When Faith Must Endure

A Pastoral Journey Through the Revelation of St. John

Volume 4B

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A Note from the Author

This book grew out of a journey through the Revelation of St. John that began simply—with a desire to slow down and listen carefully to what John was saying.

Along the way, that study became something more.

In preparing When Faith Must Endure, I made extensive use of ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence system developed by OpenAI, which I came to call "Atlas." Atlas served as a research, writing, and editorial partner throughout the project. Our work together included exploring the historical and literary context of Revelation, examining Greek words and phrases, developing and testing interpretations, organizing the commentary, and refining the pastoral reflections found throughout these pages.

I believe it is important to acknowledge that contribution openly.

At the same time, the theological judgments, interpretations, editorial decisions, and final form of this work are my own. I reviewed, questioned, revised, accepted, or rejected the material developed through those conversations, just as I would material gathered through other research and study resources.

Artificial intelligence did not replace the study of Scripture. It became one of the tools used in that study.

Just as importantly, our purpose was never to turn these pages into an academic exercise or to give the reader the equivalent of a graduate degree in biblical studies. There are excellent scholarly works written for that purpose, and I am grateful for them.

Our purpose here is different.

We want to help people understand Scripture.

That is one reason these pages sometimes read more like a conversation than a traditional commentary. The shorter paragraphs, pauses, repeated phrases, and occasional sentences standing alone are intentional. They reflect the way we might talk about a passage if we were sitting together with an open Bible, stopping occasionally to say:

"Look at this."

"Did you notice that?"

"Why would John say it that way?"

"And what might that mean for us?"

The scholarship still matters. Historical context matters. Language matters. Theology matters. Interpretive differences matter. We have tried to take all of those things seriously.

But the scholarship should serve the reader rather than become an obstacle between the reader and the text.

Perhaps the best description of the process is simply this:

There were many occasions when it felt less like a person asking questions of a computer and more like two people standing at a whiteboard, opening the Scriptures together and asking:
“What is Scripture really trying to tell us here?”
That is the experience I hope these pages provide for you as well.
Not simply reading an explanation of Scripture.
But joining the conversation.
Opening the Bible with us.
Stopping where something deserves another look.
Asking questions when something is difficult.
And occasionally sitting quietly with a truth before moving on.
Because ultimately the purpose of studying Scripture is not simply to know more about the Bible.
It is to hear what God is saying through it—
and then to ask what we will do with what we have heard.

Dedication

To my loving wife, Marilyn,
who has always stood by me through good times and bad;
who is always seeking to know more about God and His Word;
and whose own desire to understand Scripture has encouraged me along the way.
I dedicate this book to her with love and gratitude, and with the hope that this commentary may help her—and perhaps others as well—to better understand God's Word and to draw closer to the One who gave it to us.

About the Author

Randy Nielsen began life as a sickly child. His mother prayed that if God would allow her son to survive, she would see that he received a proper Christian education. She kept that promise, making certain that Randy was in church nearly every Sunday and, as he grew, encouraging him to remain close to God.
Later in life, Randy felt God calling him into ministry—a calling he initially resisted. But, as Randy has sometimes observed, God does not take "No" particularly well.
In 2007, Randy finally answered that call. He entered the United Methodist Church's Local Pastor licensing program and became a Licensed Local Pastor. Over the next fifteen years, he served several church appointments, sharing the Gospel, caring for congregations, and helping some of the churches he served experience renewed growth.
During his years in ministry, Randy pursued graduate theological education at Asbury Theological Seminary, completing 54 credit hours toward the 96-hour Master of Divinity degree through online study. Ultimately, he decided that the time and financial commitment required to complete the degree were no longer practical. Content to serve as a vessel for God's Word as a Licensed Local Pastor, Randy continued ministering to the churches entrusted to his care.
Randy retired from pastoral ministry in 2022, but not from his love of Scripture or his desire to understand God's Word more deeply. That continuing journey eventually became *When Faith Becomes a Way of Life: A Pastoral Journey Through the Epistle of James*. Now, that same journey has led him into the Revelation of St. John and *When Faith Must Endure: A Pastoral Journey Through the Revelation of St. John*.

Today, Randy and his family regularly attend a Southern Baptist church, where he continues his lifelong journey of faith, study, and discipleship.

Introduction
When Faith Must Endure

There are books of the Bible that tell us how to live faithfully in the ordinary rhythms of life. The Epistle of James is one of them. James speaks directly and practically. Listen before speaking. Control the tongue. Do not show favoritism. Care for those in need. Do not merely hear the Word—do it. Pray. Be patient. Resist the pull of wealth and selfish ambition. Let the faith you profess become visible in the life you live.

James teaches us what **When Faith Becomes a Way of Life** looks like. Revelation asks a different question.

What happens when living faithfully becomes costly?

What happens when following Christ brings opposition rather than approval? What happens when compromise would make life easier? What happens when evil appears powerful, injustice seems to prosper, faithful people suffer, and God appears strangely silent?

What does the Christian need to know then?

That is where the Revelation of St. John speaks with extraordinary power. Revelation teaches us why faith that works must also become **faith that endures**.

A Book Written for the Church

Few books of the Bible have generated as much fascination, disagreement, fear, speculation, and controversy as Revelation.

Its pages contain extraordinary images: lampstands and thrones, scrolls and seals, trumpets and bowls, angels and demons, a dragon, beasts, Babylon, Armageddon, a millennium, final judgment, a new heaven and a new earth, and a magnificent city in which God dwells with His people.

It is understandable that Christians have wanted to know what all of these things mean.

But somewhere along the way, Revelation has too often become primarily a book about predicting what happens next.

That is not the approach of this commentary.

Revelation is not primarily a timetable. It is not a codebook for identifying today's politicians, nations, wars, technologies, or headlines. It is not intended to frighten Christians into faithfulness. And it is not a puzzle in which the person with the cleverest interpretation wins.

Revelation is **pastoral Scripture addressed to Christians who need to know how to remain faithful when appearances suggest that faithfulness is not winning.**

That distinction matters.

John writes to churches living in the real world. They know pressure, temptation, compromise, suffering, uncertainty, and fear. From their earthly vantage point, the powers surrounding them can appear overwhelming.

Revelation pulls back the curtain.
It allows the Church to see earthly reality from a heavenly perspective.
The Lamb has not lost.
God has not surrendered His throne.
Evil has not escaped His judgment.
The suffering of the faithful has not been forgotten.
And the apparent victories of the powers opposed to God are not the end of the story.
Revelation therefore does more than tell Christians something about what will happen.
It tells Christians what they must know in order to remain faithful when the world around them gives them every reason to wonder whether faithfulness is worth the cost.

The Revelation of St. John

Perhaps the most important thing we can remember as we begin is something Revelation tells us in its opening words.
This is "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:1, KJV).
Before we encounter the dragon, the beast, Babylon, the mark, the number 666, Armageddon, or the millennium, we encounter Jesus Christ.
That order matters.
The central figure of Revelation is not Satan.
It is not the Antichrist.
It is not the beast.
It is not Babylon.
It is not Rome.
It is not any modern nation, political leader, military alliance, economic system, or technological development.
The central figure is **Jesus Christ**.
He is the faithful witness.
He is the Lamb who was slain.
He is the risen Lord.
He walks among His churches.
He alone is worthy to open the scroll.
He conquers not by becoming like the powers of this world but through His faithful witness, sacrificial death, resurrection, and ultimate victory.
And His people are called to follow Him.
If our reading of Revelation becomes so fascinated with evil that Jesus Christ moves into the background, something has gone wrong with our reading.

First, Hear Revelation as John's Churches Heard It

Revelation was written for us.
But it was not written first to us.

John addressed real Christian communities living in the first-century world.
The seven churches of Asia Minor were not symbols floating somewhere in prophetic history. They were churches filled with real people facing real questions about worship, faithfulness, suffering, accommodation, economic pressure, false teaching, fear, and compromise.
Therefore, throughout this commentary we will follow a simple interpretive principle:
First understand what John showed his original hearers. Then understand what it says to the Church in every generation. Only then consider questions about fulfillment.
This does not eliminate prophecy from Revelation.
It protects prophecy from becoming detached from Scripture.
An interpretation that could have meant absolutely nothing to the Christians who first heard Revelation read aloud in their congregations deserves careful examination before we declare it to be John's intended meaning.
Their world matters.
Their struggles matter.
Their Scriptures matter.
And understanding them will often help us understand John's extraordinary visions.

The World Behind the Vision

For that reason, we will occasionally step into the world in which Revelation was first heard.
We will visit Patmos.
We will consider the cities of Asia Minor.
We will examine Roman imperial culture, emperor worship, economic pressure, social exclusion, persecution, public religion, and the difficult choices confronting Christians attempting to remain faithful to Jesus Christ within that world.
But history will never become the destination.
Historical background is useful only when it helps us hear Scripture more clearly.
Our goal is not merely to reconstruct the first century.
Our goal is to understand why Revelation spoke so powerfully to Christians living there—and why it continues to speak to Christians now.

An Old Testament World

Another principle will guide us throughout this journey.
Revelation may be the final book of the New Testament, but its imagination is saturated with the Old Testament.
Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and other portions of Scripture repeatedly stand behind John's language and imagery.

John often does not stop and tell us that he is drawing upon an earlier biblical passage.
He simply uses its language.
Readers unfamiliar with those echoes can easily encounter Revelation's imagery and search immediately for a modern equivalent.
But before asking what an image might resemble today, we should first ask:
Where have we seen this before in Scripture?
When Scripture provides the background for John's imagery, Scripture should be our starting point for understanding it.
Revelation did not emerge from the twentieth or twenty-first century.
It emerged from the biblical story.

When Faithful Christians Disagree

We should also acknowledge something before beginning.
Christians have disagreed about Revelation for a very long time.
Faithful, serious, Bible-believing Christians have reached different conclusions concerning the seals, trumpets, bowls, Babylon, the beast, the mark of the beast, Revelation's chronology, Israel and the Church, the millennium, the timing of Christ's return, and many other questions.
We will not solve every disagreement.
Nor will we pretend they do not exist.
When substantial disagreement occurs, we will slow down.
We will examine the major interpretations.
We will ask what biblical evidence supports them.
We will consider their strengths and difficulties.
And whenever possible, we will distinguish clearly between:
What Scripture actually says
and
what an interpreter concludes from what Scripture says.
Those are not always the same thing.
There will be places where we reach a conclusion.
There may be places where one interpretation appears considerably stronger than another.
And there will almost certainly be places where the most responsible answer is:
We do not know.
There is no failure of faith in admitting that Scripture has not told us everything we would like to know.
We must never manufacture certainty merely because uncertainty makes us uncomfortable.

Revelation and the Headlines

Every generation seems tempted to believe that it is the generation that has finally discovered the key to Revelation.

Wars begin.
Governments rise and fall.
New technologies appear.
Economic systems change.
Political leaders emerge.
Natural disasters occur.
International tensions increase.
And someone inevitably opens Revelation and announces:
"There it is."
Sometimes contemporary events may illustrate principles Revelation describes. Human empires still demand allegiance. Economic systems can still become instruments of injustice. Political power can still become idolatrous. Christians can still face pressure to compromise.
But resemblance is not proof of prophetic identification.
We will therefore resist the temptation to read the newspaper into Revelation.
Our task is not to make John's visions fit our headlines.
Our task is to allow John's visions to reshape the way Christians understand the world—including its headlines.
That is a very different undertaking.

More Than a Timeline

We will also be cautious about assuming that Revelation unfolds as a simple chronological sequence.
John's visions sometimes appear to revisit events, themes, and conflicts from different perspectives. Heavenly scenes interpret earthly ones. Images expand upon earlier images. The same struggle may be viewed from another vantage point.
Therefore, when we encounter a vision, we will not automatically ask:
"Where does this fit on the timeline?"
Sometimes the better question may be:
"What is John showing us about reality?"
Those are not necessarily the same question.
Revelation gives us glimpses behind the visible world. It shows earthly suffering from heaven's perspective. It reveals the spiritual dimensions of worship, allegiance, evil, witness, judgment, and endurance.
And sometimes the point of a vision may be less about establishing when something happens than about revealing **what it means**.

When the Chips Are Down

This brings us back to the pastoral heart of Revelation.
James teaches Christians how faith should shape ordinary life.
Revelation speaks when ordinary life becomes extraordinarily difficult.
When the chips are down, what should the Christian know?
Know that God is still on the throne.

Know that Jesus Christ is still Lord.
Know that the Lamb who was slain has overcome.
Know that evil may be powerful, but it is not eternal.
Know that suffering does not mean God has abandoned His people.
Know that faithful witness matters even when faithfulness appears unsuccessful.
Know that compromise is not victory simply because it makes life easier.
Know that death itself does not have the final word.
And know where the story is going.
Babylon falls.
Evil is defeated.
Death is destroyed.
Creation is renewed.
God dwells with His people.
And the Lamb reigns.
That is why Revelation can speak hope even while describing terrible things.
Its purpose is not to convince frightened Christians that they should become more frightened.
It is to tell frightened Christians why they can remain faithful.

How Then Should the Church Live?

That will be the question to which we continually return throughout this commentary.
Not merely:
What does this symbol mean?
Not merely:
When will this happen?
Not merely:
Which interpretation is correct?
But eventually:
How then should the Church live?
Revelation repeatedly calls God's people to worship, witness, endurance, holiness, courage, discernment, and faithfulness.
It warns against idolatry and compromise.
It exposes the seductive nature of wealth and power.
It reminds Christians that earthly empires are temporary.
It insists that God alone deserves worship.
And it calls the followers of Jesus to remain faithful to the Lamb even when following Him carries a cost.
If we finish studying Revelation knowing considerably more about prophetic systems but no more committed to following Jesus Christ, we will have missed something essential.

When Faith Must Endure

This will not be a journey in which every question receives a simple answer.
Revelation is too rich, too deeply rooted in Scripture, too filled with imagery, and too historically debated for that.
There will be moments when we stop and examine a Greek word.
There will be moments when we travel backward into Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Exodus, or Genesis.
There will be moments when we enter the first-century Roman world.
There will be moments when we consider several interpretations and acknowledge that faithful Christians understand the passage differently.
There will be moments when we simply stand before the vision and allow its grandeur to speak.
But through all twenty-two chapters, one truth must remain before us:
Jesus Christ is the center of Revelation.
And one pastoral call must continually return:
Remain faithful.
Faithful when obedience is easy.
Faithful when obedience is difficult.
Faithful when the Church is strong.
Faithful when the Church appears weak.
Faithful when we understand.
Faithful when we do not.
Faithful when victory is visible.
Faithful when victory can only be believed.
James teaches us how **When Faith Becomes a Way of Life** looks like.
Revelation calls us to become a people whose **Faith Must Endure**.
And so, before we attempt to understand beasts, bowls, trumpets, dragons, Babylon, or the mysteries of things yet to come, we begin where John begins:
With Jesus Christ.
Because when everything else has passed away, the Lamb will still be standing.

A Word About the Imagery of Revelation

Throughout *When Faith Must Endure*, we have deliberately resisted the temptation to turn the imagery of Revelation into a catalog of modern people, nations, technologies, weapons, or current events.

