

The End is Near
Revelation 16:1-21
Rev. Brian Bill
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Recently Pastor Ed and Dale Steele were seen standing by the side of I-74 holding up a sign that read, *“The End is Near! Turn yourself around now before it’s too late!”* They held up the sign to each passing car.

“Leave us alone you religious weirdos!” yelled the first driver as he sped by. Seconds later, they heard a big splash.

Ed asked Dale, *“Do you think we should just put up a sign that says, ‘the bridge is out’?”*

That’s usually how people hear the book of Revelation: *“The end is near”* sounds like just a threat, easy to roll your eyes at, easy to speed past. But what if what we read in Revelation is real? What if Revelation was written as a series of warning signs?

Last weekend, we finished Revelation 15, which is the shortest chapter in the book. Our main idea was: *God’s wrath is certain, but His people are secure because He is sovereign.* Our text today is a bit longer and extremely intense.

Speaking of sermon length, when I was studying at a coffee shop this week, I got up for a coffee refill and when I came back, I saw a message on top of my notes allegedly signed by God: *“Dear Brian, shorten this up!”* While I’m open to messages from God, this one came from Kim Hawkins, so I think I’ll ignore his admonition. I can’t promise a short sermon, but I can give a short summary of the sermon: *Because God’s judgment is coming and Christ’s return is near, repent of your sin and receive Jesus Christ while there is still time.*

We don’t have the option of ignoring the Almighty because He speaks in a very loud voice according to Revelation 16:1: ***“Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, ‘Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.’”*** The word **“loud”** is the Greek word *megas*, which means *“great, large, loud in volume, intense, fierce, and severe.”* The word is used 10 times in this chapter to describe God’s great voice, fierce heat, the great river Euphrates, the great day of God the Almighty, twice to describe a great earthquake, the great city, Babylon the great, great hailstones, and a severe plague.

The phrase ***“pour out”*** means *“to spill or empty out completely.”* These seven bowls looked more like saucers and were designed to be poured out quickly and completely. The ***“wrath of God”*** refers to His holy and righteous anger against sin and rebellion. We see a similar picture in Lamentations 4:11: ***“The Lord gave full vent to His wrath; He poured out His hot anger.”*** God’s patience has a limit, and His judgment will one day be poured out in full against sin, sinners, and Satan. Up to this point, God has always tempered His wrath as He honored the request of the prophet in Habakkuk 3:2: ***“In wrath remember mercy.”*** But now the world will experience the undiluted wrath of a holy God.

Trevin Wax writes, *“God is not a permissive grandfather who winks at sin, but a perfect Father of fiery love...who thunders against sin, whose holy love demands He confront and destroy it. God’s hatred of sin isn’t at odds with His love; it’s an expression of it...what we see in this passage is how much God hates sin. He hates it so much that He must judge it.”* Theologian Leon Morris argues that the wrath of God is the *“strong and settled opposition to all that is evil...arising out of God’s very nature...it is a burning zeal for the right coupled with a perfect hatred for everything that is evil.”*

We have already seen the seal judgments and the trumpet judgments and with each cycle, God’s judgment becomes more intensive and more extensive. David Jeremiah suggests Revelation is organized around these three sets of symbols.

- **Seal judgments** – when the world is ruined by men (chapter 6).
- **Trumpet judgments** – when the world is ruined by Satan (chapters 8-9).
- **Bowl judgments** – when the world is reclaimed by God (chapter 16).

I believe these bowl judgments come right before Jesus’ return. Let’s consider these final judgments which are poured out one right after the other.

1. SORES. In verse 2, the first bowl brings painful sores upon those who bear the mark of the beast: ***“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.”*** These were open oozing ulcers like what Job experienced in Job 2:7: ***“...loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.”*** These sores will fall upon those who have deliberately rejected God and given their allegiance to the Antichrist.

This first plague of the Apocalypse also corresponds to the sixth plague in Egypt, when God struck the Egyptians with painful boils in Exodus 9:9: ***“It shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.”*** I found this insight helpful: *“What God did in Egypt, He will do again on a far greater scale in the final judgment. The God who judged Pharaoh will ultimately judge everyone who refuses to bow to the true King.”*

2. SEA. When the second bowl is poured out, the entire salt-water ecosystem will collapse under God’s judgment. We see this in verse 3: ***“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.”***

This will not be a partial judgment like we saw with the second trumpet, where one-third of the sea became blood and one-third of the sea creatures died. Here, the judgment is total: ***“Every living thing died that was in the sea.”*** The word ***“every”*** means, *“total, complete, exhaustive, nothing left alive.”* The phrase ***“like the blood of a corpse”*** pictures thick, congealed, putrefying blood.

