

# THE BREAKER IS BROKEN

SERIES: WAKE UP



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Revelation 15–16  
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## *Revelation 15–16*

A story is told that in the 15th century, a Japanese shogun named Ashikaga Yoshimasa had a favorite tea bowl which broke. In desperation, he sent it back to China for repair. When it returned, the bowl had unsightly metal staples holding it together. So Yoshimasa had his own craftsmen cover those lines with precious gold.

The Japanese art of Kintsugi was born. Broken vessels of all sorts are repaired with beautiful golden lines. There is something beautiful about this. We spend so much time trying to fix what's broken and hide our scars. There is something freeing about highlighting what's broken. Gilding the cracks of life with gold gives our scars meaning.

It's pleasing to think that our brokenness could be beautiful.

That thought works for some things in life. But there is a kind of brokenness in our world that cannot be made beautiful. How do you find beauty in racism when some categories of people are valued as more important than others? Can you cover the flaws of sexism with gold and make them meaningful?

Some things are broken in a way that is so twisted, so heinous, so grotesque that painting over the lines with gold isn't an option. Can you paint over the cracks of the church bombings in Sri Lanka? Or the car crash in Sunnyvale that was allegedly motivated by religious persecution? Or a hundred other big and small acts of evil?

What do we do with the kind of brokenness that is simply evil? We live in a world full of it. If God is real and he loves this world, what is his plan? He can't just sit there. What will he do?

After taking a break for the season of Lent and Easter, today we are returning to our series in the book of Revelation called "Wake Up." We started working through this fascinating book of the Bible back in September. We'll reach the end by early June.

As we've been reading this book, our hope has been that these visions and revelations of God will help to wake us up to the spiritual reality which surrounds us every day. This book is dramatic and confusing and vivid. But at its core is a message of good news: this is God's final response to the brokenness of our world.

This morning we are studying Revelation 15–16. These chapters describe not one bowl with golden scars, but seven bowls filled with the wrath of God. These bowls will be poured out upon the earth. What results will be destruction, suffering, and pain. But when we understand what's really happening, we'll see that this action is God dealing with the broken systems of the world.

God isn't only responding to the broken systems of our world. He is taking care of the one who broke them. God breaks the breaker. Nearing the end of Revelation, we see as the breaker is broken.

If you're new to PBC, this may seem a strange passage to look at in the weeks following Easter. Maybe you were here last week, and you're back again with us; we're really glad you are. Maybe you've been encouraged by the healing that the risen Christ means for us. Why now turn to judgment and suffering?

First of all, because this is what we do at PBC, our pattern is to preach directly from the Bible. We often take entire books of the Bible and work our way through them. We believe that these words, understood in their proper context, will guide us into a deeper relationship with God far better than ideas or topics we could think of.

We trust that God works through our sermon scheduling so that this passage has something for us today. It may seem odd to proceed with such a difficult topic, but we trust that God has plans for it.

Secondly, we believe in a God who is passionate about justice and salvation. He wants to save people from the brokenness of this world and establish justice throughout this kingdom. Judgment is part of that process. Justice can't happen without addressing the

darker tendencies of our hearts and the world. There is evil in this world. Any talk of real salvation has to include judgment.

If the world is going to be repaired, something needs to be done about the broken systems.

If Revelation is a new book to you and you're just joining us, get ready for a crazy ride. All of our messages are recorded and videoed if you want to go back. But here's a brief review to catch you up.

The book of Revelation opened with a dramatic vision of Jesus Christ. Then we saw seven letters written to the churches of the first century filled with praise, criticism, and encouragement. After the letters, we were invited into the throne room of God himself. We saw a scroll with seven seals that represented God's plan for the world. Over the last several chapters, with a few interludes, we've seen the seven seals opened, seven trumpets blown, and now these seven bowls.

Overall, what we've seen is that God's method of fixing a broken world is more dramatic and painful than painting over broken lines with gold. This is the final work of redemption. God is dealing with evil. And evil doesn't lie down quietly. Evil must be defeated so that God's good kingdom can reign.

If you don't know Jesus, I hope you can see the message through the powerful images. I'll do my best to help you. It's a message of hope and an invitation to trust the God who redeems.