That is intentional.

When John describes locusts like horses prepared for battle, creatures rising from the sea, a woman clothed with the sun, Babylon, dragons, beasts, bowls, trumpets, and seals, our first question is not:

"What does this resemble in our world?"

Our first question is:

"What was John communicating through this imagery to the people who first heard these words?"

Revelation was written nearly two thousand years before our newspapers, political boundaries, military technologies, and modern institutions existed.

Yet the book was meaningful to the Christians who originally received it.

They were expected to hear it, understand its central message, and respond faithfully to what they heard.

That must matter to the way we interpret it.

So, we begin where they began.

With the Scriptures they knew.

With the symbols they recognized.

With the world in which they lived.

With the pressures they faced.

And above all, with the revelation of Jesus Christ that John was giving them.

This does not make Revelation irrelevant to the modern world.

It makes Revelation **more** relevant.

Because once we understand the enduring truth communicated through the imagery, we no longer have to force the symbols into one particular generation.

Empires still demand allegiance.

Power still tempts.

Deception still misleads.

Idolatry still competes for the human heart.

Evil still destroys.

Faithfulness still costs something.

The Church is still called to endure.

And Jesus Christ is still Lord.

Those truths belonged to John's churches.

They belong to us.

And should the Lord tarry, they will belong to Christians living generations after us.

We are therefore not attempting to make John's imagery predict our world.

We are attempting to allow John's imagery to speak from **his world into ours**.
There is an important difference.
The question is not merely:
“Can we identify the locusts?”
The deeper question is:
“Can we remain faithful to the Lamb?”
Because Revelation was never given merely to satisfy Christian curiosity about the future.
It was given to form faithful Christians in the present.
And that is why our approach throughout this journey will remain the same:
We will first seek to understand the imagery in the manner in which it was originally written—and then allow its enduring truth to speak to the world in which we live.
Scripture quotations are from the King James Version (KJV). Explanations and paraphrases in the commentary are the author’s own.

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Revelation 8:1–5 — The Seventh Seal, the Silence, and the Prayers of the Saints

“And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.
And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.”
— Revelation 8:1–5, KJV

Chapter 7 ended in one of the tenderest places Revelation has taken us.
The Lamb:
Shepherds.
The redeemed are led toward:
Living water.
And God:
Wipes away every tear.
The ordeal did not receive the final word.
God did.
But Revelation is not:
Finished.
The question that ended Chapter 6—
“Who is able to stand?”
—has been answered.
God’s people:
Stand.
Not because nothing terrible can touch them.
Not because they possess extraordinary strength.
But because they belong to:
God.
They have been sealed.
They have been brought through.
They are sheltered.
They are shepherded.
And now John takes us back to:
The scroll.

Six seals have been:
Opened.
One remains.
The Lamb reaches for:
The seventh seal.
And perhaps we expect:
Thunder.
Perhaps:
Another horseman.
Perhaps:
Another earthquake.
Perhaps:
Another great cry from heaven.
Instead—
Nothing.
For approximately half an hour:
Heaven is silent.
And sometimes:
Silence says more than thunder.

1. The Lamb Opens the Seventh Seal

The opening words return our attention to:
The Lamb.
That matters.
The seals have never been opening:
Themselves.
History is not unraveling beyond God's:
Control.
The judgments are not random events breaking loose across:
Creation.
The Lamb opens:
The seal.
The One John saw slaughtered yet standing remains the One holding the scroll and opening its:
Seals.
We have been waiting for this moment since:
Chapter 5.
The first four seals brought the:
Horsemen.
The fifth revealed the martyrs beneath the:
Altar.
The sixth brought cosmic upheaval and the terrible question:
Who is able to stand?
Chapter 7 answered that question.

Now:
The seventh seal.
But what appears to be the conclusion of one sequence becomes the beginning of:
Another.
The trumpets are coming.
That reminds us of something important about the way Revelation works.
Its visions do not always behave like a simple chronological sequence:
First this.
Then this.
Then this.
Then this.
They:
Expand.
Overlap.
Pause.
Return.
Intensify.
The seventh seal does not simply close one door.
It opens:
Another.
That should make us cautious about forcing Revelation into a rigid prophetic calendar.
John is giving us a vision of God's purposes.
He is not handing us:
A spreadsheet.
And through it all, the Lamb remains:
There.

2. And Then There Is Silence

This may be one of the most startling moments in the:
Book.
Heaven has been filled with:
Sound.
Songs.
Praise.
Worship.
Questions.
Declarations.
Angelic voices.
The cries of martyrs.
The roar of a multitude no one could:
Count.
Then the Lamb opens the seventh seal.

And:
Silence.
No one speaks.
No one sings.
No elder offers an:
Explanation.
No creature cries:
Holy.
For about half an hour:
Heaven waits.
We should resist the temptation to turn John's "half an hour" into some complicated prophetic:
Calculation.
John does not tell us to convert it into:
Years.
Months.
Days.
Generations.
Perhaps the simplest observation is also the most powerful.
The silence lasts long enough to be:
Felt.
Thirty seconds of silence can feel uncomfortable.
Thirty minutes?
The silence itself becomes:
Overwhelming.
But silence is not:
Emptiness.
The throne is still:
There.
The Lamb is still:
There.
The angels are still:
There.
Everything that was present before the silence remains present:
During it.
The difference is simply:
No one speaks.
And that becomes profoundly:
Pastoral.
There are seasons when God seems:
Silent.
We pray.
And hear:

Nothing.
We wait.
And nothing appears to:
Change.
We ask:
How long?
And heaven seems:
Quiet.
Revelation reminds us that silence and absence are not the same:
Thing.
God can be present in:
Silence.

3. The Holy Weight of Waiting

The silence has:
Weight.
It feels almost like the stillness before:
A storm.
Seven angels are about to receive:
Trumpets.
The prayers of the saints are about to rise before:
God.
Fire will soon fall upon:
The earth.
Before all of that:
Silence.
Revelation repeatedly makes us:
Wait.
The winds were told to:
Wait.
The servants had to be:
Sealed.
Now heaven itself:
Waits.
There are moments when waiting is part of:
Faithfulness.
And perhaps there is something here for the Church to learn.
We sometimes become uncomfortable when nothing is being:
Said.
So we fill every empty space with:
Words.
But heaven itself can become:
Quiet.
Not every silence needs to be:

Filled.
Some silences need to be:
Honored.

4. Seven Angels Before God

After the silence:
John sees.
Seven angels standing before:
God.
And seven trumpets are given to:
Them.
Again:
Seven.
The number that has repeatedly carried the sense of:
Completeness.
Seven churches.
Seven spirits.
Seven seals.
And now:
Seven trumpets.
But notice where these angels:
Stand.
Before:
God.
They do not act:
Independently.
Their authority comes from:
God.
Their trumpets are:
Given.
The horsemen could move only when:
Permitted.
The winds were restrained until:
Released.
And now the angels receive their:
Trumpets.
Judgment remains under divine:
Authority.
The trumpets themselves carry deep biblical memory.
Throughout Scripture they can announce:
Assembly.
Warning.
Worship.
Battle.

The arrival of something:
Momentous.
Something from heaven is about to break into the experience of:
Earth.
But the trumpets do not sound:
Yet.
Something happens:
First.
And what happens first is one of the most important things in this entire:
Passage.
Prayer.

5. Another Angel at the Altar

John sees another:
Angel.
The angel approaches:
The altar.
He carries:
A golden censer.
And suddenly the imagery takes on the atmosphere of:
Worship.
Altar.
Incense.
Prayer.
Priestly service.
The imagery draws upon the worship life of:
Israel.
But here, in the heavenly vision, the incense is gathered around something deeply connected with the earthly life of God's people:
Their prayers.
Heavenly worship and earthly suffering meet in the same:
Scene.

6. The Prayers of All the Saints

Before the trumpets sound:
Someone is praying.
Before judgment proceeds:
Prayers rise.
Before fire reaches the earth:
Prayer reaches heaven.
And these are not merely the prayers of:
A few.
Not merely:
The apostles.
Not merely:

The extraordinarily spiritual.
John calls them the prayers of:
All the saints.
The people of God pray.
And heaven:
Receives them.
Think about where those prayers:
Go.
Before:
The throne.
Upon:
The golden altar.
Into the presence of:
God.
The prayer that may have seemed weak on earth becomes part of the worship of:
Heaven.
The believer who wondered whether anyone was listening discovers:
Heaven heard.

7. “How Long?” Was Not Forgotten

We have encountered prayer at an altar before.
In Chapter 6 the martyrs beneath the altar cried:
How long?
They wanted to know when God would:
Act.
When justice would:
Come.
When evil would finally be:
Answered.
They were told to:
Wait.
Now we are back at:
An altar.
We should not say more than the text says.
Revelation 8 speaks of the prayers of:
All the saints.
John does not tell us that these are exclusively the prayers of the martyrs from Chapter: 6
But within the unfolding vision it is difficult not to hear an:
Echo.
The martyrs prayed.
The saints pray.
God:

Hears.
And that gives us one of the great pastoral truths connecting these chapters:
"How long?" was not:
Forgotten.
Waiting can feel remarkably similar to being:
Ignored.
But delay is not necessarily:
Forgetfulness.
The prayers rise before:
God.

8. Prayer Reaches the Throne

This is an astonishing claim.
Human beings on:
Earth—
weak,
frightened,
suffering,
uncertain—
pray.
And those prayers rise into the presence of:
God.
Prayer crosses the distance between:
Earth and heaven.
Not because human words possess magical:
Power.
Not because prayer gives us control over:
God.
But because God receives the prayers of:
His people.
The smoke of the incense rises:
With them.
Earth speaks.
Heaven receives.
There are prayers we have whispered beside a hospital:
Bed.
Prayers offered in the darkness when everyone else was:
Asleep.
Prayers repeated for:
Years.
Prayers that seemed to travel no farther than:
The ceiling.
Revelation gives us another picture.
They:

Rise.
That does not mean every prayer receives the answer we:
Requested.
The person may still:
Die.
The relationship may still:
End.
The door may remain:
Closed.
The suffering may:
Continue.
We should never pretend those things do not:
Hurt.
But unanswered as we hoped does not necessarily mean:
Unheard.

9. Prayer as an Act of Endurance

Prayer does not place us upon the:
Throne.
It places us before:
It.
Prayer does not make God:
Our servant.
Prayer acknowledges that we are:
His.
That becomes especially important in Revelation.
The saints live in a world where they cannot control:
Empire.
Persecution.
Economic pressure.
Violence.
Death.
But they can bring that world before:
God.
Prayer becomes an act of:
Trust.
God—
this is beyond me.
But it is not beyond:
You.
Sometimes endurance looks:
Heroic.
Sometimes it looks like standing before:
Empire.

Sometimes it looks like refusing to:
Compromise.
And sometimes endurance looks like getting up one more morning and:
Praying.
Again.
The prayer we have prayed a hundred times may become one of the clearest expressions of enduring:
Faith.
Prayer is not:
“Nothing else worked.”
Prayer is:
“I am placing this before God.”
That does not mean we stop:
Acting.
Helping.
Serving.
Seeking treatment.
Making decisions.
Doing what faithfulness requires.
It means none of those things replaces:
Prayer.

10. Prayer and Judgment Meet at the Altar

Then something changes.
The incense has:
Risen.
The prayers have:
Risen.
They have reached:
God.
Then the angel takes the same censer associated with:
Prayer—
fills it with fire from the:
Altar—
and throws the fire upon:
The earth.
The movement reverses.
Prayer rose:
Up.
Fire comes:
Down.
Earth cried toward:
Heaven.
Heaven now answers toward:

Earth.
We should be cautious about reducing this to a simplistic equation:
Saints pray → God destroys.
The vision is richer than:
That.
But the sequence certainly tells us that God's response to evil is not disconnected from the cries of:
His people.
The suffering of God's people does not disappear into:
History.
What human beings do to one another:
Matters.
Faithfulness:
Matters.
Suffering:
Matters.
Evil:
Matters.

11. The God Who Wipes Tears Also Judges What Causes Them

Chapter 7 ended with God wiping away:
Tears.
Chapter 8 moves toward:
Judgment.
Those are not two different:
Gods.
The God who cares about tears also cares about the evil that produces:
Them.
Judgment is not portrayed here as divine:
Irritability.
God has not suddenly lost His:
Temper.
Revelation has already shown us:
Patience.
Restraint.
Waiting.
Witness.
Prayer.
Calls to repentance.
Divine judgment belongs within the larger biblical conviction that evil will not be allowed to have the:
Final word.
Imagine telling the martyrs beneath the altar:

God loves you.
But what happened to you does not:
Matter.
Or telling the oppressed:
God cares about your tears.
But He has no concern about what caused:
Them.
Revelation refuses that kind of:
Comfort.
God comforts.
And God:
Judges.
The Judge is still the:
Comforter.
The God who shelters His people is the same God who refuses to call evil:
Good.

12. Heaven Answers Earth

The censer's fire is thrown upon:
Earth.
Then comes:
Thunder.
Voices.
Lightning.
And an:
Earthquake.
The silence is:
Over.
What began with no sound at all now erupts with:
Sound.
Heaven was silent.
Now heaven:
Roars.
What was happening in heaven now affects:
Earth.
Prayer has risen.
Fire has fallen.
The earth:
Trembles.
The boundary between heavenly worship and earthly history is not as impermeable as it might:
Appear.
What happens on earth reaches:
Heaven.

The prayers of the saints:
Rise.
And what happens in heaven reaches:
Earth.
Revelation refuses to allow us to imagine heaven as some distant realm completely disconnected from human:
History.
Heaven is not:
Passive.
God is not merely observing:
History.

13. Perhaps Heaven Is Listening

Now we can return to the silence with which this passage:
Began.
At first, silence and prayer may appear to be two separate:
Images.
Heaven becomes:
Silent.
Then:
Prayer rises.
But perhaps they belong together more closely than we first:
Realize.
We should be careful here.
John does not explicitly tell us why heaven becomes silent.
So we should not turn a pastoral possibility into an exegetical:
Certainty.
But the image is powerful.
Heaven falls:
Silent.
And in that silence the prayers of God's people rise before:
God.
Perhaps heaven is not:
Empty.
Perhaps heaven is:
Listening.
The silence we fear may not mean what we think it:
Means.
God has not answered.
Therefore:
God has not heard.
Revelation does not allow us to make that leap so:
Easily.
Between prayer and visible answer there may be:

Silence.
But silence does not mean:
Absence.
And delay does not mean:
Forgetfulness.