On Monday, Beth and I were down by the Mississippi River with some family members, and I saw a bag of something with blood oozing out of it. After the grandchildren walked away, I went back to investigate. As I looked closer, I saw that it was raw, bloody chicken that had been sitting in the hot sun. The smell was repulsive. But even that gives us only a faint picture of what this judgment will be like. The oceans will become vast reservoirs of death and decay, and the stench of corruption will fill the coastlines of the world.

The oceans cover roughly 71% of the earth’s surface, and they are normally teeming with an incredible variety of life. But when the second bowl is poured out, that entire ecosystem will collapse.

About a week ago, Beth and I watched a special called “The Americas” narrated by Tom Hanks, which showcased the beauty and incredible diversity of underwater life. It was breathtaking. Colorful fish, coral reefs, whales, sea turtles, and countless other creatures are all part of the beauty God has created. Imagine all that life suddenly vanishing.

Because God’s judgment is coming and Christ’s return is near, repent of your sin and receive Jesus Christ while there is still time.

3. SPRINGS. When the third bowl is emptied out, the river and springs don't become "like blood," but become actual blood according to verse 4: ***"The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood."*** Unlike the second bowl, which affects the oceans, this plague strikes rivers, springs, wells, and every source of drinkable water. Something similar happened in the first plague in Egypt when God turned the Nile to blood in Exodus 7:17-18. We read that the fish died, and ***"the Nile will stink,"*** and the Egyptians would find it so gross they would not want to get near it.

Most of us don't realize what a blessing it is to turn on the faucet and have clean water whenever we want. That certainly wasn't the case in Kenya when we were constantly trying to acquire purified water for our team. Reading about this plague reminded me of the time when we lived in Mexico and turned on the faucet only to see white worms cascading into the sink. Imagine turning on the faucet and seeing blood pour out. The horror is unimaginable.

In verses 5-6, after the waters become blood, the third angel reminds us that God is just and righteous: ***"And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, 'Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!'"***

Loved ones, as we consider these judgments and their severity, it's important to remember that God's judgments are true and righteous. Some of us push back against God because frankly, we don't think He's fair. Many years ago, I heard a pastor ask a piercing question: *"Can you worship a God who isn't obligated to explain His actions to you? Could it be your arrogance that makes you think God owes you an explanation?"* This plague confronts that arrogance head-on. Genesis 18:25 asks, ***"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what's right?"***

In Revelation 6:10, we learned that slain martyrs sought refuge under the altar as they asked God for an answer to this question: ***"O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"*** They were not crying for revenge, but for justice.

Revelation 16:7 reveals that God has answered their prayer from the altar: ***"And I heard the altar saying, 'Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!'"*** Those who thirsted for the blood of God's people are fittingly given blood to drink. This is similar to what we read in Isaiah 49:26: ***"I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as***

with wine.” The judgment matches their crime. The persecutors who spilled innocent blood now face the consequences of their violence.

God never ignores the cries of His people. Justice may seem delayed, but it is never denied. The altar that once held the prayers of the oppressed now declares that the justice of God has been fulfilled. The Judge of all the earth does what is right, even when His judgments are severe.

4. SUN. When the fourth bowl is poured out, the sun will become an instrument of judgment by scorching people with intense heat. We see this in verses 8-9: ***“The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.”*** In Luke 21:25, Jesus predicted there would be ***“signs in sun and moon and stars.”***

In Revelation 6:12, the ***“sun became black like sackcloth.”*** Isaiah 24:6 says: ***“Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left.”*** Malachi 4:1 reinforces this picture: ***“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”***

The sun is about 93 million miles from earth, and its core reaches roughly 27 million degrees Fahrenheit. God has designed our planet to exist within an extraordinarily narrow range that allows life to flourish. In this judgment, the very thing God devised to sustain life becomes an instrument of His wrath. Thankfully, God keeps the earth at the perfect distance, but this plague shows what will happen when God removes His restraining hand. While there are differences of opinion about whether global warming is happening today, when this plague is unleashed, it won’t just be warmer around the globe – there will be supernatural scorching on a worldwide scale.

