

Revelation 16:17-21 – “There Will Be No More Time”

<p>Every stone that makes you stumble and cuts you when you fall Every serpent here that strikes your heel to curse you when you crawl The king of love one day will crush them all</p>	<p>And every sad seduction and every clever lie Every word that woos and wounds the pilgrim children of the sky The king of love will break them by and by</p>
<p>And you will rise up in the end You will rise up in the end I know the night is cruel but the day is coming soon And you will rise up in the end</p>	<p>If the thief had to come to plunder when the children were alone If he ravaged every daughter and murdered every son Would not their father see this? Would not his anger burn? And would he not repay the tyrant in the day of his return? Oh, wait. Oh, wait the day of his returnⁱ</p>

The King came and is coming again. Oh, wait, oh wait the day of His return! Not in fear, but in hope! These final verses in Revelation 16 teach us that *“on the Day of God's wrath all will realize too late that Christ has always been the world's only hope.”* There will be no more time.

There will be no more time to repent

[read v17] Jesus was sent by God to save; He will come again to judge. No matter how badly you are caught in sin; no matter how much you have suffered as someone else's victim; no matter how much wrong you have endured, hope in Jesus. For many lifetimes the mighty Egyptian empire had their boots on the necks of the people of Israel, forcing them to work as slaves. But a day came when God sent Moses to tell the tyrant, “Let my people go.” Every time he refused, God sent a plague. The sixth time, Exodus 9:8 says God told Moses stand in front of Pharaoh king of Egypt and take ashes from a kiln and “throw it into the air...”ⁱⁱ God said, “it shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt...,” (Ex 9:9). All over the land. It spread plague to everyone in the land. Once again in this vision God gave to John, the judgement he saw uses a picture of one of the Egyptian plagues—Moses threw the ashes into the air, the seventh angel pours his bowl into the air showing that nobody in the land will escape this Day of Judgement. This is terrible news for all who refuse to put their hope in Jesus, but good news if you do.

Before John even sees what happens when the bowl is poured into the air, the voice of God shouts from the Temple, from the Throne, “It Is Done!” This is God having the last word. He is finished His mighty work. In verse 1, God's loud voice commanded the seven angels to start pouring out the bowls of His wrath on the earth, on His enemies. Now God says He has finished. In these verses, the cataclysm, the earthquake, the lightning, thunder and hail, these are not the things that should terrify us. It is God's announcement. It is done. The most frightening words in the history of the world are the words God speaks at the end of the World.

So how do people answer God? Verse 21 says, “they curse God...” Hasn't God been patient enough? God has given people times of peace and prosperity, and what did they do? Turn away

from Him. He gave warnings and prophets and finally His own Son preaching Good News and dying to save sinners. And what did people do? They shouted “Crucify Him!” and they hunted down His followers. He gave more warnings, took peace away, brought down civilizations and brought in foreign invasions, and what did people do? Rev 9:20 says “the rest of mankind who were not killed... did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols...” So God showed how rotten people’s false religion was by showing what kind of fruit it produced. People turned against the priests and bishops of their former religion, and did they finally repent? Rev 16:9 says, “they did not repent and give [God] glory.” Rev 16:10 says, “they did not repent of their deeds.” Finally Rev 16:16 predicts that instead of repenting, people will gather at Armageddon and declare war on God. Even if God was patient for another thousand years it would not soften these hard hearts. So in verse 17, God says, “It is done!”

God has been giving the whole world a lot of chances to humble themselves and turn to Him, to say sorry, ask forgiveness, and receive His mercy. But they want nothing to do with Him. Maybe you think you are neutral—neither for God or against Him. But while you sit on the fence, you forget: it’s not your fence. You are a tenant in His Universe. You are squatting on His land. You are under His jurisdiction, and yet you keep on insisting He has no authority over you. If that describes you, you are not neutral: you are a rebel, an enemy living in God’s Kingdom. There are no fence-sitters. If the message Jesus gave to John to write down in the book of Revelation does not convince you to get off the fence you’re sitting on and bend your knee to your true King, then nothing will convince you. If mercy won’t get through to you, will fear? You might think your life has been long and hard, but your afterlife will be infinitely longer...and worse. You might think your sins are not that bad, not as bad as others anyway. But Jesus already died for your sins, yet you insist on rejecting His generosity and paying your own bill. There are a lot worse sinners than you who have received His grace; and there are a lot of people more religious, more hard-working, more pious, and more impressive than you who are going to find out **too late** that the only hope they **had** was to ask for mercy from the one on the Throne.