14. Sometimes Faith Must Endure the Silence

This belongs deeply within the purpose of our:
Journey.
There are times when faith must endure:
Persecution.
Times when faith must endure:
Loss.
Times when faith must endure:
Fear.
And there are times when faith must endure:
Silence.
Perhaps that is among the hardest forms of:
Endurance.
It is easier to trust when we can see something:
Happening.
Give us:
Progress.
Give us:
Evidence.
Give us:
A sign.
Give us:
Movement.
Anything.
But sometimes God gives us:
Silence.
And faith continues:
Praying.
The silence occurs in:
Heaven.
Before:
The throne.
In the presence of:
The Lamb.
Nothing about God's sovereignty has:
Changed.
Who opened the seventh seal?
The:

Lamb.
The silence itself therefore exists within the unfolding activity of:
Christ.
The Lamb who shepherded His people in Chapter 7 is still the Lamb who opens the seal in Chapter: 8
Tenderness and authority remain together in:
Christ.
The Shepherd has not lost control of the:
Storm.
And before the trumpets begin to sound, that may be exactly what the Church needs to:
Remember.

15. The Saints Pray While the World Is Still Broken

The saints do not control:
History.
They:
Pray.
That distinction matters.
The Church's calling in Revelation is not to seize control of:
History.
It is to remain:
Faithful.
To bear:
Witness.
To worship:
God.
To follow:
The Lamb.
And:
To pray.
Prayer is the language of people who know they are not:
God.
It admits:
I cannot control this.
I cannot fix:
Everything.
I cannot see:
Everything.
I do not know:
Everything.
But I know the One who:
Does.
And notice when the saints pray.

Not after everything has been:
Resolved.
They pray while history is still:
Moving.
While suffering still:
Exists.
While judgment is still:
Coming.
While the world remains:
Broken.
They pray in the middle of:
Mystery.
They do not possess the whole:
Picture.
Neither do:
We.
Their prayers can even carry:
Questions.
“How long?”
That is a:
Prayer.
Not polished.
Not comfortable.
Not neatly resolved.
But:
Honest.
Faith can lament.
Faith can cry.
Faith can wait.
And still:
Believe.
Eventually the silence:
Ends.
The fire:
Falls.
The thunder:
Sounds.
The earth:
Shakes.
God:
Acts.
Not according to the timetable of the:
Saints.

According to:
His.
Evil does not receive:
Forever.
The ordeal has a:
Boundary.
And so does the reign of:
Evil.
The trumpets are about to:
Sound.
Everything is:
Ready.
The silence has:
Ended.
The prayers have:
Risen.
The fire has:
Fallen.
Now the angels prepare to:
Sound.

Pastoral Reflection

There are few things harder in the life of faith than:
Silence.
We can endure difficulty more easily when we can see God:
Working.
We can endure waiting when we know exactly what we are waiting:
For.
But sometimes we pray—
and heaven seems:
Silent.
We pray for healing.
Silence.
We pray for reconciliation.
Silence.
We pray for direction.
Silence.
We pray for someone we love.
Silence.
We ask the question the martyrs asked:
How long?
And still:
Silence.
Revelation 8 tells us something extraordinarily important.

Silence does not mean God is:
Absent.
When heaven became silent, the throne was still:
Occupied.
The Lamb was still:
Present.
The angels were still:
Waiting.
And the prayers of the saints were still:
Rising.
Perhaps the most dangerous conclusion we can draw from God's silence is:
God is not listening.
John gives us precisely the opposite:
Picture.
The prayers rise before:
God.
Every prayer we whispered when we wondered whether anyone heard.
Every prayer prayed beside a hospital bed.
Every prayer offered through:
Tears.
Every:
How long?
Every:
Help me.
Every:
Lord, I don't know what to do.
The image Revelation gives us is not of prayers disappearing into:
Nothing.
They rise before:
God.
And eventually:
God acts.
Not always when we expect.
Not always how we expect.
Not always in ways we immediately:
Understand.
But silence is not:
Indifference.
Delay is not:
Forgetfulness.
And prayer is never merely:
Nothing.
Sometimes faith endures until God changes the:

Circumstances.
Sometimes faith endures through circumstances that do not:
Change.
Sometimes faith endures all the way:
Home.
And sometimes—
faith must endure: The silence.
But even in the silence:
The throne is occupied.
The Lamb is present.
The prayers are rising.
And God:
Hears.

Something Worth Pondering

Perhaps we have misunderstood some of the quiet places in our:
Lives.
We thought nothing was:
Happening.
We thought God had become:
Distant.
We thought our prayers had disappeared into:
Silence.
But Revelation 8 invites us to imagine another:
Possibility.
Perhaps heaven is not:
Empty.
Perhaps heaven is:
Listening.
The silence of God is not necessarily the absence of:
God.
And the delay of God is not the forgetfulness of:
God.
The prayer that seems to have gone nowhere may already stand before:
The throne.
Faith does not endure because it always hears an immediate answer.
Faith endures because it knows Who is listening during the:
Silence.

Ask Yourself This:

When God seems silent, what do I assume that silence: Means?
Do I interpret delay as: Absence?
Do I stop praying because I cannot yet see an: Answer?

Are there prayers I have quietly abandoned because I concluded that God was not: Listening?
Can I trust that the throne remains occupied even when heaven seems: Silent?
Can I continue praying when I cannot see what God is: Doing?
And perhaps the hardest question: Can I trust the God who hears my prayer enough to allow Him to decide how—and when—to answer it?
Because Revelation 8:1–5 does not promise that heaven will always answer: Immediately.
It promises something perhaps even more important. Heaven: Hears.

A Closer Look — Revelation 8:1

"And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour."
— Revelation 8:1, KJV

We have arrived at:
The seventh seal.
Since Chapter 5, everything has been moving toward this:
Moment.
The scroll was in the right hand of the One seated upon:
The throne.
No one was found worthy to open:
It.
John:
Wept.
Then came the announcement:
The Lion has conquered.
John looked—
and saw:
A Lamb.
Standing as though:
Slaughtered.
The Lamb took:
The scroll.
And one by one:
The seals began to open.
Now only one remains.
The Lamb breaks:
The seventh seal.
And what happens next may be one of the greatest surprises in:
Revelation.
Nothing.
At least:
Not immediately.
Heaven becomes:
Silent.

1. Chapter 7 Prepared Us for This Moment

Between the sixth and seventh seals, Revelation gave us an extended:
Pause.
We needed that pause.
Chapter 6 ended with the terrifying question:
Who is able to stand?

Chapter 7 answered:
These are.
The sealed.
The redeemed.
The innumerable multitude.
Those brought through the ordeal.
Those sheltered by God.
Those shepherded by the Lamb.
Only after answering that question does Revelation return to:
The seals.
That ordering is:
Important.
Before we hear the trumpets:
We see the redeemed.
Before the judgments intensify:
We see God's people standing before the throne.
Sealed.
Known.
Worshiping.
Sheltered.
We know who stands before we see what comes:
Next.
That gives us a theological anchor for everything that:
Follows.

2. The Lamb Opens the Seal

Once again:
The Lamb.
Revelation refuses to let us wander very far from:
Christ.
We have seen:
The throne.
The elders.
The creatures.
The angels.
The horsemen.
The martyrs.
The multitude.
But at the center remains:
The Lamb.
Chapter 7 showed us the Lamb as:
Shepherd.
He leads His people toward:
Living water.

Now the Shepherd opens the seventh:
Seal.
Tenderness has not replaced:
Authority.
Authority has not eliminated:
Tenderness.
Revelation does not give us two different pictures of:
Christ.
One gentle.
One frightening.
It gives us:
One Lamb.
The Lamb does not stand beside the throne wondering what will happen:
Next.
He opens:
The seal.
History does not simply happen around:
Christ.
The unfolding vision remains under His:
Authority.
And that becomes increasingly important as the imagery becomes increasingly:
Severe.

3. The Seventh Seal Brings Silence

At last:
Seven.
The sequence that began in Chapter 6 reaches:
Completion.
First seal.
Second.
Third.
Fourth.
Fifth.
Sixth.
And now:
Seventh.
We naturally expect:
Climax.
Something enormous.
Something immediate.
Perhaps another:
Horseman.
Perhaps another cosmic:

Disturbance.
Perhaps a great declaration from:
Heaven.
Instead:
Silence.
That is almost shocking after everything we have:
Heard.
Revelation has been an extraordinarily:
Noisy book.
Voices.
Songs.
Thunder.
Crying.
Worship.
Questions.
Declarations.
Multitudes shouting before the:
Throne.
Only a few verses earlier the multitude cried with a loud:
Voice.
The angels fell before the:
Throne.
The elders and living creatures:
Worshiped.
Heaven rang with:
Amen.
Blessing.
Glory.
Wisdom.
Thanksgiving.
Honor.
Power.
Might.
Then:
Silence.
John does not gradually lower the:
Volume.
It:
Stops.

4. Silence Becomes Part of the Vision

Sometimes Scripture speaks powerfully by saying:
Nothing.
The silence itself becomes part of the:

Vision.
John hears:
Nothing.
And because he hears nothing—
we:
Notice.
Anyone who has experienced sudden silence after prolonged noise understands:
This.
When machinery stops.
When a crowd suddenly quiets.
When music abruptly ends.
The absence of sound becomes almost:
Physical.
You feel:
The silence.
Heaven has been filled with worship.
Now heaven:
Waits.
There are moments when worship:
Speaks.
There are moments when worship:
Sings.
And apparently there are moments when heaven simply:
Waits.

5. Silence Does Not Mean the Throne Is Empty

This is where the verse becomes deeply:
Pastoral.
Nothing says God has:
Left.
Nothing says the Lamb has:
Disappeared.
Nothing says the throne has been:
Vacated.
The same heaven we saw in Chapters 4–7 remains:
There.
Only now:
It is quiet.
Presence and silence can exist:
Together.
We sometimes have difficulty believing:
That.
When God seems present, we expect to:

Feel something.
Hear something.
See something.
Experience something.
And when none of those things happen, we may conclude:
God is absent.
Revelation 8:1 challenges that:
Assumption.
Heaven is silent.
God is still:
There.
There will be times in almost every Christian life when heaven seems:
Quiet.
We pray.
Nothing.
We ask.
Nothing.
We wait.
Nothing.
Eventually we begin asking a more painful:
Question.
God—
where are:
You?
Silence can frighten us because we often handle a difficult answer better than:
No answer.
At least an answer gives us something to:
Hold.
Silence leaves us:
Waiting.
Wondering.
Questioning.
Sometimes:
Doubting.
And faith must learn how to live there:
Too.

6. “How Long?”

We should remember the prayer of the martyrs from:
Chapter 6.
How long?
They wanted:
Justice.

They wanted God to:
Act.
They were given white robes.
And then they were told to:
Wait.
That is not always the answer we want from:
God.
Especially when suffering continues.
Especially when injustice continues.
Especially when nothing seems to:
Change.
“Wait” can feel remarkably like:
Silence.
But Revelation has already shown us that waiting does not mean:
Forgotten.
And within only a few verses John will show us the prayers of the saints rising before:
God.
That makes the silence of verse 1 even more:
Powerful.
Heaven is quiet.
But heaven is not:
Deaf.

7. We Should Not Rush to Explain the Silence

Interpreters have offered different understandings of this:
Moment.
Silence can accompany awe before divine:
Judgment.
It can suggest solemn:
Expectation.
It can recall biblical scenes in which creation becomes silent before:
God.
Those connections deserve:
Consideration.
But perhaps we should first allow John’s image to do what it:
Does.
Everything:
Stops.
There are moments when immediate explanation can diminish the power of:
Silence.
At a funeral.
Beside someone who has just received terrible:
News.

In the presence of profound:
Grief.
Sometimes words are:
Necessary.
Sometimes silence is the more faithful:
Response.
Heaven does not apologize for being:
Quiet.
No angel rushes to fill the silence with:
Noise.
No elder begins another:
Song.
Heaven is comfortable enough in the presence of God to:
Be still.
Perhaps the Church can learn something from:
Heaven.
Not every moment must be filled with:
Words.
Music.
Announcements.
Movement.
Sometimes:
Silence is happening.
Sometimes stillness itself can become:
Worship.

8. Silence Is Not Inactivity

The silence also creates:
Expectation.
The seventh seal has been:
Opened.
Surely something will:
Happen.
And yet:
Heaven waits.
The silence stretches between what has happened and what is about to:
Come.
But silence does not mean nothing is:
Happening.
The purposes of God continue to:
Unfold.
Within the silence heaven is poised for what comes:
Next.
That truth travels far beyond:

Revelation.
There are seasons when we cannot see what God is:
Doing.
We cannot hear an:
Answer.
Nothing appears to:
Move.
But our inability to perceive God's activity does not mean God has ceased to:
Act.
Faith often lives between what God has done and what God will:
Do.
Christ has:
Come.
Christ has:
Died.
Christ has:
Risen.
Christ will:
Come again.
And between those great realities:
The Church waits.
So do:
We.
We wait for:
Answers.
Healing.
Justice.
Direction.
Reconciliation.
And ultimately:
Christ.
Sometimes faith is believing while apparently nothing:
Happens.

9. "For About Half an Hour"

Then John gives us this remarkably specific:
Detail.
Approximately:
Half an hour.
Why?
John does not:
Explain.
And because John does not explain, we should be cautious about claiming that we:

Know.
We do not need a prophetic:
Calculator.
John gives us no instruction to turn these thirty minutes into some particular number of:
Years.
Months.
Generations.
Sometimes half an hour means:
About half an hour.
Perhaps the simplest observation is the most:
Effective.
This was not a momentary:
Pause.
It lasted long enough for John to:
Notice.
Long enough for him to:
Remember.
Long enough for silence itself to become an:
Experience.
Thirty minutes is a long time when nobody:
Speaks.
Before the trumpet sounds—
wait.
Before the judgment comes—
wait.
Before heaven acts—
be:
Still.

10. The Silence Has a Boundary

There is something quietly hopeful in the phrase:
“About half an hour.”
The silence has:
A duration.
It begins.
And it:
Ends.
The silence does not last:
Forever.
We said something similar about the ordeal in Chapter: 7
The ordeal is real.
But it does not get:
Forever.

The tears are real.
But they do not get:
Forever.
And here:
The silence is real.
But it does not get:
Forever.
God gets the last word over silence:
Too.
Sin speaks.
Suffering speaks.
Empire speaks.
Death speaks.
The grave speaks.
But none of them speaks:
Last.
God:
Does.
Soon heaven will sound:
Again.
The angels will receive:
Trumpets.
The saints' prayers will:
Rise.
Fire will:
Fall.
Thunder will:
Sound.
Lightning will:
Flash.
The earth will:
Shake.
This silence is not the end of:
The story.
It is the stillness before the next:
Movement.

11. Sometimes Faith Must Endure the Silence

Here our series title becomes intensely:
Personal.
When Faith Must Endure.
We have talked about enduring:
Persecution.
Suffering.

Loss.
Temptation.
Compromise.
Fear.
But perhaps one of the hardest things faith ever has to endure is:
Silence.
Can I trust the throne when I hear:
Nothing?
Can I trust the Lamb when I see no immediate:
Movement?
Can I continue praying when I have received no:
Answer?
Can faith remain when experience gives me only:
Silence?
The answer is not found in:
The silence.
It is found in:
The Lamb.
We do not trust:
Silence.
We trust the One who remains present:
Within it.
The Lamb who opens the seventh seal is the same Lamb who was:
Slaughtered.
The same Lamb who:
Stands.
The same Lamb who:
Shepherds.
The same Lamb who leads His people toward:
Living water.
We know something about the One who occupies the:
Silence.
We have seen:
The cross.
We know:
The resurrection.
Therefore, when we do not understand what God is doing:
Now—
we interpret the silence through what God has already shown us in:
Christ.