If you do know Jesus, I hope you can be sobered by this vision of God and encouraged to stay awake in your faith.

## **The Song of Victory**

Before we get to the bowls, we are introduced to the angels who pour them out. In chapter 15, we meet them and hear them singing a powerful song. We will look at part of the chapter.

### **Revelation 15:1-4:**

**Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.**

**2 And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. 3 And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,**

**“Great and amazing are your deeds,**

**O Lord God the Almighty!**

**Just and true are your ways,**

**O King of the nations!**

**4 Who will not fear, O Lord,**

**and glorify your name?**

**For you alone are holy.**

**All nations will come**

**and worship you,**

**for your righteous acts have been revealed.”**

We are told that these seven angels with their seven plagues are the last of God's judgment. As I've said, we've already seen the plagues of the seals and the trumpets. This is the third and last in the book of Revelation. I want us to notice the words used at the end of verse 1: "with them the wrath of God is finished."

Is there anything familiar about that phrase? It was only ten days ago that we remembered the final words of Jesus on the cross: "It is finished." In a sense, the wrath of God was finished when Jesus died on the cross. That's what the cross meant. All of God's wrath was absorbed by Jesus. God took the punishment of the world upon himself.

But evil remains in the world. Jesus accepted the punishment for evil on the cross, but he didn't destroy evil. That's the world we live in now. The "in-between time" with the cross in the past and Jesus' return in the future.

In the book of Revelation, we've seen what will happen when evil is finally taken out of this world. This is the counterpart to what happened when Jesus died. Here we see the final conclusion of God's wrath.

That's why the angels and the conquerors (those are the followers of Jesus) sing a victory song here. Moses sang a famous victory song after he led God's people out of slavery in Egypt. In the Exodus, God's people were given political freedom and became a nation. In

Revelation, we see a new kind of freedom: complete freedom from evil. It's a messy process to get there, but the destination is stunning.

The angels sing of victory. God wins, and everyone is invited. Notice the last phrase: "All nations will come and worship you."

This is an optimistic view of eternity. In our passage this morning, we will see people cursing God. But not everyone. Before we get to the judgment, we see this good news of people from all backgrounds joining with God in his victory.

People from every background will come to know God. His victory is not for a select few, but for anyone and everyone who will receive it. God will make a way. Salvation is available to everyone.

Don't you hate being left out? I do. If there are people having fun somewhere, I want to be with them.

In our culture, Christianity is often criticized as being exclusive. People make it sound as if God is leaving people out; as if the message of Jesus on the cross is only available to a select few or a certain demographic of people. But that couldn't be farther than the truth.

In reality, the whole idea of inclusion came from Christianity. Every religious system in its day was limited to certain ethnicities or culture or social classes. But not Christ. He is King of the Nations. A Savior for everyone. Who will not glorify his name? All nations will come and worship Jesus.

What's happening here is salvation. God is saving anyone and everyone who will receive it. For that to happen, evil must be judged. Now, with that in mind, we're prepared to witness the pouring out of the bowls.

## The First Four Bowls

These seven angels are given seven bowls. One by one they pour them out over the earth.

### Revelation 16:1-9:

**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." 2 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. 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. 4 The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. 5 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.**

**6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,**

**and you have given them blood to drink.**

**It is what they deserve!"**

**7 And I heard the altar saying,**

**"Yes, Lord God the Almighty,**

**true and just are your judgments!"**

**8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. 9 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.**

The judgment of the bowls follows the same pattern as the trumpets. The first four affect the earth, the sea, the rivers, and the sun. They are also modeled after the plagues of Egypt. This is God letting the world suffer the consequences of its bad choices.

In response to the challenge of life, our world has developed systems to cope. Economic systems. Political systems. Commercial systems. Educational systems. Social systems.

The judgment upon the earth and sea and rivers affect the economic and political systems of the ancient world. The sea was the lifeblood of the Roman Empire. The people who bore the mark of the beast were the power brokers of an ancient evil. The sun was worshipped, but now that worship would scorch people with fire. The bowls are poured out upon broken systems so that they can crumble apart.

