his literary work—in this case the Apocalypse—next to each other so that to a large extent they parallel each other, especially chronologically and with regard to subject matter. In Revelation, each vision may lead to the final consummation. Thus the modern interpreter attempts to uncover and understand the use of this technique, recognizing that in Revelation the author repeatedly leads his audience over the same ground, adding new perspectives each time.²⁷

2. Recapitulation in Daniel

Revelation is not the first biblical book in which recapitulation can be found. Scholars have pointed to various Old Testament writings that use some form of recapitulation.²⁸ Probably the clearest case is found in the book of Daniel. It contains four parallel visions (chaps. 2, 7, 8, and 10–12). Since Daniel 10–12 is more difficult to interpret, charts oftentimes contain Daniel 2, 7, and 8 portrayed in such a way as to indicate the chapters’ parallel structures and content.²⁹ Arthur

²⁶ Aune, xciii.

²⁷ Rob Dalrymple, *Revelation and the Two Witnesses: The Implications for Understanding John’s Depiction of the People of God and His Hortatory Intent* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2011), 72, contends “that since the latter accounts are consistently more detailed, they often serve to clarify earlier texts.”

²⁸ E.g., G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 135, mentions Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah.

²⁹ See William H. Shea, *Daniel 7–12*, The Abundant Bible Amplifier Series (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1996), 152. Idem, “Unity of Daniel,” in *Symposium on Daniel*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series, vol. 2 (Silver Spring, MI: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 186. Sometimes Daniel 2 and 7 and Daniel 7 and 8 are compared in detail. See Shea,

Ferch stated, “Most scholars recognize that the visions in the book parallel each other with later chapters progressively enlarging earlier chapters. Thus, chapter 2 is the least complex, while the visions in chapters 7, 8–9, 10–12 increase in complexity and detail.”³⁰ C. F. Keil has noted long ago that “the contents of both chapters [Dan 2 and 7] are essentially alike.”³¹

<i>Dan 2</i>	<i>Dan 7</i>	<i>Dan 8</i>	<i>Powers</i>
Gold	Lion	–	Babylon
Silver	Bear	Ram	Medo-Persia
Bronze	Leopard	Goat	Greece
Iron	Undefined Beast	Little Horn	Pagan Rome
Iron-Clay			Divided kingdom
	Little Horn	Little Horn	Papal Rome
–	SAINTS	HOST OF HEAVEN	
–	INVESTIGATIVE	SANCTUARY	
	JUDGMENT		
–	TIME SPAN	TIME SPAN	
Stone	Saints and the kingdom of the Son of Man	Destruction by non-human power	Kingdom of God
<i>political perspective</i>	<i>political-religious perspective</i>	<i>political-religious perspective</i>	

This chart clearly points to parallelism in Daniel’s visions. Daniel 2 and 7 describe four major empires under different symbols. Daniel 8 omits the first and uses other symbols to describe the earthly empires. Nevertheless, there are thematic and literal connections between the empires of the different visions. For instance, the fourth empire of Daniel 2 is represented under the metal iron, an empire that “crushes and shatters all things”³² (Dan 2:40), while the fourth beast of Daniel 7 has large iron teeth, devouring and crushing its enemies (Dan 7:7). The leopard of Daniel 7 has four heads, while the

“Unity of Daniel,” 170,171, 209. Although not mentioning the term recapitulation, Shea clearly stresses the parallel character of these chapters in Daniel.

³⁰ Arthur J. Ferch, “Authorship, Theology, and Purpose of Daniel,” in *Symposium on Daniel*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series, vol. 2 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 48.

³¹ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 9:15.

³² Bible texts are from the New American Standard Version (1995), unless otherwise indicated.

goat of Daniel 8 has a large horn that is replaced by four other horns. In both Daniel 7 and 8 are found little horns with largely identical characteristics.³³ All visions in Daniel extend from the time of the author to the establishment of the eternal kingdom of God. Thus we can establish a number of principles for the interpretation of recapitulation.

First principle: Recapitulation has to do with parallelism of overarching themes, but may also be found in literary and thematic details.

However, this parallelism may not always be present in every element of a vision. Daniel 8, for example, omits the first kingdom. Daniel 10–12 does not follow the structure of empires through in the same way the other visions do. There is Darius the Mede (6:1), and there are several Persian kings, not just a Medo-Persian empire (11:1, 2) as in Daniel 8:20. The kings of the South and the North seem to represent different powers in their long history. But there are also linguistic links between Daniel 7, 8, and 9 and Daniel 11 and 12.³⁴

Second Principle: One cannot expect recapitulation to cover all details of parallel visions.

Daniel 7 and 8 contain elements (the Son of Man, the people of God, the sanctuary, a heavenly judgment scene, and time spans) that are lacking in Daniel 2. The visions following Daniel 2 furnish more details and are even richer in theology.

Third principle: Recapitulation does not exclude but actually points to different emphases. It is not a mere repetition of descriptions of events previously portrayed, but contains material so far unknown and emphases not yet encountered.

Daniel 2 is certainly the easiest vision to understand. Yet in its simplicity it functions as a paradigm for the understanding of the apocalyptic literature in Scripture. However, the visions following Daniel 2 become increasingly complex. To interpret the time span in Daniel 8:14, for example, one needs the explanation of the time elements found in chapter 9:24–27.

Fourth principle: Recapitulation does not rule out a certain progression. While the various visions are largely parallel, elements of these visions may follow the mode of progression.

3. Daniel and Revelation

The books of Daniel and Revelation are not only linked by containing apocalyptic prophecies; Revelation is to a large degree dependent on Daniel. The Apocalypse contains numerous allusions to the

³³ See, e.g., Shea, “Unity of Daniel,” 187.

³⁴ E.g., the “daily” in Daniel 8:11–13 and 11:31; the “time, times, and half a time” in Daniel 7:25 and 12:7; and “the Beautiful Land” in Daniel 8:9 and 11:16.

book of Daniel. One finds the same or similar vocabulary (e.g., worship of the image—Dan 3:5, 6; Rev 13:15), the same persons (e.g., the Son of Man—Dan 7:13; Rev 1:13; 14:14; and Michael—Dan 12:1; Rev 12:7), the same time spans (three and a half times—Dan 7:25; Rev 12:14), the same symbolic animals (Dan 7:4–6; Rev 13:2), and the same concepts (e.g., making war with the saints—Dan 7:21; Rev 13:7; and the coming with the clouds—Dan 7:13; Rev 1:7). Revelation relies heavily on Daniel, especially on chapters 2 and 7.³⁵

G. K. Beale suggests that Daniel's structure of parallel visions "may be the most influential on the structure of Revelation, since Daniel is used so much in the book and is used to signal the broad structural divisions of the Apocalypse."³⁶ The phrase "things which must shortly take place" in Revelation 1:1 reflects the phrase "what will take place in the latter days" in Daniel 2:28. The Danielic passage may also be reflected in Revelation 1:19; 4:1; and 22:6. Beale suggests that the Danielic markers in Revelation divide the book into four parts—the introduction, the letters to the churches, the overall vision of Revelation 4:1–22:4, and the book's conclusion—and thus shape the Apocalypse.³⁷ If Beale is correct that Daniel had a strong influence on Revelation, even inspiring to some extent the structure of the book, it can be safely assumed that Revelation also contains recapitulation as does the book of Daniel. Hence, recapitulation seems to be one of the characteristics of apocalyptic literature.³⁸

We now turn to Revelation itself to see whether or not the book contains units that are parallel and whether or not entire visions can be understood to recapitulate earlier visions.