12. Silence Does Not Cancel What We Already Know

Revelation 8:1 does not tell us to pretend silence is:
Pleasant.

Waiting can:
Hurt.
Silence can:
Confuse.
Unanswered prayer can:
Ache.
Faithfulness does not require pretending:
Otherwise.
The people of God may still ask:
How long?
Faith can ask and wait at the same:
Time.
That is not faith without:
Questions.
It is faith that carries its questions toward:
God.
Not faith without:
Pain.
Faith that remains with God within the:
Pain.
And when God seems silent, we can become tempted to forget everything
God has already:
Said.
But silence does not erase:
Promise.
Silence does not erase:
Grace.
Silence does not erase:
The cross.
Silence does not erase:
The empty tomb.
Silence does not erase:
The Lamb.
Perhaps this is the sentence we need to carry from the:
Verse.
When heaven is singing:
The throne is occupied.
When heaven is thundering:
The throne is occupied.
When angels are speaking:
The throne is occupied.
And when heaven is completely:
Silent—

the throne is still:
Occupied.
The seventh seal has been:
Opened.
God's purposes continue.
The prayers will:
Rise.
The trumpets will:
Sound.
History will:
Move.
The kingdom will:
Come.
The silence is only:
About half an hour.

Pastoral Reflection

There are seasons in the Christian life when God seems very:
Near.
Prayer feels:
Natural.
Scripture seems:
Alive.
Doors open.
Answers come.
And then there are seasons when we pray and hear:
Nothing.
Those seasons can be frightening because silence invites us to create our own:
Explanations.
Perhaps God has forgotten:
Me.
Perhaps God does not:
Care.
Perhaps I did something:
Wrong.
Perhaps God is not:
There.
Revelation 8:1 gives us another possibility.
Heaven can be:
Silent—
while God remains completely:
Present.
The throne has not been abandoned.

The Lamb has not disappeared.
The purposes of God have not stopped.
Heaven is simply:
Silent.
And perhaps there are moments when faith must stop demanding that silence explain:
Itself.
We know enough about the Lamb to trust Him even when we do not know what He is:
Doing.
The Lamb was slaughtered.
The Lamb stands.
The Lamb opens the scroll.
The Lamb shepherds His people.
The Lamb leads them toward living:
Water.
That is who occupies the silence.
So when heaven seems quiet:
Keep praying.
When the answer does not come:
Keep trusting.
When you cannot see what God is doing:
Remember what God has already done.
Because silence is not:
Absence.
Waiting is not:
Abandonment.
And delay is not necessarily:
Forgetfulness.
The silence has:
A boundary.
And beyond the silence:
God is still God.

Something Worth Pondering

Perhaps the hardest silence is not the silence around:
Us.
It is the silence above:
Us.
We can endure a noisy world if we believe heaven is:
Speaking.
But what happens when heaven itself seems:
Quiet?
Revelation does not tell us to pretend the silence is not:

There.
John heard it.
John felt it.
John even remembered approximately how long it:
Lasted.
But the silence never meant the throne was:
Empty.
Sometimes faith is not hearing God speak.
Sometimes faith is remembering who God is until the silence:
Ends.
And it will:
End.

Ask Yourself This:

What do I assume when God seems:
Silent?
Do I interpret silence as:
Absence?
Do I interpret waiting as:
Rejection?
Have I abandoned prayers because I decided God was not:
Listening?
Can I continue trusting the Lamb when I cannot see what He is:
Doing?
Can I allow silence to be silence without filling it with:
Fear?
And when I hear nothing from heaven, can I still remember this:
The throne is occupied.
The Lamb is present.
And silence does not get the last:
Word.

A Closer Look — Revelation 8:2

“And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.”
— Revelation 8:2, KJV

The silence continues.
No trumpet has yet:
Sounded.
No fire has yet been thrown upon:
The earth.
No judgment described in the remainder of the chapter has yet:
Begun.
John simply:
Looks.
And what he sees is remarkably:
Ordered.
Seven angels.
Standing before:
God.
Seven trumpets.
Given to:
Them.
Everything is ready.
But nothing moves until:
God permits it.
That may be the first thing we need to:
See.

1. “And I Saw”

Once again Revelation moves between:
Hearing—
and:
Seeing.
Verse 1 told us what John:
Heard.
Or perhaps more accurately:
What he did not hear.
Silence.
Now John:
Sees.
The silence has not:
Ended.
But the vision continues.

That immediately strengthens something we discovered in verse: 1
Heaven is:
Silent.
But heaven is not:
Inactive.
John sees angels already standing before:
God.
The next movement in the vision is already being:
Prepared.
Perhaps that is worth remembering whenever God seems:
Silent.
Our inability to hear what God is doing does not mean God is doing:
Nothing.

2. Seven Angels

Again we encounter the number:
Seven.
Revelation has surrounded us with:
Seven.
Seven churches.
Seven spirits.
Seven lampstands.
Seven stars.
Seven seals.
And now:
Seven angels.
Soon:
Seven trumpets.
The imagery continues to communicate completeness and the ordered unfolding of God's:
Purposes.
These are not random:
Angels.
John describes them as:
"The seven angels who stand before God."
There is something almost formal about the:
Description.
They have a place:
Before God.
They stand ready for:
Service.
Ready to receive:
Instruction.
Ready to carry out what God:

Gives.

3. They Stand Before God

That may be the most important phrase in the:
Verse.
Before:
God.
Not above God.
Not beside God as:
Equals.
Not acting apart from:
God.
Before:
God.
Their position tells us something about their:
Authority.
It is:
Derived.
Angels may be:
Powerful.
Glorious.
Terrifying.
They may carry out extraordinary:
Tasks.
But they remain:
Servants.
They stand before:
God.
Revelation continually guards the uniqueness of:
God.
God reigns.
The Lamb acts.
Angels serve.
Creation responds.
Nothing suggests that heaven has lost:
Control.

4. That Matters Before the Trumpets Begin

What follows will look increasingly:
Chaotic.
Fire.
Blood.
A burning mountain.
A falling star.
Darkness.

Destruction.
If we begin reading those images without remembering verse 2, we might imagine a universe spinning out of:
Control.
But verse 2 places everything where it belongs:
Before God.
The trumpets do not originate in some independent force of:
Evil.
The angels stand before:
God.
And the trumpets are:
Given.
Whatever difficulties await us in interpreting the trumpet judgments, Revelation establishes something before they:
Begin.
The throne remains:
Central.
That is where we must begin interpreting what:
Follows.
Not sensationally.
Not by immediately hunting for modern:
Headlines.
But:
Theologically.
What is Revelation showing us about:
God?
Judgment?
Creation?
Repentance?
Faithfulness?
Endurance?
Those questions will keep us anchored when the imagery becomes:
Difficult.

5. They Stand Ready

Notice what the angels are:
Doing.
Standing.
They have not yet been:
Sent.
They have not raised their:
Trumpets.
They have not:
Blown.

They stand.
Ready.
Waiting.
We just saw heaven:
Silent.
Now we see angels:
Standing.
There is no frantic:
Movement.
No impatience.
No one gets ahead of:
God.
Heaven knows how to:
Wait.
The angels are ready.
But readiness does not authorize:
Action.
That distinction appears repeatedly throughout:
Revelation.
Power may exist.
Ability may exist.
Opportunity may exist.
But action remains governed by:
God.
The angels do not decide:
Enough waiting.
They do not declare:
Now.
They stand before: God.

6. The Trumpets Were Given

Seven angels.
Seven:
Trumpets.
And those trumpets were:
Given.
Those two words are extraordinarily important:
Theologically.
The angels did not:
Make them.
They did not:
Claim them.
They did not:
Take them.

They received:
Them.
Authority repeatedly appears in Revelation as something:
Given.
Permission is:
Given.
Power is:
Given.
White robes are:
Given.
And now trumpets are:
Given.
Created beings may exercise extraordinary:
Power.
But they are not the source of that:
Power.
The source remains:
God.
That becomes increasingly important as the judgments become more:
Severe.
Revelation is not describing a cosmic struggle in which God has released forces He can no longer:
Control.
The instruments themselves have been:
Given.
Authority is:
Derived.
The throne remains:
Sovereign.

7. The Trumpets Are Ready—but Silent

A trumpet is meant to be:
Heard.
That creates an extraordinary contrast with verse: 1
Verse 1:
Silence.
Verse 2:
Trumpets.
The instruments that will eventually break the silence are already:
Present.
But not one sounds:
Yet.
Seven trumpets have been:
Given.

Seven angels hold:
Them.
Still:
Silence.
Something else must happen:
First.
Verses 3–5 will take us to:
The altar.
Incense.
The prayers of the saints.
Fire.
Only afterward will the angels prepare to:
Blow.
That ordering deserves our:
Attention.
Trumpets are ready.
But prayer comes:
First.
Before heaven announces judgment toward earth, heaven receives the prayers rising from:
Earth.
The saints are not an:
Afterthought.
They have been:
Sealed.
Known.
Gathered.
Sheltered.
Shepherded.
Comforted.
And now their prayers:
Matter.
The God before whom angels stand is also the God who hears His:
People.
Majesty does not make God:
Inaccessible.

8. Trumpets Carry Biblical Memory

Trumpets appear throughout the biblical:
Story.
They can call people:
Together.
Announce important:
Events.

Signal:
Worship.
Warn of:
Danger.
Accompany:
Battle.
Announce the movement of:
God.
So when John sees seven trumpets, the image already carries a sense of:
Announcement.
Something is about to be:
Declared.
A trumpet demands:
Attention.
Listen.
Pay attention.
Something is:
Happening.
The trumpet judgments will eventually carry both judgment and:
Warning.
They will be severe.
But they will not yet be:
Total.
Again and again we will encounter:
A third.
Limited judgment.
Restricted destruction.
And eventually Revelation will show us the tragic reality that people still refuse to:
Repent.
But we should allow those later verses to tell that story when we:
Reach them.
For now:
The trumpets remain:
Silent.

9. The Seals Open Into the Trumpets

We are standing at an important structural moment in:
Revelation.
The seals have brought us this:
Far.
Now the seventh seal opens into the sequence of:
Trumpets.
The seventh seal does not merely terminate what came:

Before.
It becomes a doorway into what comes:
Next.
That is another reason we should be cautious about forcing Revelation into a simple chronological:
Chart.
The imagery unfolds as a great theological:
Vision.
One sequence opens into:
Another.
Scenes pause.
Perspectives change.
Themes return.
Judgment intensifies.
And throughout it all:
The throne remains central.
We should therefore let Revelation set the:
Pace.
We may want to hurry ahead.
What is the burning:
Mountain?
What is:
Wormwood?
What happens when the sun is:
Darkened?
We will get:
There.
But Revelation has not taken us there:
Yet.
Right now:
Seven angels stand.
Seven trumpets wait.
Good interpretation sometimes means refusing to blow the trumpet before:
John does.

10. Readiness Without Impatience

There may be something deeply pastoral in the posture of these:
Angels.
They stand:
Ready.
But they:
Wait.
There are seasons when Christians must do the:
Same.

Ready to serve.
Ready to respond.
Ready to move.
But unwilling to run ahead of:
God.
Waiting is not necessarily:
Laziness.
The angels are not:
Idle.
They are:
Attentive.
There is a difference.
Waiting upon God can be readiness governed by:
Obedience.
We often want to be:
Doing.
Fixing.
Moving.
Accomplishing.
But sometimes God has not yet said:
Go.
There can be faithfulness in simply standing:
Ready.
Possession is not:
Permission.
Ability is not:
Calling.
Opportunity is not necessarily:
Timing.
Sometimes we can do something and still need to ask whether this is the moment God has called us to:
Do it.

11. Power Under Authority

That may summarize the angels in this:
Verse.
They possess:
Trumpets.
They will participate in extraordinary:
Events.
But they remain:
Before God.
Power is safest when it remembers:
Whose it is.

The Church needs that reminder:
Too.
Any authority we possess is:
Derived.
Any gifts we possess are:
Given.
Any ministry we perform is:
Entrusted.
Any influence we exercise is:
Stewardship.
We never graduate from standing:
Before God.
The servant never becomes:
The throne.
We serve.
God:
Reigns.
We witness.
God:
Saves.
We pray.
God:
Answers.
We obey.
God determines:
History.
Revelation keeps putting God back at the:
Center.

12. The Throne Defines Reality

Before the trumpets ever sound—
before creation shakes—
before judgment unfolds—
God is already:
There.
John may be:
Overwhelmed.
The churches may be:
Frightened.
We may be:
Confused.
But heaven is not:
Panicking.
The angels stand.

The trumpets are given.
God:
Reigns.
That perspective mattered profoundly for Revelation's first:
Hearers.
From earth:
Empire seemed enormous.
Caesar appeared to possess:
Power.
The churches seemed:
Small.
History could appear:
Chaotic.
But Revelation pulls back the:
Curtain.
Who occupies the:
Throne?
God.
Who stands before:
Him?
Angels.
Who receives authority from:
Him?
His servants.
Earthly power looks different from:
Heaven.
And that perspective helps faith:
Endure.
The churches did not need a promise that nothing difficult would:
Happen.
They already knew better than:
That.
They needed assurance that difficulty did not mean God had lost:
Control.
Neither do:
We.
Endurance depends upon knowing who:
Reigns.

13. Everything Is Ready

Perhaps we should simply allow the picture to settle over:
Us.
Seven angels.
Seven trumpets.

Heaven:
Silent.
Everything:
Ready.
And at the center:
God.
The angels are:
Ready.
The trumpets are:
Ready.
The next movement of the vision is:
Ready.
But they stand.
Before:
God.
Nothing moves because a servant becomes:
Impatient.
Nothing moves because an angel decides the time has:
Come.
Everything remains oriented toward:
The throne.
And when the time comes:
Heaven will move.

Pastoral Reflection

There are times when we feel that something must happen:
Now.
The situation needs:
Resolution.
The prayer needs:
Answering.
The door needs:
Opening.
The problem needs:
Fixing.
We become impatient because we can see what needs to:
Happen.
At least we think we:
Can.
Revelation 8:2 gives us a very different picture.
Seven angels stand before:
God.
Seven trumpets are placed into their:
Hands.

Everything appears:
Ready.
And still:
They wait.
They do not run ahead.
They do not decide the time.
They do not confuse readiness with:
Permission.
Perhaps there are seasons when that is exactly what faithfulness looks like for:
Us.
Ready.
Attentive.
Available.
But:
Waiting.
Waiting does not mean we are doing:
Nothing.
Sometimes waiting is one of the most difficult acts of:
Obedience.
And while we wait, we remember where the angels are:
Standing.
Before:
God.
That is where all faithful waiting ultimately:
Takes place.
We do not wait before an empty:
Throne.
We do not wait before an uncertain:
Future.
We wait before:
God.
The trumpets have been:
Given.
The angels are:
Ready.
The future is in God's:
Hands.
And when the time comes:
Heaven will move.