Notice the tragic response in verse 9: ***“They did not repent and give him glory.”*** Instead, ***“they cursed the name of God.”*** Even under the fierce and fiery judgment of God, most unbelievers will refuse to repent. Sin can harden the human heart so deeply that even judgment does not produce repentance. The fourth bowl is not merely about unbearable heat; it is a sobering picture of what happens when God’s restraining hand is removed and sinful humanity continues to rebel against Him.

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5. SEAT. We learned in Revelation 13:2 that the dragon gave to the beast ***"his power and his throne and great authority."*** According to Revelation 16:10-11, the fifth bowl will be poured out on the seat of the beast's throne, plunging his kingdom into total darkness: ***"The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds."***

This is not ordinary darkness but rather a supernatural, suffocating, paralyzing blackness that mirrors the ninth plague in Egypt, which Exodus 10:21 describes: ***"Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt."*** For three days, Egypt sat in thick darkness, unable to move, unable to function, unable to escape. It was a darkness that exposed the impotence of Egypt's gods and the futility of Pharaoh's rebellion.

There is another moment in history when darkness fell, not as judgment on rebels, but as judgment on the Redeemer who died in our place. Matthew 27:45 says: ***"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour."*** This deep and pervasive darkness was a sign of divine wrath being poured out on Jesus as He bore the sins of the world as our substitute sacrifice, when the innocent suffered for the guilty.

Someone said it like this:

- At the cross, Jesus endured darkness so sinners could receive light.
- In Revelation 16, rebels endure darkness because they rejected the Light of the World.

The misery of those who will not repent will be so terrible that people will ***"gnaw"*** or chew their tongues in great pain, leading them ***"to curse the God of heaven."*** This is a preview of Hell itself according to Luke 13:28: ***"In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."***

6. SPIRITS. When the sixth bowl is emptied, the Euphrates will dry up, demonic spirits will gather the kings of the earth for battle, and the world will be mobilized against God. This is described in detail in verses 12-14: ***"The sixth angel poured***

out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.”

This judgment is localized “*at the great river Euphrates.*” According to Genesis 2:14, the Euphrates was one of the four rivers connected to Eden. From the very beginning, this region became associated with humanity’s rebellion against God. It was east of Eden that fallen humanity spread. The first murder took place in that broader region when Cain killed Abel. After the flood, the plains of Shinar near the Euphrates became the site of the Tower of Babel, where mankind united in arrogant defiance against God. It was also there that Nimrod established an early kingdom connected to rebellion and false worship.

Later, in Genesis 15:18, the Euphrates marked the eastern boundary of the land God promised to Abraham. That same region would eventually become the location of Israel’s captivity in Babylon, a nation synonymous with idolatry, pride, and opposition to God. And, as we will see later in Revelation 17-18, Babylon will become the symbol of the world’s final rebellion before God’s judgment falls. This is where man began and where man will end. The Euphrates region is not a random geographic detail. Throughout Scripture it’s been a staging ground for human rebellion, false religion, oppression, and divine judgment.

A dried-up Euphrates would “*prepare the way for the kings from the east*” to march with massive armies on the riverbed road. Some commentators suggest this would allow China, India, and Japan to move forward with ease. Others speculate this would be to wipe out Israel or to rebel against a European based leader. Ultimately, they come to do battle against God and His Messiah according to Psalms 2:2: “*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed.*”

These demonic spirits will look like frogs. They were regarded as unclean and repulsive by Jews and revered as a goddess by Egyptians. These demon frogs will stir up people to do battle against God Himself.

In verse 15, we hear a call to stay alert because Jesus is coming soon. Inherent in this is another invitation: “*Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one*

who stays awake, keeping his garment on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!” This is the third of seven benedictions in Revelation.

This is urgent because verse 16 tells us that these demonic spirits will assemble armies at Armageddon in Satan’s final attempt to oppose Christ: ***“And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.”*** Megiddo is a place associated with over 200 battles throughout history, with decisive victories like when Deborah defeated Sisera (Judges 5:19) and where Gideon triumphed over the Midianites.