There will be no more time to boast

What is in these seven bowls? God’s wrath. Now God doesn’t store His wrath in bowls, and these seven angels are not literal, but parts of the vision John saw. And though the bowls of God’s wrath are poured out on the Sun and rivers and the air, God is not angry with the Sun and rivers and air. As verse 1 reminds us, these things are all signs for real things on the earth. Likewise, the storm and the worst earthquake in history—they are signs that are easier to understand once we narrow down who exactly God is angry with, who is the object of wrath? The bowl poured “into the air”—just like Moses threw the ashes “into the air” (Ex 9:8-10), spreads to everyone “throughout all the land” (Ex 9:9). But what land? This is not about the “land of Egypt.” Verse 19 mentions a “great city” and then gives it a name: the city is called “Babylon the great.”

[**read vv18-19**] King Nebuchadnezzar was feeling awesome. He was at the peak, the zenith, the pinnacle of power, success, of ambition. And one evening he was enjoying the air and the view

from the rooftop of his palace in Babylon, and he looked out over all that was his, all that he had accomplished, all he took credit for and said, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” (Dan 4:30). And a voice from heaven rang out, and God took his kingdom away from him. Two Sundays ago, we saw that God took the kingdom away from the Popes of Rome. Today the popes are no longer kings, just bishops presiding over a false religion. For 1260 years the Popes were real kings so it’s no wonder they have trouble accepting what God has done. And still they sit in their little palace on a throne and boast of their dignity and majesty. But they are pretenders. They are not the true kings of anything, much less of Christendom. There is only one True King. There is only one Head of the Church. “There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof; [but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God.”ⁱⁱⁱ Christians find comfort knowing everyone can pray now, and ask Jesus for mercy, for forgiveness we don’t deserve, for grace we could never afford. But Christians also believe Justice is coming. For the millions the tyrants have martyred, deceived, seduced, and abused. Verse 19 says the target of God’s anger is this ancient, world-famous city.

But the bishops of Rome have had a makeover. It’s hard to imagine these nice men we see in the News can be the villain John describes. Yet for centuries Christians experienced the atrocities the papacy now tries so hard to cover up, to pretend never happened. [read vv 5b-6; 19b]. It is what they deserve and if we knew all the facts we would agree. The earthquake that’s coming will reveal the epicenter of God’s anger. Justice will fall. But I don’t believe this will be a literal earthquake. I don’t know how this will turn out, but it seems like the city of Rome and the one who claims to rule the Church of Jesus Christ, and those who have followed him, are in for a time of trouble like the world has never seen. In Bible prophecy, earthquakes stand for uprisings and upheavals of people.^{iv} The earthquake is a symbol of the rise and fall of peoples and nations in Haggai 2, Amos 8:8, Joel 2:10, Isaiah 13:13, 24:18-20, and Jeremiah 10:22. I assume John is following the examples of the prophets in this prediction. But I am not clear what it means for the city to shake out into three parts—time will tell.^v But by then...

There will be no more time to run

When we read this it’s hard to even picture what John is predicting. One commentator says, “It could hardly be fulfilled literally. Cities, though devastated by earthquake, do not split into three parts, islands do not fly away, and mountains do not get lost...”^{vi} What does “flee”? People flee. What does run and hide so that it can’t be found? People abandon their posts, people go AWOL. As the saying goes, “there’s never a cop around when you need one.” If you are counting on people, there is a day coming when the help you look for can’t be found.

In Revelation 7:16-17 John quotes from Isaiah to describe how Jesus always protects those who trust Him—through persecution, through tribulation, ultimately even through death. In Isaiah, those words were about God bringing the people of Israel back to their land (I talked about that last Sunday). But in the next verse, (Isa 49:11) God says He will flatten the mountains and raise

up a highway. Because the people who had to travel around mountains to get somewhere knew that mountains were obstacles. Mountains could also give protection and shelter like in Rev 6:16 when people call on the mountains to shelter them. One man's obstacle is another man's defense.