Something Worth Pondering

Verse 1 gave us:
Silence.

Verse 2 gives us:
Readiness.
Those two things can exist:
Together.
God may seem silent while heaven is already prepared for what comes:
Next.
Perhaps we have sometimes mistaken God's silence for God's:
Inactivity.
But Revelation shows us another possibility.
While we are wondering whether anything is happening, heaven may already be standing ready before:
God.
We cannot see everything God is:
Doing.
We do not know everything God is:
Preparing.
We do not know when the trumpet will:
Sound.
But we know where history ultimately:
Stands.
Before:
God.

Ask Yourself This:

Am I able to wait when I believe I am:
Ready?
Do I sometimes confuse ability with:
Permission?
Do I run ahead of God because His timing seems too:
Slow?
When heaven seems silent, do I assume heaven is:
Inactive?
Can I remain ready without becoming:
Impatient?
Can I trust that God sees more of the situation than:
I do?
And when I cannot see what comes next, can I remember what John:
Saw?
The angels stand before God.
The trumpets are in their hands.
And nothing has slipped beyond the authority of:
The throne.

A Closer Look — Revelation 8:3

“And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.”
— Revelation 8:3, KJV

Seven angels stand before:
God.
Seven trumpets have been placed into their:
Hands.
Everything seems ready for the judgments to:
Begin.
Surely verse 3 will tell us that the first angel raises his trumpet and:
Blows.
But he does:
Not.
Instead another angel:
Appears.
And Revelation takes us somewhere we might not have:
Expected.
To:
The altar.
To:
Incense.
And most importantly:
To prayer.
Before the trumpets sound—
the prayers of God's people come before:
The throne.
That ordering is too important to:
Miss.

1. Another Angel

John's attention:
Shifts.
The seven angels remain:
Present.
They have received their:
Trumpets.
But another angel enters the:
Scene.

And this angel has a different:
Task.
He does not carry a:
Trumpet.
He carries:
A censer.
That contrast is:
Striking.
We expect:
Judgment.
John shows us:
Worship.
We expect the trumpet:
Blast.
John shows us:
Incense.
We expect something coming down from:
Heaven.
First John shows us something rising toward:
God.
Prayer.
Revelation has already given us:
Silence.
Then angels:
Waiting.
And now the vision slows once:
More.
Before the trumpets sound, Revelation wants us to see something that must not be:
Overlooked.
God's people are:
Praying.

2. A Golden Censer at the Altar

The angel carries a golden:
Censer.
The censer belongs to the imagery of:
Worship.
It was associated with burning:
Incense.
And incense carried rich associations with prayer and worship within the biblical:
Tradition.
John draws the imagery of earthly worship into the heavenly:

Throne room.
Again we encounter:
Gold.
Golden crowns.
Golden bowls.
A golden altar.
And now:
A golden censer.
The imagery communicates something:
Precious.
Sacred.
Belonging to worship before:
God.
That is the setting Revelation gives to the prayers of God's:
People.
Not:
Disposable.
Not:
Insignificant.
Not annoying interruptions reaching an otherwise occupied:
God.
A golden censer.
A golden altar.
The throne of:
God.
Prayer belongs within the worship of:
Heaven.

3. We Have Seen an Altar Before

The angel comes and stands at:
The altar.
Again:
The altar.
We have been here:
Before.
When the fifth seal was opened in Chapter 6, John saw beneath the altar the souls of those slaughtered because of their faithful:
Witness.
And from beneath that altar came the cry:
How long?
How long before God would:
Judge?
How long before justice would:
Come?

How long before what had happened to them would finally be:
Answered?
They were given white robes.
And told to:
Wait.
Now Revelation brings us back to an:
Altar.
Chapter 6:
The martyrs cry from beneath the altar.
Chapter 8:
An angel stands at the altar with incense and the prayers of the:
Saints.
We should not collapse those passages into exactly the same:
Thing.
John speaks here of the prayers of:
All the saints.
But Revelation invites us to remember what we have already:
Seen.
The prayer—
"How long?"—
still hangs over the:
Vision.

4. Waiting Did Not Mean Forgotten

The martyrs were not told:
Your prayer does not matter.
They were told:
Wait.
There is a profound difference between:
No—
and:
Not yet.
The martyrs waited.
History continued.
Chapter 7 unfolded.
The seventh seal was opened.
Heaven became:
Silent.
But their cry had not disappeared into:
Nothing.
God had not:
Forgotten.
This may be one of the most important pastoral connections between
Chapters 6 and: 8

Waiting can feel like:
Forgetfulness.
Silence can feel like:
Absence.
Delay can feel like:
Rejection.
But Revelation keeps showing us something:
Else.
The throne remains.
The Lamb remains.
And now:
The prayers remain.

5. “He Was Given”

Once again we encounter those important:
Words.
The seven angels were given:
Trumpets.
This angel is given:
Incense.
Authority is:
Given.
Resources are:
Given.
Heaven operates according to the purposes of:
God.
The angel does not supply the incense:
Himself.
He receives:
It.
Once again the emphasis falls not upon the independent power of the:
Angel—
but upon:
God.
Even within the heavenly sanctuary, everything proceeds from divine:
Provision.
And the angel is given not merely a little:
Incense.
John says:
A great quantity.
The image feels:
Abundant.
There is enough incense to accompany the prayers of:
All the saints.

6. Incense and Prayer

John's wording deserves careful:
Attention.
The incense is offered:
With the prayers of all the saints.
Incense and prayer are brought:
Together.
Verse 4 will make the relationship even more:
Explicit.
The smoke of the incense rises with the prayers before:
God.
The direction of the image is:
Upward.
From:
Earth—
toward:
Heaven.
From the saints—
toward:
God.
From human need—
toward:
The throne.
The prayers:
Rise.
The saints themselves may still live amid:
Suffering.
They may be scattered through:
Cities.
Homes.
Congregations.
Prisons.
Places of persecution.
But their prayers reach:
The throne.
Prayer goes where they physically:
Cannot.
The suffering believer praying on earth may feel very far from:
Heaven.
Revelation says the distance is not what it:
Appears.
Earthly prayer enters heavenly:
Worship.

The Church prays.
Heaven:
Receives.

7. “The Prayers of All the Saints”

This is one of the most beautiful phrases in the:
Verse.
All the:
Saints.
Not merely:
Apostles.
Not merely:
Martyrs.
Not merely:
Pastors.
Not merely:
Prophets.
Not merely people whose prayers sound impressive.
All the:
Saints.
The believer who never stands behind a:
Pulpit.
The person whose name will never appear in a:
History book.
The elderly saint praying quietly at:
Home.
The frightened believer whispering:
Help me.
The parent praying for a:
Child.
The congregation praying for someone who is:
Sick.
All the:
Saints.
Heaven does not appear to have a VIP prayer:
Line.
Revelation does not tell us that God listens more closely because one Christian is more prominent than:
Another.
The throne is not reserved for a spiritual:
Elite.
All the:
Saints.

8. We May Pray Alone Without Ever Praying Alone

John's churches were geographically:
Separated.
Believers were scattered throughout:
Asia Minor.
The wider Church extended much farther:
Still.
Yet heaven gathers their prayers into:
One offering.
There is something beautiful in that picture of the unity of the:
Church.
You may be alone in the:
Room.
But somewhere another believer is:
Praying.
And another.
And another.
Across:
Languages.
Nations.
Cultures.
Generations.
The prayers of:
All the saints.
We hear one voice at a:
Time.
God receives a chorus beyond our ability to:
Comprehend.
Countless voices.
Countless needs.
And none disappears into the:
Crowd.
Chapter 7 prepared us for:
This.
John saw a multitude no one could:
Count.
Every nation.
All tribes.
Peoples.
Languages.
And yet the Lamb could:
Shepherd them.
No one disappeared into the:

Multitude.
Now we encounter:
All the saints.
And again:
No one disappears.

9. The God Who Knows Every Tear Knows Every Prayer

Chapter 7 ended with:
Tears.
Every:
Tear.
Now Chapter 8 gives us:
Prayers.
All the:
Saints.
Tears are not:
Lost.
Prayers are not:
Lost.
God knows:
Both.
And sometimes tears and prayer cannot even be:
Separated.
There are moments when the prayer may be little more than:
Tears.
No carefully chosen:
Words.
No theological:
Precision.
No eloquent:
Language.
Just:
Grief.
Perhaps all we can manage is:
Lord...
Revelation does not tell us that heaven receives only beautifully constructed:
Prayers.
It says:
The prayers of all the saints.
Prayer is not a:
Performance.
We are not auditioning before:
God.

God is not persuaded by our:
Vocabulary.
The significance of prayer does not lie in our ability to make it sound:
Powerful.
A weak prayer can reach an almighty:
God.
Sometimes:
Lord, help me—
is enough to:
Begin.

10. The Golden Altar Before the Throne

John locates the altar:
Precisely.
Before:
The throne.
That location matters.
Not somewhere on the outskirts of:
Heaven.
Not in a celestial waiting:
Room.
Before:
The throne.
The prayers of God's people are brought into the presence of the One who:
Reigns.
Prayer brings the brokenness of our lives before:
The King.
God—
this is happening.
God—
this hurts.
God—
this is wrong.
God—
I need help.
God—
how long?
Prayer places our lives before:
The throne.
And the throne changes the meaning of:
Prayer.
If there were no throne, prayer would be wishful:
Thinking.
If the throne were empty, prayer would be speaking into:

Nothing.
But Revelation has shown us again and again:
The throne is occupied.
Therefore prayer has an:
Address.
We pray because Someone:
Reigns.

11. Prayer Confesses That We Are Not in Control

That can be difficult for:
Us.
We like:
Solutions.
Plans.
Answers.
Strategies.
We want to:
Fix.
Prayer begins by acknowledging something we do not always enjoy:
Admitting.
Some things are beyond:
Me.
I cannot change another person's:
Heart.
I cannot undo what has:
Happened.
I cannot guarantee:
Tomorrow.
I cannot eliminate:
Death.
I cannot control:
History.
But:
God.
Prayer moves the burden toward:
The throne.
Not because we stop:
Caring.
Not because we stop:
Acting.
Not because responsibility:
Disappears.
But because we acknowledge where ultimate authority:
Rests.

There are burdens human shoulders were never designed to carry:
Alone.

12. Prayer Is Part of Faithfulness

Prayer is not:
Passivity.
The saints pray.
But Revelation never portrays faithful Christians as indifferent to:
Life.
They witness.
They endure.
They refuse:
Compromise.
They worship.
They remain:
Faithful.
And:
They pray.
Prayer accompanies faithful:
Action.
We pray—
and serve.
We pray—
and love.
We pray—
and speak truth.
We pray—
and care for people.
We pray—
and endure.
Prayer is not what we do instead of:
Faithfulness.
Prayer is part of:
Faithfulness.
We can serve.
Witness.
Teach.
Comfort.
Work.
But we cannot make the kingdom:
Come.
That belongs to:
God.
Prayer keeps faithful activity from becoming:

Self-reliance.

13. Before the Trumpets, Prayer

The order deserves:
Attention.
Seven angels already have:
Trumpets.
Everything is prepared.
But Revelation:
Pauses.
Before judgment:
Prayer.
Before heavenly action:
Prayer.
Before the earth is shaken:
Prayer.
We should not turn that narrative sequence into some rigid theological:
Formula.
But neither should we ignore what John:
Shows.
The saints pray.
Their prayers rise before:
God.
Then the vision moves toward divine:
Action.
The cries of God's people matter within the unfolding purposes of:
God.
The martyrs' “How long?” was never an interruption in the story.
Their cry belonged to its theological:
Heart.
The suffering of God's people matters to:
God.
Empire may:
Forget.
History may:
Forget.
Society may:
Forget.
Even churches may:
Forget.
God does:
Not.
The altar remembers.
The prayers rise.

The throne:
Hears.

14. Prayer Is an Act of Hope

Why pray if no one:
Hears?
Why pray if nothing can:
Change?
Why pray if history belongs entirely to the powers of this:
World?
The very act of prayer declares:
They do not have the last:
Word.
Pain does not have the last:
Word.
Death does not have the last:
Word.
God:
Does.
Prayer refuses to accept the world's claim that what we see is all there:
Is.
There is a throne beyond every earthly:
Throne.
There is a King beyond every earthly:
Power.
There is a kingdom beyond every:
Empire.
When the saints pray:
How long?—
they are declaring that evil does not deserve:
Forever.
When they pray for deliverance, they declare that suffering is not:
Ultimate.
When they pray for God's kingdom, they declare another kingdom is:
Coming.
Prayer is hope spoken toward:
God.

15. Prayer Is Trust, Not Control

Some prayers seem to receive answers almost:
Immediately.
Others take:
Years.
Others appear to remain unanswered throughout a person's:
Lifetime.

That can be one of the hardest realities of:
Faith.
Revelation does not give us a technique for obtaining quick:
Answers.
Pray these words.
Have enough faith.
Follow these steps.
Then God must:
Act.
That would turn prayer into:
Control.
Prayer is not:
Control.
It is:
Trust.
Christian prayer does not require hiding what we:
Want.
Jesus Himself prayed honestly about the cup in:
Gethsemane.
We can tell God what we:
Desire.
But ultimately prayer places the matter in:
His hands.
And Revelation keeps showing us what those hands:
Hold.
The scroll.
The seals.
The angels.
The trumpets.
History itself.
When we place something into God's hands, we are not placing it into:
Weakness.

16. Heard Does Not Always Mean Answered as We Hoped

“All the saints” necessarily includes people whose prayers were not answered as they:
Hoped.
Some had:
Died.
Some had been:
Persecuted.
Some had suffered:
Loss.

Some had prayed for circumstances that apparently did not:
Change.
Yet their prayers are still:
Before God.
That distinction matters.
Sometimes we pray for healing and the person:
Dies.
Sometimes we pray for restoration and the relationship remains:
Broken.
Sometimes we pray for a door to open and it remains:
Closed.
Those realities:
Hurt.
We should never minimize:
Them.
But Revelation distinguishes between:
Unanswered as I hoped—
and:
Unheard.
I may not understand the:
Answer.
I may not like the:
Answer.
I may still grieve what did not:
Happen.
But Revelation shows the prayers of the saints:
Before God.
They were:
Heard.

17. Faith Lives Between Prayer and Answer

God receives the prayer before we see the:
Answer.
That is precisely where faith must:
Endure.
Between:
Prayer—
and:
Answer.
Between:
How long?—
and:
God's action.
Between:

Earth—
and:
Heaven.
There may be:
Waiting.
In many ways, prayer lives in the space between promise and:
Fulfillment.
That is where the Church:
Lives.
Christ has:
Come.
Christ will:
Come.
God's kingdom has:
Begun.
God's kingdom will be:
Completed.
And between those realities:
The Church prays.
“Your kingdom come.”
“Your will be done.”
On earth—
as it is in:
Heaven.