Recapitulation Within Visions of the Apocalypse

In this section we will look at some examples of recapitulation of smaller units without going through the entire Apocalypse. If it can be shown that some smaller units are parallel, the concept of recapitulation as defined above may be confirmed, at least on this limited level.

1. Revelation 12

Simon J. Kistemaker points out that Revelation 12 contains "two descriptions of the same event," calling it the "principle of repetition

³⁵There is not a single chapter in Daniel that does not have echoes or allusions in Revelation.

³⁶ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 135–136.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

³⁸ Beale's discussion of Danielic influence is found in *The Book of Revelation*, 135–141. See also G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 272–285.

for emphasis.”³⁹ The passages he is referring to are Revelation 12:6 and 12:13–16. In both passages is found an escape of the woman clothed with the sun to the desert, a place of refuge and relative safety for her, and the identical time span, once described as 1,260 days and once as a time, times, and half a time.⁴⁰ The outline of Revelation 12 shows that there is recapitulation between verse 6 and verses 13–16, the second passage providing additional information. This corresponds to what has been found in Daniel.

- Rev 12:1–5 Early conflict between the dragon and the woman
- Rev 12:6 *Medieval conflict between the dragon and the woman*
- Rev 12:7–12 Conflict between Michael and the dragon in heaven
- Rev 12:13–16 *Medieval conflict between the dragon and the woman*
- Rev 12:17 End-time conflict between the dragon and the woman⁴¹

2. Revelation 13

In Rev 13:1–10 we find another case of parallelism. Verses 1–4 and verses 5–8 do not follow each other chronologically but seem to be parallel, repeating major thoughts and phrases. First, we notice that each section ends with the universal worship of the beast by humanity. Second, a closer look at the vocabulary and word order in the following chart shows that the two parts should be understood as parallel, providing similar and also complementary information.⁴²

v.1	beast heads	names of blasphemy			
v.2	beast	mouth	dragon gave		great authority
v.3	beast heads/mortally wounded				
v.4	beast		he (dragon) gave authority	<i>make war</i>	EARTH/ WORSHIP

³⁹ Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 8.

⁴⁰ Generally, it is agreed that the two different ways of numbering still describe the same time span. They are understood as three and a half years (with Dan 7:25 as background), 1,260 days, or forty-two months. Cf. Osborne, 482; Smalley, 331.

⁴¹ See William H. Shea, “Time Prophecies of Daniel 12 and Revelation 12–13,” in *Symposium on Revelation—Book I*, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 349.

⁴² Ekkehardt Müller, *Der Erste und der Letzte: Studien zum Buch der Offenbarung*, Adventistica: Forschungen zur Geschichte und Theologie der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten, vol. 11 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011), 362.

v.5 (it)	mouth/blasphemy	was given/ authority was given	
v.6 (it)	mouth/blasphemy/ blaspheme name		
v.7 (it)		was given/ authority was given	<i>make war</i>
v.8 (it)			EARTH/ WORSHIP

The sea beast is clearly dependent on the dragon⁴³ and collaborates with this power. In contrast to the description and the actions of the sea beast (Rev 13:1–8), there is a brief description of the saints: “Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints” (Rev 13:10b).

Both parallel sections (Rev 13:1–4 and 13:5–8)⁴⁴ mention mouth, blasphemy, power, war, and worship. Twice universal worship of humanity is referred to, obviously indicating the same event. Unfortunately, it is not aimed at God but at the dragon and the beast. The actions of the sea beast are directed against God and the saints. Initially this activity lasts forty-two months (Rev 13:5) and comes to an end through the fatal wound (Rev 13:3). The healing of this wound leads to war against the saints⁴⁵ and universal worship of the beast on the part of the inhabitants of the earth.

3. Revelation 17 and 18

The sixth plague mentions the drying up of the Euphrates river, Babylon’s support system (Rev 16:12). The seventh plague (Rev 16:17–21) refers to the judgment on Babylon. This judgment on Babylon is spelled out in greater detail in the next two chapters of Revelation. It is introduced by one of the plague angels (Rev 17:1). In Revelation Babylon is presented as the harlot as well as the great city. Revelation 17 describes her judgment under the image of the “great harlot.” Babylon, a religious alliance, has created a super-alliance with the po-

⁴³ Twice it is stated that the dragon gave his authority to the beast. In addition, the phrase “it was given to him” appears four times.

⁴⁴ William H. Shea, “Time Prophecies,” 354–359, and William G. Johnsson, “The Saint’s End-Time Victory over the Forces of Evil,” in *Symposium on Revelation-Book II*, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 24.

⁴⁵ This war seems to be the dragon’s eschatological war against the remnant (Rev 12:17) in which he uses the sea beast as his agent.

litical powers. Her judgment is that the powers that have originally supported her now turn against her. They “will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire” (Rev 17:16).

While Revelation 17 portrays Babylon as a prostitute and an adulterous daughter of a priest (Lev 21:9) who suffers death, Revelation 18 portrays Babylon as the great city that suffers destruction while those who have benefitted from her economically—kings, merchants, and seafarers—mourn for her. Thus Babylon’s fate is described twice by using recapitulation. The following list shows topical and verbal similarities:

Divine Judgment	17:1	18:4–8
Wine of adultery	17:2	18:3
Intoxicated/deceived	17:2	18:23
Gold, pearls, precious stones		
Support system		
Kings	17:2, 12	18:9
Beast	17:3, 7–8	–
Merchants	–	18:11
Seafarers	–	18:17
Purple, scarlet	17:4	18:12, 16
Bloodshed	17:6	18:24
Saints/people of God	17:6	18:4, 20
The Great City	17:18	18: 10, 16, 19, 21

In addition to these similarities and parallels there are differences that highlight the special emphases of each chapter. For instance, the “war against the Lamb” (Rev 17:14) is not found in Revelation 18. On the other hand, evil spirits and magic are playing quite a role in the Babylon of Revelation 18 (vs. 2, 23). Obviously, the two chapters present another case of recapitulation.⁴⁶

Summary

From the above examples, it seems clear that recapitulation of smaller units appears in some of the visions of Revelation. It consists of parallel sections with different emphases that complement each other. We will now turn to the level of the broad structure of the Apocalypse and see if recapitulation also occurs on that level.