Mountains are natural defenses that helped protect ancient cities from invasion; rivers also are a natural defence keeping invaders out. Both mountains and rivers can be obstacles to travel, or defenses people count on. This prophecy is about Jesus punishing everybody in the land with final judgment. I don't know how this will turn out, but I do know this: God is going to make sure nobody feels safe, nobody finds help on that day to save them from His wrath, nobody gets away. Like Pharaoh saw, the ashes Moses throw into the air got to everybody in the land. So I think the mountains and islands have the same meaning here as in the sixth seal—when suddenly every government protection the pagans relied on to keep them safe in the Old Roman Empire, every military and civic institution was taken from them (Rev 6:14).^{vii}

Now if you think that when the Bible says a mountain will be removed that it is predicting the face of the earth will be completely transformed, then I want to show you that I think you're overlooking how the prophets wanted you to understand what they were saying. For example, the prophet Nahum predicted, "The mountains quake before him; the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who dwell in it. Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him." (Nah 1:5-6)^{viii} But Nahum himself tells us that prophecy was not about literal mountains, or the whole planet: That was vv 5-6. Verse 1 says, [**read** Nah 1:1]. By using that time-honoured picture of God shaking the earth like never before, Rev 16:18 practically shouts to our time the same warning Nahum did to Nineveh: Who can stand before the indignation of Jesus on that terrible day? Why would any sane person not take shelter in Christ, pray to Him for mercy while you can? Because on that day there will be no more time to repent; no more time to boast; no more time to run. *On the Day of God's wrath all will realize that Christ has always been the world's only hope.*

In the end, on the last Day, God will not let anyone hope in anything or anyone else. There will only be one mountain. There will only be one refuge. Jesus is going to crush all pretenders so that on the battlefield, when the smoke clears, the only person left standing is Jesus Christ. No mountain or island, no army or government will be there to help on that day. Only Jesus. And will you be glad to see Him? Or terrified of Him? Whatever exactly is meant by these great hailstones, the hail again echoes the seventh Egyptian plague, where God warned Pharaoh, "Let my people go that they may serve me. For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth" (Ex 9:14). I can't predict what that day will be like. I don't know how it all will happen. But I know two things for sure: people will refuse to repent. And the whole Earth will learn that Jesus is Lord.

ⁱ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/he-will-rise-up-in-the-end/>

ⁱⁱ “According to the ancient conception of the earth, the sphere of the air reaches to the moon, where the ethereal region of the stars commences.” [Foerster, TDNT, s.v. “ἀήρ,” I:165.
https://accordance.bible/link/read/TDNT_Complete#2383]

ⁱⁱⁱ WCF 25:6

^{iv} From my sermon on Revelation 6:12-17, July 1, 2018:

The symbol of an earthquake is used often in the Old Testament to predict God judging and overthrowing nations. A good example is Haggai 2:6-7a, where God says He is about to shake the heavens and the earth, then adds He will shake “the nations”, and then interprets this as meaning He will topple thrones and overthrow nations (Hag 2:21-22). An earthquake symbol in prophecy, then, is not the shaking of the ground, but the shaking-up of a people and nation. The same symbols are used in similar ways predicting the overthrow of Israel in Amos 8:8; of Judah in Joel 2:10; of Babylon in Isaiah 13:13; and of all the nations in Isaiah 24:18-20. But Jeremiah 10:22 uses exactly this phrase, “a great earthquake” to predict the fall of Judah at the hands of the Babylonian army. This same phrase is only used a few times in the Hebrew Bible.^{iv} “...Behold it comes—a *great earthquake* out of the land of the north to make the cities of Judah a desolation...” (my trans.)

^v The Greek doesn’t say “split” but just “the great city became three parts.” *καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη εἰς τρία μέρη* (Rev 16:19 BGT)

^{vi} Oral Edmond Collins, *The Final Prophecy of Jesus: An Introduction, Analysis and Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 379.

^{vii} See my sermon from July 1, 2018. [<http://bcchurch.ca/index.php?pid=17&id=272&media=listen>]

^{viii} Also Isaiah prophesies, “I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools... (and v16,) I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them.” (Isa 42:15-16)