18. Earth to Heaven—and Soon Heaven to Earth

Notice the movement unfolding across these:
Verses.
Verse 3:
Prayer rises.
Verse 4:
Prayer reaches God.
Verse 5:
Fire falls.
Earth → Heaven → Earth.
We should not say that prayer manipulates:
God.
The saints do not control:
The throne.
But Revelation certainly refuses to portray prayer as:
Irrelevant.
The prayers of God's people belong within the story of what God is doing with:
History.

That is:
Astonishing.
The kingdom belongs to:
God.
The power belongs to:
God.
The victory belongs to:
God.
And still God makes room for the prayers of:
His people.
Our prayers matter without making us:
Sovereign.
They participate.
They do not:
Control.
They are heard.
They do not command:
The throne.

19. The Power of Prayer Is the God Who Hears

Sometimes we speak about prayer as though prayer itself were a kind of spiritual:
Force.
But the significance of prayer does not lie in the sound waves produced by our:
Voices.
It lies in the One toward whom those prayers are:
Directed.
The throne gives prayer its:
Meaning.
That frees us from the burden of:
Perfect prayer.
If everything depended upon saying exactly the right:
Words—
we should be:
Terrified.
But prayer rests upon:
God.
We do not need the perfect:
Phrase.
We need the faithful:
God.
A weak prayer can reach an almighty:
God.

You do not need to feel:
Powerful.
You do not need to sound:
Powerful.
You do not need to convince yourself that everything will turn out exactly as you:
Want.
You can simply:
Pray.
Lord:
Help.
Lord:
Have mercy.
Lord:
Stay with me.
Lord:
I am afraid.
Lord:
I don't understand.
Those prayers may seem small to:
Us.
They do not rise toward a small:
God.

20. When Faith Must Endure, Faith Prays

There will be moments when we can:
Act.
Then:
Act.
There will be moments when we can:
Help.
Then:
Help.
There will be moments when we can:
Speak.
Then:
Speak.
But through all of it:
Pray.
Sometimes prayer itself is the:
Work.
There are moments when nothing else can be:
Done.
We cannot undo:

Yesterday.
We cannot control:
Tomorrow.
We cannot reach the person we desperately want to:
Help.
We cannot repair what lies beyond our:
Power.
Then prayer is not:
Giving up.
Prayer is placing what we cannot carry before the One who:
Can.
The saints have:
Suffered.
They have:
Waited.
Some have:
Died.
They have asked:
How long?
And now their prayers stand within the worship of:
Heaven.
Not:
Forgotten.
Names may disappear from:
History.
Stories may be:
Lost.
Graves may become:
Unmarked.
Acts of faithfulness may never be:
Recorded.
Prayers may never be heard by another human:
Being.
But God:
Knows.

21. Before God Shakes the Earth, He Receives the Prayers of His People

Perhaps that is the sentence that carries us toward verses 4 and: 5
The trumpets are:
Waiting.
Judgment is:
Coming.
The earth will:

Shake.
But first:
The prayers of the saints are brought before:
God.
The God of Revelation is not merely the God of cosmic:
Events.
He is the God of:
Tears.
And:
Prayers.
Never mistake the apparent weakness of prayer for:
Insignificance.
Heaven:
Doesn't.

Pastoral Reflection

There are few sentences Christians say more sincerely—and sometimes more sadly—than:
"All I can do is pray."
We understand what we:
Mean.
We cannot fix the:
Situation.
We cannot change the:
Diagnosis.
We cannot force someone to make a different:
Decision.
We cannot undo what has:
Happened.
So:
All I can do is pray.
But Revelation 8:3 gently challenges the word:
All.
Look at where prayer:
Goes.
A golden censer.
A golden altar.
Before the throne of:
God.
The prayers of:
All the saints.
Prayer is not the consolation prize given to Christians when nothing useful remains to be:
Done.

Prayer is one of the ways God's people participate in the life and purposes of:
God.
Sometimes we can pray and:
Act.
We should.
Sometimes we can pray and:
Serve.
We should.
Sometimes we can pray and seek:
Help.
We should.
But sometimes there truly is nothing left within our power to:
Change.
Then we pray.
Not because prayer is:
Nothing.
Because God is:
Everything.
And perhaps someone reading this has been praying the same prayer for a very long:
Time.
You have asked:
Again.
And again.
And again.
Nothing seems to:
Change.
You wonder whether the prayer ever made it beyond the room in which you:
Prayed.
Revelation cannot promise you that God will answer exactly as you:
Want.
It cannot promise you the answer will come:
Tomorrow.
It does not give us a formula for making God follow our:
Timetable.
But it gives us this:
Picture.
The prayers of the saints rise before:
God.
The prayer may seem forgotten to:
You.
It is not forgotten by:
Him.

The prayer may seem small to:
You.
It is brought before the:
Throne.
The voice may be weak.
The God who hears it is:
Not.
So pray:
Again.
Not because repetition forces God's:
Hand.
But because faith continues bringing its life before:
God.
Sometimes faith endures until God changes the:
Circumstances.
Sometimes faith endures through circumstances that do not:
Change.
Sometimes faith endures all the way:
Home.
And through all three:
Faith prays.

Something Worth Pondering

Seven angels already have seven:
Trumpets.
Heaven is ready for the next great movement of:
Judgment.
Yet before a single trumpet sounds:
God makes room for prayer.
Perhaps that tells us something about what heaven considers:
Important.
We may think our prayers are small because:
We are small.
But the significance of prayer has never depended upon the size of the person:
Praying.
It depends upon the God who:
Hears.
The prayer whispered from the weakest voice on earth can rise before the highest throne in:
Heaven.
And perhaps the next time we are tempted to say:
“All I can do is pray,”
we might remember Revelation 8:3 and say instead:

“I can pray.”
And that is no small:
Thing.

Ask Yourself This:

Do I treat prayer as my first response or my last:
Resort?
Have I stopped praying about something because the answer seemed too long in:
Coming?
Do I believe that a prayer can be heard even when the answer is not the one I:
Wanted?
Do I sometimes think my prayers matter less because I do not consider myself especially:
Spiritual?
Can I trust that “all the saints” includes ordinary believers like:
Me?
When I say, “All I can do is pray,” do I realize what I am actually:
Saying?
And can I picture where Revelation says the prayers of God's people:
Go?
Before the throne.
Before the God who:
Reigns.
Before the God who:
Hears.
Before the God who has not forgotten a single one of:
His people.

A Closer Look — Revelation 8:4

“And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand.”
— Revelation 8:4, KJV

Verse 3 showed us the:
Preparation.
The angel.
The golden censer.
The golden altar.
The incense.
The prayers of all the:
Saints.
Now verse 4 shows us where those prayers:
Go.
They:
Rise.
And John leaves absolutely no question about their:
Destination.
They rise:
Before God.
That may make this one of the simplest verses in the:
Chapter.
It may also make it one of the most:
Beautiful.
Because every believer who has ever wondered—
Did God hear me?
—has been given an image worth:
Remembering.
The prayer rises.
And it rises before:
God.

1. The Smoke Rises

The incense from verse 3 is now:
Burning.
Smoke rises from the:
Altar.
John takes something his readers could easily:
Picture.
Incense burns.
Smoke:

Rises.
It moves upward.
It spreads.
It fills the space with its:
Fragrance.
And Revelation uses that familiar movement to help us see something we ordinarily cannot:
See.
Prayer rising before:
God.
Prayer is normally:
Invisible.
We speak.
Perhaps no one else even:
Hears.
The words leave our lips and seem to:
Disappear.
There is nothing visible for us to:
Follow.
But John gives prayer a visible:
Form.
Smoke:
Rising.
Not literally, as though prayer were physical:
Smoke.
This is:
Vision.
Symbol.
Worship imagery.
But the theological picture is:
Powerful.
The prayers do not:
Fall.
They do not:
Disappear.
They do not drift aimlessly through the:
Universe.
They:
Rise.

2. “With the Prayers of the Saints”

Verse 3 introduced the connection between:
Incense—
and:

Prayer.
Verse 4 emphasizes:
It.
The smoke of the incense rises with the prayers of the:
Saints.
We have already spent considerable time with those words:
“The saints.”
So we do not need to say everything:
Again.
But we should remember what John has shown:
Us.
These are the prayers of God's:
People.
Ordinary believers.
Faithful people.
People whose names may never be known beyond their families and:
Churches.
Some prayers may be offered in public:
Worship.
Others may be whispered beside a hospital:
Bed.
Some may be prayed around a kitchen:
Table.
Others through:
Tears.
Some may consist of little more than:
Help.
Please.
Why?
How long?
No human audience is:
Required.
The prayer has:
God.
And now John shows those prayers:
Rising.

3. “Rose”

That single word carries the movement of the entire:
Verse.
Rose.
From the altar.
Before:
God.

There is something wonderfully reassuring about the:
Direction.
The prayer is going:
Somewhere.
We cannot ordinarily see a prayer:
Travel.
We pray—
and then:
Silence.
No visible trail marks its:
Journey.
No confirmation appears telling us:
Delivered.
But John gives us the theological reality behind the:
Prayer.
It:
Rises.
The significance is not that prayer somehow possesses a natural power to ascend through:
Heaven.
The significance is that prayer is received by:
God.
Prayer has a:
Destination.

4. Prayer Has an Address

Christian prayer is not released into an impersonal:
Universe.
It is not positive energy sent into the:
Air.
The universe is:
Creation.
God is:
Creator.
The universe does not occupy the:
Throne.
God:
Does.
The saints do not send their hopes vaguely:
Outward.
Their prayers rise:
Before God.
That makes prayer intensely:
Personal.

Someone:
Hears.
Someone:
Knows.
Someone:
Receives.
Prayer is not primarily a spiritual:
Technique.
It is relationship with:
God.

5. “Before God”

Here is the destination.
Before:
God.
John could hardly make the point more:
Directly.
Not somewhere near:
God.
Not lost within the enormous activity of:
Heaven.
Not waiting in some celestial:
Queue.
Before:
God.
Think about everything Revelation has shown us concerning the One seated upon the:
Throne.
Majesty.
Holiness.
Power.
Glory.
Worship.
Living creatures crying:
Holy.
Elders falling before:
Him.
Angels beyond:
Counting.
And yet the prayers of ordinary believers rise before this:
God.
Majesty and intimacy are not:
Opposites.
God's greatness does not make Him:

Distant.
The God who governs creation hears the prayers of:
His people.

6. All—and Each

Verse 3 spoke of the prayers of:
All the saints.
That is an enormous:
Multitude.
Chapter 7 showed us a multitude no one could:
Count.
Yet Revelation never suggests that an individual disappears within the:
Crowd.
God receives the prayers of:
All.
And He knows:
Each.
That distinction is:
Beautiful.
We become overwhelmed by too many:
Requests.
Too many messages.
Too many people needing our:
Attention.
God does:
Not.
The multitude does not become an indistinguishable mass before:
Him.
The God who knows every:
Tear—
knows every:
Prayer.
The prayer no one else:
Heard.
The prayer you never spoke aloud.
The prayer you could barely:
Form.
The prayer you have prayed so often that you no longer know what else to:
Say.
Before:
God.

7. Heard Does Not Mean Granted

Here we must remain pastorally:
Careful.

Revelation 8:4 does not promise that every prayer will be answered exactly as the person praying:
Requests.
God hearing a prayer does not mean God always answers:
Yes.
We pray for:
Healing.
Sometimes the person:
Dies.
We pray for:
Restoration.
Sometimes the relationship remains:
Broken.
We pray for:
Deliverance.
Sometimes the trial:
Continues.
We pray for:
Clarity.
Sometimes confusion:
Remains.
Those realities can be deeply:
Painful.
And Revelation does not ask us to pretend:
Otherwise.
But there is an important distinction between:
Not answered as I hoped—
and:
Not heard.
Verse 4 addresses the second:
Fear.
Did the prayer reach:
God?
John's picture says:
Yes.
The prayer rises before:
God.

8. Prayer Is Entrusting, Not Controlling

Faith does not require us to hide what we:
Want.
We can pray:
God, please heal.
God, please provide.

God, please open the:
Door.
God, please spare:
Them.
God, please make this:
Different.
Honest prayer is not the absence of:
Desire.
But prayer ultimately places that desire:
Before God.
There is a difference between:
Trust—
and:
Control.
Control says:
God must do what I have:
Requested.
Trust says:
God, this is what I ask—
and I place it in Your:
Hands.
That second prayer may be much:
Harder.
Because trust leaves the outcome with:
God.
We want to know:
What?
When?
How?
Why?
Prayer may not immediately answer those:
Questions.
But it gives us somewhere to place:
Them.
Before:
God.

9. “How Long?” Reached the Throne

We should not lose the connection to Chapter: 6
The martyrs cried:
How long?
Their prayer was not immediately followed by the judgment they:
Requested.
They were told to:

Wait.
Now the prayers of the saints rise before:
God.
Waiting did not mean their prayer had:
Failed.
Delay did not mean God had:
Forgotten.
“How long?” reached the:
Throne.
Some prayers may be answered with:
Waiting.
We do not particularly like that:
Answer.
But there is a profound difference between:
Wait—
and:
I did not hear you.
Revelation removes at least one uncertainty.
We may not know:
When.
We may not know:
How.
We may not understand:
Why.
But we know:
Where.
Before:
God.

10. Heaven Treats Prayer as Something Precious

John tells us that the incense and prayers rise from the hand of the:
Angel.
The imagery surrounding prayer is remarkably:
Sacred.
Golden censer.
Golden altar.
Before the throne.
The hand of an:
Angel.
Incense rising.
Prayers rising.
Everything in the scene says:
This matters.
Perhaps we should be careful about diminishing prayer with our:

Language.
We sometimes say:
“Just pray.”
As though prayer were the small thing left over when nothing important can be:
Done.
Perhaps instead:
Pray.
Certainly:
Pray.
Continue to:
Pray.
Not because prayer is:
Magic.
Not because the right words manipulate:
Reality.
Not because incense possesses some spiritual:
Power.
The power belongs to:
God.
Prayer matters because:
God matters.
We do not place faith in our ability to:
Pray.
We place faith in the God to whom we:
Pray.

11. A Weak Prayer Can Reach an Almighty God

That means we can pray when faith feels:
Weak.
There may be days when we feel:
Strong.
There may be days when all we can manage is:
Barely believing.
Prayer does not require us to manufacture emotional:
Certainty.
Sometimes prayer itself is the act of:
Faith.
God—
I am still talking to:
You.
Perhaps endurance does not always look like someone standing tall and:
Fearless.

Sometimes endurance may look like someone sitting on the edge of a bed whispering:
Lord, I am still:
Here.
And then praying:
Again.
Even lament:
Prays.
Why?
How long?
Where are:
You?
Those questions remain directed toward:
God.
Faith can survive:
Questions.
Prayer can survive:
Confusion.
Prayer can survive:
Grief.
Prayer can survive:
Tears.
And Revelation shows us those prayers:
Rising.