⁴⁶ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 132, states, “The refrains about the fall of Babylon in 14:8; 16:19; 17:16; 18:2, 10, 17, 19–21; and 19:2–3 are certainly not descriptions of different sequential events but of the same cataclysmic judgment.”

Recapitulations of Entire Visions in the Apocalypse

1. Criteria

The further we move up on the level of structure, namely from smaller units to larger ones, the more difficult it may be to establish that recapitulation occurs and the more careful one has to be. Therefore, a major issue is the methodological approach to be chosen. In other words, which criteria/principles would help to establish the existence of recapitulation? The following suggestions are based on the assumption that the text should be allowed to reveal its own structure rather than interpreters imposing their ideas of structure and/or agenda on the text.

1. Determine the beginning and ending of the vision under investigation. It is important to distinguish, if possible, one vision from the next. This procedure does not exclude the possibility that there may be verses that link one vision with the next. Some call this phenomenon “hinge verses”⁴⁷ or the “technique of interlocking.”⁴⁸

2. Determine the time frame of the vision. This step is mainly interested in finding the chronological starting and ending points of the vision.

3. Find the same or a similar climax on the thematic level.

4. Determine basic locations.

5. Find similar literary structures within the vision under investigation.

6. Find repetition of important themes and time spans. The themes here referred to are themes in addition to the one on judgment and salvation mentioned above. The time spans refer to time elements that appear in addition to the time frame of the visions and typically occur as numerical designations in connection with such terms as “year,” “month,” and “day.”

7. Determine, if possible, the extent of recapitulation on the level of the visions in Revelation.

Not all of these criteria can be expected to be present in every recapitulation passage. However, some must be there to make it a true recapitulation.

2. Criteria Applied

We now turn to the application of these criteria. It should be noted that it is best to keep all the criteria in mind when applying one of them to the text of Revelation, even though for the sake of this presentation we have to proceed in a chronological order. Because of

⁴⁷ E.g., Stephen Pattemore, *Souls under the Altar: Relevance Theory and the Discourse Structure of Revelation* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2003), 118.

⁴⁸ E.g., Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 16–19.

space limitations we will only summarize results of previously published research.⁴⁹

Determining the Literary Demarcations of the Visions

Prologue

The Book of Revelation begins with a prologue that reminds readers of a letter, containing a reference to the divine Author of its message, the human author, and the audience. It is generally agreed that the prologue is found in Revelation 1:1–8.

The Messages to the Seven Churches

The subsequent short vision of the “one like a son of man” forms the introduction to the seven letters (Rev 1:9–20). That means that the first septet has an introductory scene, a device that is also found in the other major parts of Revelation. There is also a clear-cut end of this first septet in Revelation 3:22 and the beginning of a new section in 4:1, although Revelation 3:21 already prepares the way for the next section by mentioning God’s throne. This verse is an interlocking device.

The Seven Seals

According to Revelation 4:1, John is asked to enter heaven through an open door in order to get further information. With this marker the apocalyptic part of Revelation begins. It extends to Revelation 22:5.

In chapter 4, John sees a heavenly throne scene. It continues in chapter 5, where the Lamb is the only one able to take the scroll with seven seals from the hand of God the Father and open it. Revelation 4 and 5 clearly introduce the opening of the seven seals. While these chapters are the introductory scene to the seal vision, they may in a larger sense serve as an introduction to the entire apocalyptic part of Revelation.⁵⁰

There is a question as to where the seven seals end and where the vision of the seven trumpets begins. This is of vital importance for the interpretation of Revelation and has to do with the issue of recapitulation. While some interpreters suggest Revelation 8:1 as the end of the seal vision, others extend it to 8:5 or 6. The decision in this case is largely dependent on the interpretation of the silence that occurs when the seventh seal is opened. If, because of the silence mentioned in Revelation 8:1, the seventh seal (8:1) is more or less

⁴⁹ See Ekkehardt Müller, *Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 4-11*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 21 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1996); idem, “Recapitulation in Revelation 4–11,” 260–277.

⁵⁰ Cf. Stefanovic, 164.

empty of contents, then the next verses need to be added to provide some contents. This would also mean that if the seventh seal extends to Revelation 8:5 or 6, the seven trumpets are an extension of the seven seals, following them chronologically. If, however, the seven seals end with Revelation 8:1 and the silence is the climax of the seals, then a new section begins with 8:2,⁵¹ and recapitulation is a possibility. Revelation 8:2–6 would then form the introduction to the seven trumpets.⁵² Several scholars have suggested that the silence has a rich Old Testament background and a definite meaning, and that Revelation 8:1 is not empty of contents.⁵³

Below are some of the arguments that support recapitulation of the seals and trumpets.⁵⁴ Others will be mentioned when we discuss other criteria.

- ◆ Revelation 8:2–6 forms a chiasmic structure, but 8:1 is not linked to this chiasm. This suggests that a new section begins with Revelation 8:2.

- A Seven angels with seven trumpets (2)
- B Angel, altar, censer (3a)
 - C Incense, prayers of the saints (3b)
 - D Altar before the throne (3c)
 - C' Incense, prayers of the saints (4)
- B' Angel, censer, altar (5)
- A' Seven angels with seven trumpets (6)

- ◆ The seven trumpets start with the common formula “And the . . . angel sounded his trumpet” (Rev 8:7, 8, 10, etc., NIV). This formula is foreshadowed in Revelation 8:2 and 6 where the angels with their trumpets are introduced. This formula is quite different from that used in the seals: “When the Lamb opened the . . . seal, I heard the . . . living creature say” (Rev 6:3, 5, 7, etc., NIV) which reminds us of the living creatures and the lamb in chapters 4 and 5. Revelation 4 and 5 and 8:2–6 should be understood as introductory scenes providing the vocabulary for the in-

⁵¹ Mathias Rissi, *Was ist und was geschehen soll danach: Die Zeit- und Geschichtsauffassung der Offenbarung des Johannes* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1965), 8–11. He connects the silence with the Day of the Lord. It is a climax and not a transition to the next series of sevens. Cf. Michel Gourgues, “‘L’Apocalypse’ ou ‘les trois Apocalypses’ de Jean?” *Science et Esprit* 35 (1983): 304–311.