Broken systems hurt and oppress people. Consider what Bishop Desmond Tutu said in 1985, "We don't want apartheid liberalized. We want it dismantled. You can't improve something that is intrinsically evil."<sup>1</sup>

God is allowing these broken systems to collapse upon themselves. Evil will consume itself. It's the theological equivalent of the old saying, "Give a man enough rope and he'll hang himself."

It is hard to read about such harsh judgment. Our natural instinct is to wonder whether this is really fair. The judgment sounds terrible. How can God allow this to happen?

That's why this listing of the first four bowls is interrupted by another reminder from the angel. "Just are you, O Holy One. True and just are your judgments." We heard similar language in the victory song from chapter 15.

The angel defends the judgment by saying that God's anger is appropriate. They shed blood, so they will be given blood to drink. This is the principle sometimes called *lex talionis*. That's the law of retaliation. If you kick my shin, I'll kick your shin. If you steal my car, I'll steal your car. An eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth.

This may seem primitive to us, but this legal principle forms the basis for all modern justice systems. Dennis Prager, a noted Jewish author, makes the case in the book *The Rational Bible*, that *lex talionis* was a huge moral leap forward. He calls it "the ultimate statement of human equality." <sup>2</sup> He explains,

*"Every person's eye is as precious as anyone else's. The eye of a prince is worth no more than the eye of a peasant. This was completely new in history. The Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, for example, legislated that the eye of a noble was of much greater value than the eye of a commoner."*

Another major complaint against Christianity is that God doesn't seem fair. His judgments seem too harsh. But this angel is making a case that God judging evil is perfectly fair.

This is encouraging to me. The angel could have just said, "God is God, and he can do whatever he wants." But he doesn't. He explains how God's actions are fair. He addresses our question and gives us some ground to stand on. God is not petty and vindictive. His judgments are true and just.

But he goes farther than that. He is also merciful. Notice the language again: "They have shed the blood of saints and you have given them blood to drink." Once again, we can hardly hear this language without thinking

of another scene of blood being shed and blood being offered to drink.

In John 6:53, Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

This gives the statement a bit of a different twist. This is not just shedding blood because they shed blood. Because the one doing this has had his blood shed for the sake of these very people.

The blood they are given to drink is not only the blood of judgment. They are offered the blood of forgiveness. They deserve to have their bloodshed, but they can join with Jesus whose blood has been shed for them.

Even as the world is coming to an end, Jesus is always an option. God is not just fair. He is merciful. He is forgiving and generous.

Some of you have a hard time believing this. Many of the people we live around have a hard time believing this. The God of the Bible is more often characterized as vindictive and homophobic rather than fair and merciful. But that is a terrible misreading of the Bible.

That's why it is important to actually read the Bible instead of just believing what people say about it. As we immerse ourselves in this book, we come to realize that the God of the Bible is slow to anger, forgiving, generous, and merciful. Even in his judgment, God allows for mercy. He has made it possible for anyone to come to him.

## The Last Three Bowls

We've seen the angels singing of God's justice. We've seen them pour out the first four bowls on the creation so that the broken systems of this world are judged. But the world didn't just break. Someone broke it. In the final passage, we see God's judgment on the one who broke our precious world.

### Revelation 16:10-18:

**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 11 and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.**



**12 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. 13 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. 14 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. 15 ("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!") 16 And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.**

**17 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!" 18 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.**

These last three bowls are a strategic attack on the breaker of the broken. First, the throne of the beast is targeted. Then the River Euphrates: the river which has long symbolized the far reach of evil kingdoms. Finally, the air, which is the domain of the beast. Ephesians 2:2 calls him the "prince of the power of the air."

In order to defeat the evil one, God allows for one final decisive battle. I think the idea that there will be a final battle is somehow built into our DNA. We see it in the storyline of movies such as *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, *Avengers*, and any other action movie you can think of. There is one last battle to decide the fate of good and evil for all time.

As the sixth bowl is poured out, we see demonic spirits riling up the kings of the whole world to assemble them for this kind of battle. They gather all these armies together at "the place that is called Armageddon."

Several weeks ago, I stood on top of Tel-Megiddo in Israel. This was the remains of a city that could have been known as Har-Megiddo—the mountain of Megiddo. There is some debate over what the word here, Armageddon, actually refers to. But there is a strong case to be made that I was standing on the very spot described in Revelation 16.