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7. SHAKING. In verse 17, the pouring out of the final bowl will shake creation and bring the judgment of God to a climactic conclusion: ***“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!’”*** This last bowl judgment is directed ***“into the air,”*** which may point to the spiritual realm under Satan’s influence since Ephesians 2:2 calls Satan ***“the prince of the power of the air.”***

The loud voice from the throne announces that God’s judgment has reached its appointed climax. This makes me think of Hebrews 12:26: ***“At that time His voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’”*** This is not a whisper but the authoritative proclamation of Heaven itself. Revelation 21:6 reinforces this finality: ***“And He said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end...”*** Someone put it like this: *“This is heaven’s announcement that judgment is complete, wrath is finished, evil is defeated, Satan’s reign is over, and redemption’s plan has reached its final stage.”*

This declaration intentionally echoes Jesus’ cry from the cross in John 19:30: ***“It is finished!”*** At the cross, Jesus finished the work of redemption. With the seventh bowl, God finishes the work of judgment. The cross secured our salvation; the seventh bowl brings God’s judgment to its appointed completion. The message is unmistakable: *What Jesus accomplished at the cross will ultimately triumph over everything that opposes Him.*

We’re given more specifics about how this judgment will shake the created world in verses 18-20: ***“And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on***

the earth, so great was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.”

Romans 8:22 describes creation “**groaning**” and Jesus warned that earthquakes would be part of the birth pains of the end. But the earthquake described here will be unlike any the world has seen. The birth pains have reached their climax. What Jesus predicted is now coming to its terrifying fulfillment.

While some interpret “*the great city*” as Babylon, the context of end-time geography and Old Testament prophecy strongly suggests Jerusalem. We know that when Jesus returns, the Mount of Olives will be split in two according to Zechariah 14:4: “*On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward.*”

In addition, Babylon is mentioned in the same sentence in which she will “*drain the cup of the wine of the fury of His wrath.*” Here we see the two words for divine anger: one describing a sudden, passionate outburst, and the other describing a settled, abiding state. The fall of Babylon is more explicitly described in Revelation 17–18, where her corruption, influence, and final destruction are laid out in full detail.

Exodus 9:24-25 records the 7th plague in Egypt: “*There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast. And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field.*” The largest hailstone ever officially measured was about eight inches across and weighed less than two pounds.

By way of comparison, the heavenly hailstones in Revelation 16 will weigh about 100 pounds each – more than 50 times heavier than the largest hailstone ever recorded. Imagine 100-pound balls of ice raining down from heaven. This isn’t merely a bad storm. This is the full and final wrath of God falling upon the earth.

This helps us understand the warning in Daniel 12:1: ***“And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.”*** Jesus echoes the same reality in Matthew 24:21: ***“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.”***

I listened to a podcast this week which described how this year’s El Nino weather pattern could be the worst on record. However, what we see here isn’t just a series of bad storms but the full and final wrath of God falling upon the earth. Creation itself will be shaken as God brings His judgment to its climactic conclusion.

The Bible’s message is clear: the Tribulation will be unlike anything the world has ever experienced, and the seventh bowl will bring unparalleled judgment to its terrifying climax. What Jesus called birth pains will reach their final, catastrophic intensity. Everything that can be shaken will be shaken as God brings history to its appointed end.

Notice how people will respond. Instead of repenting, they will reject God. Instead of believing, they will blaspheme. This is exactly the attitude Revelation 16 highlights:

Bowl 4: ***“They cursed the name of God.”***

Bowl 5: ***“They cursed the God of heaven.”***

Bowl 7: ***“They cursed God for the plague.”***

Three times in one chapter, humanity responds to judgment with rebellious defiance, not repentant humility.

In Revelation 16, God is saying: ***“Turn around because the bridge is out.”*** Not metaphorically. Not symbolically. Not gently. But decisively. The bowls are God’s final, unmistakable declaration that the road humanity is on will end in destruction.

We could say, ***“The end is here!”***

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus is the bridge. John 5:24 says, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”*** Jesus took the Father’s wrath for our sins and fully satisfied it, so we don’t have to face the punishment described in Revelation 16. 1 Thessalonians 5:9 affirms: ***“For***

God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The central paradox and message of the Gospel is that God doesn't set aside His justice to show mercy; rather, His justice is satisfied through Jesus bearing that judgment, offering forgiveness and reconciliation to anyone who seeks it. At the cross, justice and mercy meet. Jesus took the wrath we deserved so that we could receive the grace we could never earn.

Let's circle back to Revelation 16:15: ***“Behold, I am coming like a thief!”*** We do not know the exact time of His return, but we know He is coming. Are you ready?

Because God's judgment is coming and Christ's return is near, repent of your sin and receive Jesus Christ while there is still time.

Gospel Invitation

Prayer for North Carolina Relief Team

Darryl Cain, Darryl Knoles, Val Ibarra, Linda Galippo, Donny Knight, Scott Malm, Alex Weuste, and Terry Hartley.