⁵² See, e.g., Smalley, 209.

⁵³ See, e.g., Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 445–452, and Osborne, 336–338, though we do not agree with all their interpretations; Mounce, 170–171.

⁵⁴ For a fuller and more detailed list see Mueller, “Recapitulation in Revelation 4–11,” 265–271.

troductory formulas to the individual seals and trumpets.

- ◆ The elements of a theophany, lightning, thunder, etc. (Rev 4:5; 8:5), and the prayers of the saints (Rev 5:8; 8:3, 4) in both sections suggests also that Revelation 4 and 5 and 8:2–6 are parallel introductory scenes to their visions.
- ◆ While one would expect similarities between visions that recapitulate—for example, in the introductory scenes—there are also clear differences. Both phenomena together support recapitulation.⁵⁵ The individuals appearing in the two series of sevens are quite different. Furthermore, the trumpets seem to focus on the earth dwellers (Rev 8:13), while the focus of the seals seems to be somewhat more on the people of God. This would be one of the different emphases associated with recapitulation.
- ◆ The phrase “I heard the number” is found only in Revelation 7:4 (an expansion of the sixth seal) and 9:16 (the sixth trumpet). In Revelation 7 the people of God are depicted; in chapter 9 their demonic counterpart. Therefore, it seems that the sixth trumpet is the exact historic counterpart to the sixth seal, at least to the expansion of the sixth seal in Revelation 7:1–8.

There are good reasons to take Revelation 8:1, called the seventh seal, as the end of the seal vision which would then extend from Revelation 4:1 to 8:1.

The Seven Trumpets

The starting point of the seven trumpets is Revelation 8:2. The seventh trumpet appears from Revelation 11:15 onward. Many interpreters take Revelation 11:19 as the ending point of the trumpet vision, or as the end of the first part of the book of Revelation.⁵⁶ Some suggest Revelation 11:18 as the end of the trumpet series.⁵⁷ We believe Revelation 11:19 to be the introductory scene to the vision of the satanic trinity that begins in Revelation 12:1, while Revelation 11:18 ends the trumpet visions. Since Revelation 11:18 previews the rest of the Apocalypse it is a fitting ending for the trumpet vision.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ See recapitulation in Daniel.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 26, 36; Desmond Ford, *Crisis! A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 3 vols. (Newcastle, CA: Desmond Ford Publications, 1982), 2:504, 548; Wayne Richard Kempson, “Theology in the Revelation of John” (Ph.D. dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982), 119, 123, 140; and Richard C. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 357–358.

⁵⁷ See Paul S. Minear, *I Saw a New Earth: An Introduction to the Visions of the Apocalypse* (Washington, DC: Corpus Books, 1968), 96–97, 105, 114, 117; Strand, “The Eight Basic Visions,” 114.

⁵⁸ Rev 11:18: “And the nations were enraged [pointing to Rev 12–14], and your wrath came,

The Satanic Trinity and God's People

This part of Revelation has no official numbering as the previous visions have, although some scholars have tried to fit it in a mold of seven scenes.⁵⁹ However, it consists of three major parts: the first dealing with the dragon (Rev 12), the second with the sea beast (Rev 13:1–10), and the third with the beast from the earth (Rev 13:11–18), followed by a preview of salvation, a reference to last events on earth, and the consummation (Rev 14). Maybe due to the preoccupation with the series of seven, this part of Revelation is sometimes just referred to as an interlude.⁶⁰ But this does not do justice to the central part of Revelation which has an introductory scene in Revelation 11:19 and an expansion—some would call it an interlude—in Revelation 14:1–13 by itself, followed by the climax, just as is the case with the seals and trumpets.

Revelation 4 and 5, the introduction to the seven seals, and Revelation 8:2–6, the introductory scene to the seven trumpets, are set in the heavenly sanctuary. This is indicated by the reference to the golden altar (Rev 8:3). Revelation 11:19, the introductory scene for chapters 12–14, is also set in the heavenly sanctuary. The word “temple” is used twice. John is allowed to see the innermost part of the heavenly sanctuary containing the Ark of the Covenant. While in Revelation 4:1 John sees an open door in heaven, in Revelation 11:19 he sees the temple in heaven open. The elements of a theophany are found in all three introductory scenes (Rev 4:5; 8:5; 11:19), although an intensification of the number of elements takes place. Revelation 11:19 is a perfect introduction to the vision that follows, because the Ark of the Covenant reminds us of salvation by grace, worship, the importance of the law, and the Day of Atonement—elements directly addressed in Revelation 12–14.

The Seven Plagues

The section following the central vision seems to be less clearly structured. Revelation 15 forms an introduction to the plagues that follow in chapter 16. As mentioned, Revelation 17 and 18 give a more detailed description of the judgment on Babylon, mentioned in the last two of the seven plagues.

and the time came for the dead to be judged [pointing to Rev 15–18], and the time to reward your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear your name, the small and the great [pointing to Rev 21–22], and to destroy those who destroy the earth [pointing to Rev 19–20].”

⁵⁹ E.g., John Wick Bowman, “The Revelation to John: Its Dramatic Structure and Message,” *Interpretation* 9 (1955): 439–443; Smalley, 22.

⁶⁰ E.g. Osborne, 452.

The Final Judgment

Revelation 19 and 20 include the triumphant shouts of the great multitude because of God's judgment on Babylon, the marriage supper of the Lamb, the final battle of Armageddon (in which Jesus, the rider on a white horse, and His army are involved), and the Millennium.

The New Jerusalem or the Church Triumphant

This section extends from Revelation 21:1 to 22:5 and is followed by the epilogue.⁶¹

The Epilogue

Revelation 22:6–21 mirrors the prelude in so far that it contains a number of similar phrases and concepts, for instance, the Second Coming.⁶²

Determining the Time Frame of the Visions

The Seven Churches

The introduction to the seven letters mentions the risen Lord who was dead before and now lives forever (Rev 1:18). This risen Lord walks among the lampstands, His churches. Obviously this is a first century AD setting. Jesus' death and resurrection happened in AD 31. After that time, He sent messages to His churches. Among other things these messages point forward to His second coming.

The Seven Seals

Jesus appears in Revelation 5 as the one who can open the seals. He comes to God the Father to receive the scroll with the seven seals. Hymns addressed to Jesus in Revelation 5 praise Him as the Savior who has purchased His people. The vision is rooted in the cross of Jesus and His coming to the Father after His ascension. This coming to God the Father is described in Acts 2:33. Jesus' exaltation to the right hand of the Father and His enthronement as king and high priest led to the fulfillment of His promise to pour out the Holy Spirit on His disciples. This happened at Pentecost. While Pentecost is the starting point of the seven seals, this vision would take His followers through the centuries until, under the sixth seal, they would notice the cosmic signs of Jesus' second coming, mentioned by Jesus Himself in Matthew 24:29. These signs were already fulfilled in the 18th and 19th centuries, while today humanity finds itself in a time just prior to the great Day of the Lord (end of sixth seal proper). This Day of the

⁶¹ See, e.g., Osborne, 31.