Eric Cline is an archaeologist and historian who has researched this location. He has counted at least 34 major world battles fought in the valley beneath Har-Megiddo otherwise known as the Valley of Jezreel. In 15 BC, the Egyptians fought the Canaanites. Saul fought the Philistines. Solomon fought Egypt. King Josiah was killed by Pharaoh Neco in this valley, marking the end of the southern kingdom of Judah.

In the 12th century, the Crusaders fought Saladin in at least four different conflicts. In the 14th century, the Mamluks fought the Mongols. In 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte fought the Ottoman empire.

In fact, listen to what Napoleon said when he looked over this valley. "All the armies of the world could maneuver their forces on this vast plain...There is no place in the whole world more suited for war than this... [It is] the most natural battleground of the whole earth" (Cline 2002: 142).

Here is the point: this is the place where all the powers of the world will assemble together for one final battle. Kingdom will be pitted against kingdom. In this final battle, evil can eradicate itself. The battle of all battles will be fought on the best battlefield in the world.

But the battle isn't fought. Instead, the 7th bowl is poured out, and the cosmos itself breaks apart. The great city is split. The islands run in fear. No one can find the mountains anymore.

Scientists have recently managed to assemble the first photograph of a black hole. Maybe you've seen it: it was all over the Internet in the past few weeks. A black hole is a collection of matter so massive that it sucks everything into it by its unbelievable gravitational pull. Not even light can escape the gravity of a black hole.

That's what this battle is like. Evil is not sustainable. Cycles of revenge and retaliation and conquest and oppression can't go on forever. Eventually, evil will implode upon itself. That's the final battle and why it is never even fought. Evil falls in upon itself.

So what do we do? How do we respond to such a message? Jesus tells us in the middle of verse 15. "Blessed is the one who stays awake." Here's the takeaway: stay awake.

What does this encouragement mean to you? Blessed is the one who stays awake.

If you're a follower of Jesus, this is an encouragement not to be lulled into sleep by the temptations of this world. Don't give in. Don't compromise. Don't give up. Don't take vengeance for yourself. Don't get discouraged that evil seems to be winning. Something else is coming. Jesus will return. Your faithfulness will resolve in a final new creation. It will all be worth it. Stay awake.

If you aren't a follower of Jesus, this is an invitation. You too can be blessed if you wake up. Wake up by repenting and believing in Jesus. Jesus offers a way for you out of the rat race of ambition and pride and the destruction of broken systems. Jesus clothes you with peace and offers you life to the fullest.

The good news is that evil will meet its end. The way will be cleared for something new to arrive, and you are invited to be a part of that. If you're falling asleep, stay awake. If you have never woken in the first place, now could be the time.

## Conclusion

Repairing a broken thing can be beautiful. We all have broken parts of our lives which God redeems and transforms into health. But a broken bowl is one thing. A world system opposed to God which oppresses the vulnerable elevates the powerful, and sows division and discord is an entirely different matter.

God's plan is to restore this creation to the way he meant it to be—transform relationships to be founded on love; build diverse communities centered on Christ; take away the tears and redeem the pain.

God is so committed to this vision that he is willing to let evil consume itself.

For us, the picture of the seven bowls gives us a glimpse into where some of the systems we live among are headed. They warn us from getting swept up with them. They expose the danger of compromise, and they reveal God's heart: a loving father willing to do whatever it takes to redeem his creation.

The Breaker will be broken, but peace is on its way.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Bishop Desmond Tutu. Speech. (1985) *Equality*, Volume 1, Issue 1 (1989). In Wikiquote. <https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Evil>.
- <sup>2</sup> Dennis Prager. "Eye for an Eye: One of the Greatest Ideas in History" Prager University (April 2018) In *Catholic Education Resource Center*, . <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/controversy/answering-atheists/eye-for-an-eye-one-of-the-greatest-ideas-in-history.html>.
- <sup>3</sup> Eric H Cline. 2002 *The Battles of Armageddon: Megiddo and the Jezreel Valley from the Bronze Age to the Nuclear Age*. (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan, 2002). In *Associates For Biblical Research - The Shiloh Excavations, Spring 2019*, <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2014/11/05/Megiddo-The-Place-of-Battles.aspx#Article>