12. Prayer Can Rise During the Silence

Verse 1:
Heaven is:
Silent.
Verse 4:
Prayer:
Rises.
That combination is:
Powerful.
God's silence does not mean the door is:
Closed.
The saints pray during the:
Silence.
And their prayers reach:
God.
We do not need to hear an immediate answer in order to continue:
Praying.
Sometimes faith means continuing the conversation when heaven seems:
Quiet.

The silence of verse 1 now looks somewhat:
Different.
At first it might have seemed:
Empty.
Now prayer rises within:
It.
We should remain careful here.
John does not explicitly tell us that heaven became silent in order to listen to the saints:
Pray.
We should not claim more than the text:
Says.
But as a pastoral reflection, the sequence is:
Beautiful.
Heaven becomes:
Silent.
The prayers of the saints:
Rise.
Perhaps the silence is not:
Indifference.
Perhaps heaven is:
Listening.
Not because God requires silence in order to:
Hear.
But because John's vision allows us to see silence and divine attention standing beside one:
Another.

13. The World May Ignore What Heaven Hears

The churches receiving Revelation were not the centers of earthly:
Power.
Empire could dismiss:
Them.
Society could overlook:
Them.
Their congregations might be:
Small.
Poor.
Pressured.
Unnoticed.
But their prayers rise before:
God.
That radically changes our measure of:
Significance.

Earth notices:
Power.
Wealth.
Status.
Influence.
Heaven notices:
Faithfulness.
Witness.
Endurance.
Prayer.
A believer may pray in a room where nothing appears to:
Happen.
No thunder.
No lightning.
No visible:
Change.
Yet Revelation asks us to see beyond:
Appearances.
The prayer rises before:
God.
The most important thing happening may be something we cannot:
See.

14. Prayer Entrusts Justice to God

Verse 5 will soon move from prayer toward divine:
Action.
The censer will be filled with fire from the:
Altar.
The fire will be thrown upon the:
Earth.
Thunder.
Voices.
Lightning.
Earthquake.
The scene is about to:
Explode.
But verse 4 makes us wait one more:
Moment.
Prayer.
That matters especially when we remember the cry of the:
Martyrs.
They asked for:
Justice.
But they did not take ultimate judgment into their own:

Hands.
They:
Prayed.
They placed justice before:
God.
That is a difficult form of:
Trust.
Prayer allows us to say:
God—
You saw.
God—
You know.
God—
judge rightly.
That does not mean ignoring:
Wrong.
It does not mean refusing appropriate efforts toward:
Justice.
It means acknowledging that ultimate judgment belongs to:
God.
We do not occupy:
The throne.
Prayer releases us from having to become the final:
Judge.

15. Leave Room for God to Be God

Perhaps this is one of prayer's hardest:
Lessons.
We bring the:
Request.
We bring the:
Grief.
We bring the:
Fear.
We bring the:
Anger.
We bring the unanswered:
Question.
And then:
Trust.
The prayer is before:
God.
There comes a point when we have said what we can:
Say.

Done what faithfulness requires us to:
Do.
Prayed what we know to:
Pray.
And then we leave room for God to be:
God.
We do not dictate the:
Method.
We do not dictate the:
Timing.
We do not dictate the:
Outcome.
That is not easy:
Faith.
To pray earnestly—
and then:
Wait.
To ask boldly—
and then:
Trust.
To believe God heard—
even while circumstances remain:
Unchanged.
That is:
Endurance.

16. When Faith Must Endure, Faith Prays

This belongs at the heart of our:
Journey.
When faith must endure:
Faith prays.
When faith does not understand:
Faith prays.
When faith is wounded:
Faith prays.
When faith waits:
Faith prays.
When heaven seems silent:
Faith still:
Prays.
Why?
Because faith knows where prayer:
Goes.
We may not know:

When.
We may not know:
How.
We may not know:
Why.
But Revelation 8:4 gives us:
Where.
Before:
God.

Pastoral Reflection

There are prayers we remember because God answered them exactly as we:
Hoped.
And there are prayers we remember because He:
Did not.
Those can remain with us for:
Years.
We prayed.
We believed.
We waited.
And the outcome was not what we:
Wanted.
It can leave us wondering:
Did God hear?
Revelation 8:4 does not give us an easy explanation for every unanswered:
Prayer.
It does not tell us why one person is healed and another:
Isn't.
Why one door opens and another remains:
Closed.
Why one relationship is restored and another:
Ends.
Why some suffering ends quickly while some continues for:
Years.
The verse does not answer:
Those questions.
Instead it gives us something we may need before we can even begin living with those:
Questions.
The prayers rise before:
God.
They are:
Heard.
The answer may be:

Yes.
It may be:
No.
It may be:
Wait.
It may be something we do not understand until we stand before God:
Ourselves.
But the prayer was not:
Lost.
That prayer whispered beside the hospital:
Bed—
was not lost.
That prayer you prayed for your:
Child—
was not lost.
That prayer you prayed through:
Tears—
was not lost.
That prayer you have prayed so many times that you no longer know what else to:
Say—
was not lost.
The smoke rises.
The prayer rises.
And it rises:
Before God.
So perhaps we should change the question.
Instead of always asking:
"Why hasn't God answered?"
perhaps sometimes faith must first remember:
"God has heard."
The answer may still require:
Waiting.
The silence may still:
Hurt.
The circumstances may still be:
Difficult.
But the prayer has reached its:
Destination.
And the destination is:
God.

Something Worth Pondering

Verse 1 gave us the silence of:

Heaven.
Verse 4 gives us the prayers of the saints rising within that:
Silence.
Perhaps we should never assume that silence means nobody is:
Listening.
Sometimes we speak and immediately hear a:
Response.
Sometimes we speak and hear:
Nothing.
But Revelation gives us a picture beyond what our ears can:
Detect.
The prayer rises before:
God.
Maybe heaven's silence is not always the silence of:
Absence.
Maybe sometimes it is the silence of:
Attention.
We cannot insist that John explains the silence that:
Way.
But we can know:
The throne is occupied.
The prayers are received.
God:
Hears.
And sometimes that must be enough to carry faith through the:
Waiting.
We may not always know what God will do with our prayer.
But Revelation assures us where the prayer:
Goes.
Before: God.
Ask Yourself This:

When I pray and hear nothing, what do I assume:
Happened?
Do I believe God heard me only when I receive the answer I:
Wanted?
Have I confused God's silence with God's:
Absence?
Are there prayers I have stopped praying because I concluded they were going:
Nowhere?
Can I trust that God hears even when I do not:
Understand?

Can I leave the answer in God's hands after I have placed the request before:
Him?
And when the silence becomes difficult, can I hold onto the picture John gives:
Us?
The incense rises.
The prayers rise.
They rise before:
God.
And whatever else I may not yet know—
I am:
Heard.

A Closer Look — Revelation 8:5

"And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake."
— Revelation 8:5, KJV

The prayers have:
Risen.
The saints have been:
Heard.
The incense has gone before:
God.
And now—
something comes:
Down.
The movement of verses 3–5 is impossible to:
Miss.
Prayer rises from earth toward:
Heaven.
Then fire moves from heaven toward:
Earth.
The same censer associated with incense and prayer is now filled with:
Fire.
The same altar before which the prayers were offered becomes the source of:
Judgment.
Prayer and judgment meet at:
The altar.
And suddenly the silence of verse 1 is:
Gone.
Thunder.
Voices.
Lightning.
Earthquake.
Heaven has not merely broken its:
Silence.
Heaven has:
Answered.

1. "And the Angel Took the Censer"

The movement of the vision matters.
And the angel acts.
John gives us:

Sequence.
First:
Silence.
Then:
Seven angels receive seven trumpets.
Then:
Incense.
Then:
Prayer.
Then:
The prayers rise before God.
Then:
The angel takes the censer.
We should not rush past that:
Order.
The fire of verse 5 does not appear from:
Nowhere.
Revelation has prepared us for this:
Moment.
We have seen the suffering of God's:
People.
We have heard the martyrs cry:
How long?
We have watched them:
Wait.
We have seen the prayers of all the saints brought before:
God.
Only then:
Fire.
We should be careful not to turn that sequence into a rigid theological:
Formula.
Prayer does not manipulate:
God.
The saints do not force God's:
Hand.
But John's ordering is surely:
Meaningful.
Their prayers rise.
Then:
The fire falls.

2. “How Long?” Was Not Forgotten

The altar should immediately remind us of:
Chapter 6.

There the martyrs cried from beneath the:
Altar.
How long?
How long before God would:
Judge?
How long before justice would:
Come?
They were told to:
Wait.
Now an altar appears again.
The prayers of the saints rise before:
God.
And then:
God acts.
Again, we should not make John say more than he:
Says.
Verse 5 does not explicitly declare:
“This fire is God's direct answer to the martyrs of Revelation 6.”
But within the movement of the vision, the connection is difficult to:
Ignore.
The cry:
How long?—
has not disappeared.
Waiting did not mean:
Forgotten.
Silence did not mean:
Abandoned.
Delay did not mean:
Unheard.
The prayer remained before:
God.

3. Now the Direction Changes

Verses 3 and 4 moved:
Upward.
Incense:
Up.
Prayer:
Up.
Before:
God.
Verse 5 reverses the:
Direction.
Fire:

Down.
Toward:
Earth.
Earth has spoken toward:
Heaven.
Now heaven speaks toward:
Earth.
That movement gives these verses their remarkable:
Shape.
Earth → Heaven.
Heaven → Earth.
Prayer:
Rises.
Fire:
Falls.
The suffering of God's people is not isolated from the purposes of:
God.
Heaven is not indifferent to what happens upon:
Earth.
History:
Matters.
Human choices:
Matter.
The cries of God's people:
Matter.
Justice:
Matters.

4. The Same Censer

The angel takes:
The censer.
The same:
Censer.
Moments earlier it was associated with:
Incense.
Prayer.
Worship.
Now it becomes associated with:
Fire.
Judgment.
John does not discard the censer after the prayers have:
Risen.
He takes:
It.

Fills it with fire.
And throws that fire toward:
Earth.
That connection is:
Striking.
Prayer and judgment are not placed in unrelated:
Scenes.
John deliberately holds them:
Together.
The object associated with the prayers of the saints becomes part of the next movement of the:
Vision.

5. Fire From the Altar

The fire has a specific:
Source.
The:
Altar.
Not some random corner of:
Heaven.
Not human:
Rage.
Not the anger of the:
Martyrs.
Fire comes from the same sacred setting where prayer has just risen before:
God.
At the altar:
Prayer rises.
At the altar:
Fire is taken.
From the altar:
Judgment proceeds.
The suffering of the saints and the justice of God meet before the:
Throne.
That may be one of the most important theological connections in these first five:
Verses.
The saints:
Pray.
God:
Judges.

6. The Saints Do Not Throw the Fire

That distinction is:
Crucial.

The martyrs do not throw:
It.
The saints do not throw:
It.
They do not take vengeance into their own:
Hands.
They take their pain to:
God.
They cry:
How long?
They:
Pray.
And God remains:
Judge.
There is something profoundly pastoral in:
That.
When we have been wronged, our vision can become:
Clouded.
Our emotions may be:
Wounded.
Our judgment may be:
Imperfect.
God sees what we cannot:
See.
Prayer says:
God—
You know.
You saw what:
Happened.
You know what was:
Said.
You know what was:
Done.
You know what it:
Cost.
You know what is:
True.
I place it with:
You.
That does not mean Christians ignore:
Injustice.
Faithfulness may require us to:
Speak.

Protect.
Intervene.
Report wrongdoing.
Defend the:
Vulnerable.
Seek what is:
Right.
But ultimate vengeance does not belong to:
Us.
We can seek justice without allowing revenge to consume:
Us.
The saints:
Pray.
God:
Judges.

7. The God Who Hears Is Also the God Who Judges

This may be uncomfortable for:
Us.
We readily speak of the God who:
Hears.
Comforts.
Forgives.
Restores.
Wipes away:
Tears.
And all of those things are gloriously:
True.
But Revelation will not allow us to separate them from another:
Truth.
God also:
Judges.
We should never become enthusiastic about:
Destruction.
Judgment should sober us before it causes us to point toward:
Others.
If our first response is:
“Good! They deserve it!”—
we may have forgotten how desperately every human being depends upon:
Grace.
But the opposite error is also:
Possible.
A God who never judges evil would not be:
Loving.

Imagine a God who sees:
Murder—
and says:
It does not matter.
Oppression:
It does not matter.
Cruelty:
It does not matter.
Abuse:
It does not matter.
That would not be:
Love.
Love takes evil seriously because love takes the person harmed by evil:
Seriously.
If God cares about:
Tears—
then God must care about what produced those:
Tears.

8. The God Who Wipes Away Tears Judges What Causes Them

Chapter 7 ended with God wiping away every:
Tear.
That is:
Compassion.
Chapter 8 now moves toward God's judgment upon:
Evil.
That is:
Justice.
They belong to the same:
God.
The God who wipes away tears also judges what causes:
Them.
That may be one of the most important theological truths to carry with us into the trumpet:
Judgments.
God's judgment does not mean He has ceased to:
Love.
It means evil will not be permitted to have the final:
Word.
God is not some cosmic cop waiting impatiently for someone to make a mistake so He can:
Punish.
He calls.

Warns.
Invites.
Forgives.
Shows:
Mercy.
Calls people to:
Repentance.
But mercy does not mean evil becomes:
Meaningless.
The Loving Father also tells the:
Truth.
Sometimes love says:
This must:
Stop.

9. Judgment Is Not Divine Temper

Notice how long Revelation has taken to reach this:
Moment.
The martyrs have:
Waited.
The saints have:
Prayed.
Heaven itself has been:
Silent.
Nothing about the scene feels:
Impulsive.
The fire does not depict God suddenly losing His:
Temper.
Human anger can be:
Reactive.
Selfish.
Uncontrolled.
Vindictive.
Divine judgment here belongs to God's holy response to:
Evil.
The fire comes from:
The altar.
The saints do not weaponize their:
Prayers.
They do not use prayer as a spiritual method for settling personal:
Scores.
They entrust justice to the God who sees:
Everything.
That is very different.

10. “And Cast It into the Earth”

The angel does not gently:
Place it.
He:
Throws it.
The language gives the scene:
Force.
Something decisive is:
Happening.
The period of silent waiting is:
Ending.
And the destination is:
Earth.
We are about to enter a series of judgments affecting:
Creation.
Earth.
Sea.
Fresh water.
Heavenly lights.
But we should not jump ahead of:
John.
We will encounter those images soon:
Enough.
For now verse 5 brings us to the:
Threshold.
Fire reaches:
Earth.
And immediately the silence:
Shatters.

11. From Silence to Thunder

Verse 1:
Silence.
Verse 5:
Thunder.
The contrast could hardly be:
Greater.
Imagine experiencing the vision with:
John.
For approximately half an hour:
Nothing.
Silence.
Then:
Prayer.

The quiet rising of:
Incense.
And suddenly:
Thunder.
Voices.
Lightning.
Earthquake.
The silence makes the thunder feel even:
Louder.
John has taken us from absolute stillness to overwhelming:
Movement.
Silence.
Prayer.
Fire.
Thunder.
The quiet was not the:
End.
It stood before what came:
Next.