⁶² See, e.g., Beasley-Murray, 32; Mounce, 35.

Lord will find people shouting to the mountains to fall on them (Rev 6:16), while others will be able to stand before the Lord. Those able to stand will find themselves before the throne of God in the heavenly sanctuary (an expansion of the sixth seal in Rev 7). The silence of the seventh seal points to the final judgment, described in Revelation 20. Thus the seal vision reaches from the first century AD to the final consummation.

The Seven Trumpets

The introductory scene to the trumpet vision portrays an angel at the heavenly altar of incense, the golden altar. He administers the prayers of the saints (Rev 8:3, 4) and therefore serves as a mediator. The pouring out of fire on earth (Rev 8:5) points to judgment, however, not necessarily the final judgment at the end of human history. This judgment here affects a third of humanity and nature, but is not the full judgment of the seven plagues with which God's wrath will be completed (Rev 15:1). The mediation of the angel points to Jesus beginning His high priestly ministry on our behalf after His ascension. This also takes us to the year AD 31. Therefore, from this year onward the trumpets are sounded. As judgments and warning they call people to repentance (Rev 9:20). The seventh trumpet describes the coming of "the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (Rev 11:15), reflecting (1) the stone kingdom in Daniel 2:44 that would crush the world empires and establish the everlasting divine kingdom and (2) the situation when the Son of Man in Daniel 7:14 would receive everlasting dominion and His kingdom that cannot be destroyed.⁶³ The time frame suggests that the trumpets run from the first century AD to the consummation at the end of human history, parallel to the seals.

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The introductory scene (Rev 11:19) to this vision focuses on the Day of Atonement which seems to be referred to again in the first angel's message. Among other things, this message states that "the hour of his judgment has come" (Rev 14:7). It seems that the divine judgment is already taking place, while the Second Coming has not yet occurred (Rev 14:14–20), reminding us of Daniel's pre-advent judgment. But although the introductory scene focuses on that time, the vision itself takes the readers farther back. The woman pregnant with a male child, the Messiah, is threatened by the dragon, Satan (Rev 12:1–5). He attempts to destroy the Messiah, but the Messiah is taken up to God. This is a symbolic description of the birth, life,

⁶³ Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 611.

death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. It is from the woman, God's people, that the Messiah comes forth. Thus the starting point of the vision is to be located either somewhat prior to or at the beginning of the first century AD. At the other end of the vision is Revelation 14:14–20, a symbolic description of the Second Coming. The one “like a son of man” is involved in a harvest. This central vision again covers the entire Christian era.

The Seven Plagues

The introduction to the seven plagues (Rev 15) describes a heavenly sanctuary that has become inaccessible (1 Kgs 8:10, 11). While with the trumpets mediation is still taking place, this is no longer the case with the seven plagues. Mounce notes:

The smoke that fills the heavenly temple in Revelation indicates the presence of God in all his glory and power actively to carry out his judgment upon wickedness. Until the seven plagues are finished, no one is able to enter the temple. Once the final judgment has come, none can stay the hand of God. The time of intercession is past. God in his unapproachable majesty and power has declared that the end has come. No longer does he stand knocking; he enters to act in sovereign judgment.⁶⁴

The full wrath of God has come. The plagues are not limited to a third of humanity as are the trumpets but reach all “who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image” (Rev 16:2), which is the vast majority of humanity. These events were described in the previous vision as end-time events (Rev 13), long after the birth of the Messiah and the centuries of persecution of God's true church. Thus the seven plagues are—contrary to the other visions of Revelation—no longer associated with historical time. They are eschatological events.

General Observation

With Revelation 15 the eschatological part of Revelation begins,⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Mounce, 289. Cf. Krodel, 280.

⁶⁵ William Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1961), 35, makes this interesting statement: “We notice that the final sections of the Apocalypse, though synchronous with the other sections and applicable to the entire course of history, describe especially what will happen in connection with the final judgment. . . . The book reveals a gradual progress in eschatological emphasis.” We agree with him regarding the eschatological focus, but not with his view that this part ap-

which no longer contains recapitulation on a large scale, although the last two plagues are enlarged in Revelation 17 and 18. Armageddon and the Second Coming are symbolically described in Revelation 19. Revelation 20 depicts the Millennium, and chapters 21 and 22 the new creation. This part of Revelation seems to focus more on progression, while the first part, up to chapter 14, is rich in recapitulation on the vision level. While many recapitulationists understand the seals, trumpets, and plagues as parallel events that “cover the same time period,”⁶⁶ we would suggest listening carefully to the text of Revelation, noticing the shift from the historical to the eschatological part of the book. While we agree that the seals and trumpets are parallel, this is not the case with the plagues. The plagues are to be associated with the last elements of the seal and trumpet visions only. Kenneth Strand has made some helpful comments and has mentioned some limitations:

A basic interpretational consideration. . . is the importance of observing in which of the two major parts of the entire book any particular item appears—whether the historical or the eschatological. . . . Moreover, two cautions arise as corollaries: First, care must be taken to avoid any methodology which would make the messages of Revelation either entirely historical or entirely eschatological, for such would do violence to the book’s divisions into major historical and eschatological parts. Second, it would likewise be inappropriate to adopt a system of interpretation which would set forth the messages of the Apocalypse as if they portrayed an absolutely “straight-line” or completely sequential chain of events or developments.⁶⁷

Finding the Same or Similar Climax on the Thematic Level

The message to the seventh church has the Lord standing at the door (Rev 3:20). This statement may have eschatological overtones. The idea of standing at the door reminded Christians of the first century of the Lord’s second coming. “When you see all these things, recognize that he is near, right at the door” (Matt 24:33; cf. Mark 13:29). In Luke 12:36, where it speaks about knocking on and opening the door, the context is the Second Coming. According to James 5:9 the Judge is standing right at the door. Obviously, the supper of Revela-

plies to “the entire course of history.”

⁶⁶ Brighton, 29; cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 127.

⁶⁷ Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation: Hermeneutical Guidelines, with Brief Introduction to Literary Analysis* (Naples, MI: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1982), 53.

tion 3:20 reflects the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19:9 that will be celebrated after the Second Coming. While the seven messages frequently refer to Christ's coming, this coming does not always mean the Second Coming but could refer to temporal judgments (Rev 2:5). However, as one comes closer to the end of the letters there seems to be an intensification with regard to the Second Coming (2:25; 3:11, 20).

The sixth seal (Rev 6:12–7:17) describes the Second Coming in terms of the Day of the Lord that would leave only those who are “able to stand” on God's side (Rev 6:17), that is, the 144,000/the great multitude (Rev 7). The others wish to be swallowed up or buried by the mountains because they cannot endure seeing God and the Lamb. The earthquake of Revelation 6:14, not the one of chapter 6:12, seems to be the eschatological earthquake of Revelation 16:18–20. Thus the sixth seal is associated with the judgment at Jesus' coming⁶⁸ and with the final salvation (Rev 7:9–17). The redeemed are depicted as being with God in His heavenly temple. This may refer to the period of the Millennium, while the seventh seal (Rev 8:1) seems to refer to the final judgment at the end of the Millennium and maybe to the new creation.

The seventh trumpet (Rev 11:15–18) reflects some texts in Daniel (Dan 2:44; 7:14) that deal with the final events of earth's history. The last judgment as well as the eternal reign of God will have come. In Revelation 11:17 God the Father appears as the “One who is and who was.” This title appears three times (Rev 1:4, 8; 4:8) as “He who is, and who was, and who is to come,” each time containing the element “who is to come.” That this element is missing in Revelation 11:17 and 16:5 is significant. Osborne comments, “There is no more future, for God's awesome power has acted, and his eternal reign has begun. We are at the eschaton!”⁶⁹ That there is no longer a future may be disputable, depending on how the phrase is defined, but Osborne is certainly correct that with the seventh trumpet we have reached the final consummation. Mounce says that “the third designation (‘is to come’) is omitted because His coming is no longer seen as future. Already He has come and has begun to reign.”⁷⁰

The double harvest of Revelation 14:14–20 ends the vision dealing with the satanic trinity. One “like a son of man” is seated on a cloud and begins the harvest of the earth. The cloud reminds readers of the description of Jesus' coming in Revelation 1:7. The phrase “like a son of man” appears for the first time in Revelation 1:13 and

⁶⁸ Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 123–124.

⁶⁹ Osborne, 443.

⁷⁰ Mounce, 227.

describes Jesus. In Matthew 24:30 the Son of Man is “coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.” Jesus finishes the end-time war against His people (Rev 12:17; 13:7) with His coming and the ingathering of the elect (the wheat). However, the harvest also includes a negative element. While the saints experience final salvation, the enemies are judged just as grapes are trampled in the wine press outside the holy city. The imagery may be connected to Revelation 19:11–16.⁷¹ There the rider on the white horse “treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty” (Rev 19:15).

All the final scenes in the visions of the historical part of Revelation seem to discuss last-day events. They describe the end of human history as we know it. They are parallel. To them can be added the eschatological climaxes of Revelation 16:17–21 and 19:11–21 that we have already mentioned and that describe the final judgment with new imagery. Beale has noted, “The strongest argument for the recapitulation view is the observation of repeated combined scenes of consummative judgment and salvation found at the conclusions of various sections throughout the book.”⁷²

Determining Basic Locations

Sometimes it is helpful for the interpretation of Revelation to notice the geographic location in which a certain passage of the Apocalypse is set. Looking at the seal vision, it is obvious that the events in Revelation 4 and 5 take place in heaven. The events associated with the opening of the first six seals (Rev 6) happen on earth. However, with the second part of the expansion of the sixth seal (Rev 7:9–17) a transition to heaven occurs. The great multitude of the redeemed stands before the throne of God in the heavenly sanctuary. The seventh seal introduces the silence in heaven. Thus with the seven seals a movement from heaven to earth and back to heaven takes place.

Turning to the seven trumpets one finds a similar arrangement. The sanctuary scene in Revelation 8:2–6 is located in heaven. Whether one includes Revelation 8:1 or not—and we would not include it—the location would not change. The blowing of trumpets one through six sets in motion events that affect earth. While the two falling stars in the third and fifth trumpet originally come from heaven, their work of devastation affects earth. The same is true of the locusts. They come out of the abyss, but their plague affects those who live on earth. Therefore, one can say that the first six trumpets happen on earth. The eating of the little scroll in Revelation 10 is also an experience with an

⁷¹ See Smalley, 377.

⁷² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 121.

earthly venue, although an angel appears in verse 1. Only with the resurrection of the two witnesses and their ascension to God (Rev 11:12) does the location change to a heavenly venue. This location remains the same under the seventh trumpet.

Basic Locations in the Seven Seals and the Seven Trumpets

SEVEN SEALS

Heaven	→	Earth	→	Heaven
Rev 4–5		Rev 6:1–7:8		Rev 7:9–8:1
thunder, voices, flashes of lightning; incense		6 seals		part of the sixth seal seventh seal: <i>climax</i>

SEVEN TRUMPETS

Heaven	→	Earth	→	Heaven
Rev 8:2–6		Rev 8:7–11:14		Rev 11:12, 15–18
thunder, voices, flashes of lightning; earthquake incense ⁷³		6 trumpets		part of the sixth trumpet seventh trumpet: <i>climax</i>

This chart shows that with regard to locations the trumpets closely resemble the seals. Furthermore, there is the same movement from heaven to earth and back to heaven. This also means that it is quite unlikely that the trumpets follow the seals chronologically. If this were the case, the redeemed would have to leave heaven to return to earth and experience the next set of judgments—a rather cruel arrangement.

The vision of the satanic trinity in Revelation 12–14 follows a similar order. The introductory scene with the temple opens and the Ark of the Covenant seen is said to be in heaven. Although the woman is also seen in heaven, her pregnancy, childbirth, and persecution take place on earth. Only the heavenly battle between Michael and Satan is placed in heaven. But immediately after it is mentioned, the storyline continues on earth. The two beasts of Revelation 13 are active on earth. The terrible persecution of the saints at the end of chapter 13 is contrasted with the future blessing of the 144,000 (Rev 14:1–5) who proclaim the three angels’ message (Rev 14:6–12). The harvest of the world happens through divine intervention from heaven (Rev 14:14–20). In chapter 15 the saints stand on the heavenly sea of glass.

In the first septet, however, in the letters to the seven churches, the location is different. The introductory scene is placed on earth, as

⁷³ See Mueller, “Recapitulation in Revelation 4–11,” 269.

are the messages to the seven churches. These messages, however, envision a time of consummation, referring to the new earth, the marriage supper of the Lamb, and sitting with Jesus on His throne. Each message reaches a certain climax, and all together seem to reach this climax more perfectly and possibly progressively.

Finding Similar Literary Structures Within the Visions

The visions of the seals, trumpets, and the satanic trinity share a common structure. They all have an introductory scene of varied lengths that has to do with the sanctuary in heaven. These introductory scenes set the tone for the messages to come. The introductory scenes are followed by the body of the vision, the “basic prophetic description”⁷⁴ and development. However, before these visions come to an end and reach their eschatological climax they contain an expansion of at least two elements.

The seals contain a twofold expansion in the sixth seal. In Revelation 7 the reader is introduced to the 144,000 and the great multitude—God’s end-time people. This first expansion deals with ecclesiology. The expansion of the trumpet vision contains two or three major elements. The first part is John’s representative eating of the little scroll. It was first a sweet and then a bitter experience (Rev 10). This is followed by the measuring of the temple and the story of the two witnesses (Rev 11:1–14). Again there is an ecclesiological focus and a focus on message and mission.

The expansion of the next vision deals again with the 144,000 (Rev 14:1–5) and the message they proclaim (Rev 14:6–13). So there is a connection between the expansions. Both the seal vision and the satanic trinity vision have passages dealing with the 144,000. Revelation 14 furnishes important additional information to what we know from chapter 7. The connection between the seven trumpets and the satanic trinity vision is the proclamation of the last message (Rev 10:11 and 14:6–13).

The last element of the three visions, following the expansion, is the eschatological climax or consummation. These climaxes, with their focus on final judgment and salvation, have already been discussed. Their parallelism, as well as the parallelism of the expansions, strongly supports recapitulation.

While the letters to the seven churches share with the other visions a sanctuary introduction scene, there is no expansion of the sixth element. Also the last element is not as pronounced as in the three apocalyptic visions of Revelation 4–14. The seven seals and the

⁷⁴ I am indebted to Strand, “The Eight Basic Visions,” 112–114.

seven trumpets share a division of four and three.⁷⁵ There are four horses and their riders in the first four seals plus three additional seals. With the trumpets there are four short trumpets comparable to the horsemen of the seals and three elaborate trumpets, also called woes (Rev 8:13; 9:1, 12; 9:13; 11:14).

Finding Repetition of Important Themes and Time Spans

Important themes are repeated in the various visions of the historical part of Revelation. We have already highlighted the consummation passages with their emphasis on judgment and salvation. We will indicate one more.

In the expansion of the sixth seal the 144,000 are mentioned. They are introduced with a unique statement found only twice in Revelation: "I heard the number" (Rev 7:4). The 144,000 are the "army" of God, His struggling end-time remnant. The multiplication of the number twelve by twelve and one thousand may point to the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles (Rev 21:12, 14). The number one thousand may represent a military unit (cf. Num 31:4–6). Craig Koester suggests that "the numbers symbolize completeness."⁷⁶ The phrase "I heard the number" occurs a second time in Revelation 9:16. But this time it refers to the satanic army of 200 million people. This is certainly not an accident but an important theme. While under the expansion of the sixth seal the true people of God are portrayed, under the sixth trumpet its satanic counterpart appears. The two are involved in a life and death struggle. However, the 144,000 are promised that they will be able to "stand" on the Day of the Lord and before the One who sits on the throne. By the repetition of phrases such as "I heard the number" the different emphases between parallel visions are stressed.

Another important feature is the use of time spans. While Revelation contains a number of time spans such as "ten days" (Rev 2:10), "five months" (Rev 9:5), and "a thousand years" (Rev 20:2), it also uses a time span employed twice by the prophet Daniel, the "three and a half times" (Dan 7:25; 12:7). In the vision of the battle between the satanic trinity and God's people, we find this time period several times and under different designations: (1) In Revelation 12:6 the woman remains in the desert for 1,260 days. (2) In Revelation 12:14 she is supported there for three and a half times. (3) The sea beast rages for forty-two months (Rev 13:5). These time elements are iden-

⁷⁵ Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 127.

⁷⁶ Craig R Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 90.

tical.⁷⁷ Seven times they are mentioned in the Bible: twice in Daniel and five times in Revelation referring to the persecution of the saints and the time of hardship for the two witnesses (Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5).⁷⁸ This time span, interpreted according to the year-day principle, refers to the period from AD 538 to AD 1798. In a symbolic vision the time period should also be symbolic;⁷⁹ a literal time period of three and a half years does not make sense when the vision covers hundreds of years, even two millennia.⁸⁰

It is interesting to note that the 1,260 years appear twice in the trumpet vision. The holy city is trodden under foot for forty-two months (Rev 11:2) and the two witnesses prophesy in sackcloth for 1,260 days (Rev 11:3). This means the two visions, the one on the satanic trinity and the trumpet vision, are related at least in regard to time. That also means that the trumpet vision—like the vision of Revelation 12–14—should be interpreted in accordance with the historicist method rather than the futurist method of interpretation. It also means that recapitulation is obviously intended in the Apocalypse.

Determining the Kind and Extent of Recapitulation in the Visions Recapitulation in Revelation

Our study has shown that in Revelation recapitulation can be found in smaller units, distributed throughout the Apocalypse, as well as with larger units, that is, complete visions. There are septets and visions that are not numbered. However, recapitulation of whole visions is not found after Revelation 14, that is, in the eschatological part of the book. Therefore, we believe that recapitulation is found in the seals, trumpets, and vision of the satanic trinity, but not in the vision of the bowls or plagues.

Problematic Texts

One problem with recapitulation in the trumpets is that the eschatological sealing mentioned with the 144,000 (sixth seal) occurs again with the fifth trumpet. If God's people are sealed only in connection with last-day events, namely during the sixth seal, then the trumpets must appear chronologically after the seals. However, ac-

⁷⁷ Cf., e.g., Osborne, 464; Krodell, 241.

⁷⁸ See Ekkehardt Mueller, "The End Time Remnant in Revelation," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 11.1–2 (2000): 196.

⁷⁹ Cf. See Gerhard Pfandl, "The Year-Day Principle," *Reflection: A BRI Newsletter* 4.18 (2007): 1–3.

⁸⁰ Cf. William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 56–93, 116–123; Pfandl, 1–3.

ording to Scripture there is an eschatological sealing (Rev 7:3) and a sealing at baptism (Eph 1:13; 4:30) which John may have had in mind with the fifth trumpet. It is important in such cases to look at the cumulative evidence for recapitulation and then try to find a solution for data that seems to diverge. We use the same approach when we discuss the doctrine of the Trinity or the biblical teaching about the divinity of Jesus. At first glance there may be conflicting data, but after careful study it usually disappears.

Summary of Arguments for Recapitulation

That recapitulation occurs in Revelation is very clear. The vision of the satanic trinity moves from the time before the birth of the Messiah to His second coming and parallels the seal and the trumpet visions. Some arguments in favor of recapitulation for the trumpet vision are: (1) The demarcation of the surrounding visions make it unlikely that the trumpets grow out of the seals; (2) the time frame of the trumpet vision reaches from the first century AD to the final consummation; (3) the parallelism of the climaxes occurs in the various visions; (4) the parallel internal structure of the major visions in the first part of Revelation is significant; (5) the basic locations of the seal and trumpet visions do not allow the redeemed, living in the presence of God, to come back to earth in order to suffer further judgments; and (6) the parallel time spans of 1,260 days and forty-two months represent 1,260 years. These reasons allow only a historicist interpretation of the trumpets.

The Case of the Letters to the Seven Churches

What about recapitulation with regard to the letters to the seven churches? As we have seen, the seven letters differ to some extent from the seals, trumpets, and the vision of the satanic trinity not only in their structure but also in content. They focus on Jesus' second coming and prepare for the apocalyptic part of the book through specific vocabulary and concepts. Doubtless the seven churches refer to the specific congregations addressed by Jesus that existed in the first century AD.

Could they also refer to consecutive periods in church history as the other series in the historical section of the Apocalypse would represent consecutive eras of history? The number seven and the general promise of blessing for anyone who reads the book and follows its messages (Rev 1:3) would be two indicators among others that suggest a universal audience rather than only the members of these seven churches. "The names of the seven churches are symbolic of the church in different periods of the Christian Era. The number 7 indicates completeness, and is symbolic of the fact that the messages

extend to the end of time, while the symbols used reveal the condition of the church at different periods in the history of the world.”⁸¹

Looking at Revelation 2 and 3, one notices a reduced number of symbols and more non-symbolic language. For example, the dominant name for Jesus in the Apocalypse is “Lamb,” occurring twenty-eight times, but not at all in the letter frame (Rev 1–3 and 22:6–21). On the other hand, the term *ekklēsia* (church) appears only in the letter frame and not in the apocalyptic part. In the latter, symbols such as the “woman clothed with the sun” are used. But it is not only a reduction of symbolism that can be noticed; the presence of conditionality also occurs in the seven messages. This difference suggests that the messages to the seven churches are closer to classical prophecy than apocalyptic prophecy. This in turn suggests that the book contains a mixed genre and possibly even mixed prophetic genres, as is also found in the book of Daniel.

The book of Daniel consists of narrative portions and apocalyptic prophecy (e.g., Dan 2, 7, 8). However, Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 4 is different from the major visions that present a sweep of history from the time of the author to the future kingdom of God. The prophecy of Daniel 4 affects only one individual and does not deal with empires that would last for decades or centuries. It is a short-term prophecy in that its time period cannot be understood according to the year-day principle; in this case it is literal and not symbolic. Daniel’s call to Nebuchadnezzar to repent (Dan 4:27) also indicates that there is an element of conditionality in the prophecy and that its fulfillment could have been avoided.

Likewise Revelation contains various genres of literature. Aune writes, “The prophetic character of the proclamations to the seven churches in Rev 2-3 has been particularly emphasized”⁸² and “that there are compositions that include apocalyptic sections but cannot themselves be categorized as apocalypses . . . suggests that it is not unreasonable to regard Revelation as a similar *mixtum compositum*.”⁸³ Beale adds, “In this respect, it is significant that the Apocalypse is to be understood broadly as an ‘epistle,’ the contents of which are apocalyptic and prophetic in genre (see 1:1–3).”⁸⁴ In this case, a dual usage of the messages to the seven churches would be possible without subjecting apocalyptic prophecy to multiple fulfillments, because apocalyptic prophecy does not have multiple fulfillments.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 585.

⁸² Aune, lxxv.

⁸³ Aune, lxxxix.

⁸⁴ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 133.

⁸⁵ See Frank B. Holbrook, ed., “Daniel and Revelation Committee: Final Report,” *Sympo-*

The paradigm for an understanding of apocalyptic prophecy in Daniel is chapter 2. It is obvious that Daniel 2 does not have multiple fulfillments. The same is true for Revelation 12, the paradigm for understanding apocalyptic prophecy in John's Apocalypse. While classical prophecy may have more than one fulfillment and may be conditional, apocalyptic prophecy has just one fulfillment and is unconditional.⁸⁶

To suggest that Revelation 1:19 implies that the messages to the churches refer to John's time only, while from Revelation 4 onward we have future events is not possible because clearly the messages to the seven churches refer also to the future. For instance, the promises to the overcomers are future-oriented and typically refer to the consummation.⁸⁷

The Nature of Recapitulation

A look at recapitulation in Revelation suggests that it is frequently used, and should be used in the interpretation of the text, as well as in the attempt to identify historical events in the biblical text. However, it is important to have a view of recapitulation that does justice to the phenomenon in Revelation. Recapitulation acknowledges that biblical texts are parallel in content and/or scope. That does not mean that all elements must match one another perfectly, although a series of elements should be roughly parallel. For example, in the seal vision the consummation begins already with the sixth element and not with the last element as in the other series. Passages that recapitulate may provide special emphasis and additional information and enlargement. Furthermore, recapitulation of visions does not exclude progression in introductory visions or theophanies (divine appearances). The introductory visions of churches, seals, trumpets, and the satanic trinity show a movement from the Holy Place into the Most Holy Place. Theophanies in Revelation 4:5; 8:5; and 11:19 add each time an additional element.⁸⁸ In other words, too narrow a view of recapitulation does not only read too much into the book of Revelation but also discredits an approach taken by the Apocalypse itself. This may lead

sium on Revelation—Book II, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 453.

⁸⁶ See Gerhard Pfandl and Ekkehardt Mueller, "How Do Seventh-day Adventists Interpret Daniel and Revelation?" in *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers*. Biblical Research Institute Studies, vol. 2, ed. Gerhard Pfandl, (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 79–89.

⁸⁷ See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 152.

⁸⁸ In Revelation 4:5 flashes of lightning, voices, and peals of thunder appear. Rev 8:5 adds as a new element earthquakes. Revelation 11:19 has five elements including heavy hail.

to a chronological interpretation of the book that disregards its true character.

Conclusion

How to approach the interpretation of Revelation is a crucial issue. Hermeneutical decisions at various levels will, to a large extent, decide the outcome. Recapitulation is found primarily in the historicist approach to apocalyptic literature, while progression is chiefly used by futurists.⁸⁹ It is quite clear that Revelation contains recapitulation but it seems that a moderate usage of recapitulation in Revelation is the most appropriate approach. We need to always remain open to learn more from the text of Scripture and be willing to listen to one another.

⁸⁹ Although it must be admitted that almost any combination has been tried in church history. Still, progression is more prevalent among futurists than preterists or historicists.



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