12. Thunder, Voices, and Lightning

We have encountered this imagery:
Before.
Back in Chapter 4, from the throne came:
Lightning.
Voices.
Thunder.
So these are more than dramatic weather:
Effects.
They belong to the imagery surrounding the awesome presence and activity of:
God.
What was associated with the throne now accompanies divine action toward:
Earth.
The same God worshiped in heaven engages human:
History.
The imagery may also remind us of:
Sinai.
Thunder.
Lightning.
Trembling.
The terrifying holiness of God's:
Presence.
We rightly speak of God as:

Father.
Shepherd.
Comforter.
The One who welcomes us through:
Grace.
But the God who welcomes us remains:
Holy.
Majestic.
Awesome.
Grace gives us confidence to approach:
God.
Confidence should never become:
Casualness.

13. “And an Earthquake”

Finally:
The ground moves.
What appeared stable becomes:
Unstable.
The earth itself:
Shakes.
That is an extraordinarily powerful:
Image.
We assume the ground beneath our feet will remain:
Still.
An earthquake destroys that:
Assumption.
What seemed permanent suddenly:
Moves.
Revelation repeatedly does the same thing with the structures human beings trust:
Most.
Empire.
Wealth.
Power.
Security.
Civilization.
They can appear:
Permanent.
Unshakable.
Ultimate.
Then:
God.
John's first hearers lived beneath the enormous shadow of:

Rome.
Rome looked:
Powerful.
Stable.
Permanent.
The Church looked:
Small.
Vulnerable.
Marginal.
But Revelation changes the:
Perspective.
Rome stands upon an earth that can:
Shake.
God sits upon:
The throne.

14. Never Confuse Present Power With Ultimate Power

That lesson reaches far beyond:
Rome.
Every human institution is:
Temporary.
Every government.
Every economy.
Every corporation.
Every civilization.
Everything human eventually:
Passes.
God:
Remains.
The earthquake therefore becomes more than a geological:
Image.
It is a theological:
Statement.
Creation is not:
God.
The structures we build upon creation are not:
Eternal.
Only God is:
God.
That is why Revelation continually redirects our confidence away from what merely appears:
Secure.
The earth:
Shakes.

The throne:
Does not.

15. The Silence Looks Different Now

Look again at the movement of these five:
Verses.
Verse 1:
Silence.
Verse 2:
Waiting angels.
Verse 3:
Incense and prayer.
Verse 4:
Prayer rising.
Verse 5:
Fire.
Thunder.
Voices.
Lightning.
Earthquake.
Now the earlier silence looks:
Different.
While heaven was silent:
God had not disappeared.
While the angels waited:
God had not lost control.
While the saints prayed:
God had not forgotten.
The silence was not:
Nothing.
It stood before:
Action.
Sometimes we judge the story too:
Early.
God has not answered:
Yet—
so we decide He never:
Will.
Nothing has changed:
Yet—
so we decide nothing ever:
Will.
The silence continues:
Today—

so we imagine it must continue:
Forever.
Revelation says:
Keep reading.

16. Do Not Put a Period Where God Has Placed a Comma

Perhaps that is a useful way to:
Say it.
We often declare the story:
Finished—
while God is still:
Writing.
The saints asked:
How long?
There was:
Waiting.
There was:
Silence.
But there was not:
Abandonment.
Waiting for God is easy to preach and difficult to:
Practice.
Especially when the waiting involves:
Pain.
Injustice.
Illness.
Grief.
Someone we:
Love.
Revelation never tells us waiting is:
Easy.
"How long?" is not the language of people enjoying the:
Wait.
It is the language of:
Longing.
You can be tired and still:
Faithful.
You can be confused and still:
Faithful.
You can ask:
How long?—
and still:
Believe.

Weariness does not necessarily mean:
Faithlessness.

17. Waiting Is Not Forever

Verse 5 finally gives us:
Movement.
The censer is:
Filled.
The fire is:
Thrown.
The thunder:
Sounds.
The lightning:
Flashes.
The earth:
Shakes.
God:
Acts.
That does not mean God will always act according to our preferred:
Timetable.
Prayer is not a lever attached to the:
Throne.
We cannot pull hard enough to make God move:
Faster.
Prayer places the longing before:
God.
Then faith:
Waits.
But Revelation also refuses to give evil:
Forever.
Suffering does not get:
Forever.
Oppression does not get:
Forever.
Death itself will not get:
Forever.
God does.
Judgment tells us that God has not surrendered His creation to:
Evil.

18. We Are Approaching the Trumpets

Verse 5 is not the end of the:
Story.
It prepares the next:
Movement.

The seven angels already possess their:
Trumpets.
Now the silence has been:
Broken.
The heavenly signs announce that the vision is moving:
Forward.
Verse 6 will tell us that the angels prepare to:
Blow.
Notice the structure one more:
Time.
Seventh seal.
Silence.
Seven angels receive trumpets.
Prayer.
Fire.
Then:
Trumpets.
Prayer stands right in the:
Middle.
That should not be treated as a minor:
Detail.
The praying Church stands within the unfolding purposes of:
God.
The Church does not control God's:
Plan.
But neither are the prayers, suffering, witness, and endurance of God's people:
Irrelevant.
God:
Hears.

19. Prayer Is Not Powerlessness

From an earthly perspective, the praying churches of Revelation might have looked:
Weak.
No armies.
No imperial:
Authority.
No great political:
Power.
Just Christians:
Praying.
But John gives us heaven's:
Perspective.

Their prayers rise before:
God.
Then:
The earth shakes.
We must be careful with that:
Connection.
This does not mean:
Pray hard enough and earthquakes happen.
Nor does it mean Christians can direct divine judgment toward people they:
Dislike.
God remains:
Sovereign.
Prayer does not give us control over:
God.
It releases our need to be:
God.
We can place the matter before:
Him.
The Judge sees more clearly than:
We do.
And the Judge is also:
The Savior.

20. The Judge Is Also the Savior

Never forget who opened the:
Seal.
The:
Lamb.
The Lamb who was:
Slaughtered.
The Lamb who redeemed people from every tribe and language and people and:
Nation.
The judgment of Revelation belongs to the God who has already acted in Christ to:
Save.
Grace comes before final:
Judgment.
The gospel has been:
Proclaimed.
The Lamb has been:
Slain.
The call to repentance remains:
Open.

Judgment does not reveal a God who was unwilling to:
Save.
The cross reveals precisely the:
Opposite.
Grace says:
You can be forgiven.
Grace does not say:
Nothing matters.
Grace calls us away from:
Sin.
Grace transforms.
And the God who offers that grace remains:
Holy.

21. The Earth Shakes; the Throne Does Not

Perhaps this is where the entire movement of verses 1–5 finally:
Lands.
Heaven becomes:
Silent.
Faith:
Waits.
The saints:
Pray.
God:
Hears.
Fire:
Falls.
Earth:
Shakes.
And through all of it:
God reigns.
Everything around us may:
Shake.
Institutions can:
Shake.
Nations can:
Shake.
Money can:
Shake.
Relationships can:
Shake.
Life itself can:
Shake.
But notice what John never:

Says.
There was an earthquake and the throne:
Moved.
No.
Earth:
Shakes.
God's throne:
Does not.
That distinction is:
Everything.
Faith endures because the throne does not:
Move.

Pastoral Reflection

There is something almost startling about the censer in this:
Verse.
Moments earlier:
Incense.
Prayer.
Worship.
Now:
Fire.
Judgment.
The same altar stands at the center of:
Both.
That tells us something important about the God to whom we:
Pray.
He is not merely a sympathetic listener who hears our pain but is powerless to do anything about:
It.
Nor is He an angry judge who acts without:
Compassion.
He is the God who:
Hears—
and the God who:
Acts.
The God who wipes away tears is also the God who refuses to let what causes those tears reign:
Forever.
That is why divine judgment, difficult as it may be for us to understand, belongs within the biblical story of:
Love.
Love cannot look at evil forever and say:
It doesn't matter.

Love cannot hear the cry of the oppressed forever and say:
Be quiet.
Love cannot wipe away the tear while remaining forever indifferent to what caused:
It.
Eventually:
God acts.
But notice who does not throw the:
Fire.
The:
Saints.
They:
Pray.
God:
Judges.
That distinction may save us from a great deal of:
Bitterness.
When we have been hurt, we can seek what is:
Right.
We can speak:
Truth.
We can establish:
Boundaries.
We can protect:
Others.
We can pursue justice through appropriate:
Means.
But we do not have to carry ultimate judgment in our own:
Hands.
We can say:
God, You saw.
God, You heard.
God, You know.
I place this before:
You.
And then:
Trust.
That may take:
Time.
It may involve:
Tears.
It may require praying the same prayer more times than we can:
Count.

But Revelation assures us that the prayer does not:
Disappear.
The prayers:
Rise.
And when God acts, He acts with knowledge we do not possess, holiness we cannot match, and justice we cannot perfectly:
Administer.
The silence may seem:
Long.
But it is not:
Forever.
The earth may seem:
Unshakable.
But it is:
Not.
God's throne:
Is.

Something Worth Pondering

Revelation 8 began with:
Silence.
Five verses later:
Thunder.
Perhaps that is worth remembering when we find ourselves living somewhere between:
The two.
We prayed.
God heard.
But nothing seems to be:
Happening.
We are still somewhere in the:
Silence.
And silence can tempt us to believe God has:
Forgotten.
But Revelation tells us:
Do not mistake God's silence for God's absence.
Do not mistake God's patience for God's indifference.
Do not mistake God's timing for God's forgetfulness.
The prayer rises before God before the fire ever falls upon the:
Earth.
And perhaps one of the great acts of endurance is trusting God in the space:
Between.
Between:
“How long?”

and:
God's answer.
Between:
Prayer—
and:
Action.
Between:
Silence—
and:
Thunder.
Faith endures because it knows that even when the earth seems immovable, the throne is more permanent than the ground beneath our:
Feet.

Ask Yourself This:

When I have been wronged, do I place the matter before:
God—
or carry it endlessly within:
Myself?
Do I trust God to judge more rightly than:
I can?
Have I mistaken God's patience with evil for:
Indifference?
Can I believe that the God who wipes away tears also cares about what caused:
Them?
When God seems silent, do I assume He has:
Forgotten?
Can I continue praying in the space between:
Request—
and:
Answer?
And when everything around me begins to:
Shake—
do I remember what does:
Not?
The prayers rise.
God hears.
The fire falls.
The earth shakes.
But above it all—
the throne:

Remains.

Revelation 8:6–13 — The First Four Trumpets: Creation Under Judgment

“And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.
The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.
And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.
And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.
And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.
And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabiters of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!”
— Revelation 8:6–13, KJV

The silence has:
Ended.
The prayers have:
Risen.
The fire from the altar has been thrown upon:
The earth.
Thunder has:
Sounded.
Lightning has:
Flashed.
The earth has:
Shaken.

And now the seven angels who have been standing before God with seven trumpets in their hands finally prepare to:
Blow.
What follows is among the most dramatic imagery we have encountered so far in:
Revelation.
Hail.
Fire.
Blood.
A burning mountain.
A blazing star.
Poisoned waters.
Darkened sun.
Darkened moon.
Darkened stars.
And finally an angel flying through the heavens crying:
Woe.
Woe.
Woe.
It would be very easy to approach these verses with one question:
What modern events do these things represent?
But if we begin there, we may miss what John's first hearers would have recognized almost:
Immediately.
Because these images do not first point us toward tomorrow's:
Newspaper.
They point us backward into:
Scripture.
Back toward:
Egypt.
Back toward:
The Exodus.
Back toward:
The prophets.
Back toward:
Creation itself.
And through those familiar biblical images John shows us something far more important than a coded schedule of future:
Catastrophes.
He shows us a creation that belongs to:
God—
a creation wounded by rebellion—
and a God who will not permit rebellion to continue:

Forever.

1. The Seven Angels Finally Prepare to Blow

Verse 6 begins almost:
Quietly.
After everything that happened in verse 5, John simply tells us that the seven angels with the seven trumpets prepare to:
Blow them.
They have been waiting since verse: 2
They received the trumpets.
Then they:
Waited.
While another angel approached the:
Altar.
While incense was:
Offered.
While the prayers of the saints:
Rose.
While fire was taken from the altar and thrown upon:
Earth.
Only now do they prepare to:
Sound.
That sequence matters.
The trumpet judgments do not interrupt the prayers of the:
Saints.
They follow:
Them.
The Church has:
Prayed.
God has:
Heard.
And now the vision moves toward:
Judgment.

2. The Trumpets Sound an Alarm

A trumpet in Scripture is rarely an insignificant:
Sound.
Trumpets gather.
Trumpets warn.
Trumpets announce.
Trumpets call people to:
Attention.
They can signal:
Battle.
They can accompany the presence of:

God.
They can announce that something of enormous importance is about to:
Happen.
At Sinai, trumpet imagery accompanies the terrifying manifestation of God's:
Presence.
At Jericho, trumpets accompany the collapse of what appeared:
Impenetrable.
The prophets use trumpet language to announce:
Warning.
Alarm.
The coming Day of the:
Lord.
So when Revelation gives seven angels seven trumpets, we should hear something deeper than seven consecutive:
Catastrophes.
The trumpet says:
Pay attention.
Wake up.
Something is:
Wrong.
Human rebellion has:
Consequences.
Creation belongs to:
God.
History is moving toward God's:
Purposes.
The world cannot sleep forever through the:
Warning.

3. The First Four Trumpets Belong Together

Before examining the individual trumpets, step back and notice their:
Structure.
The first four affect different realms of the created:
Order.
The first strikes:
Earth.
The second:
Sea.
The third:
Fresh water.
The fourth:
Heavenly lights.
Land.
Sea.

Rivers and springs.
Sun.
Moon.
Stars.
Creation itself becomes the stage upon which judgment is:
Displayed.
The world humanity assumes will always support its life becomes:
Unstable.
Yet creation is not the:
Enemy.
Creation belongs to:
God.
And creation is not:
God.
That distinction would have mattered in an ancient world where elements of creation could themselves become objects of:
Worship.
Sun.
Moon.
Stars.
Sea.
Earth.
Revelation declares:
They are creatures.
God alone is:
Creator.

4. The Echo of Egypt

As the trumpets begin sounding, readers familiar with Scripture would hear echoes of the plagues of:
Egypt.
The first trumpet brings:
Hail.
Fire.
Blood.
The second affects the:
Sea.
The third affects:
Water.
The fourth brings:
Darkness.
These are not exact repetitions of the Exodus:
Plagues.
John is not simply retelling Exodus scene by:

Scene.
But the family resemblance is:
Unmistakable.
And Egypt matters for more than the unusual disasters associated with:
It.
Egypt represented an empire that enslaved God's:
People.
Pharaoh claimed:
Power.
Pharaoh resisted:
God.
Pharaoh repeatedly refused:
Warning.
And God acted to:
Deliver.
The Exodus therefore became a biblical pattern of God's confrontation with oppressive:
Power.
Beneath the plagues stood one enormous theological:
Question.
Who is really:
God?
Pharaoh?
Egypt's gods?
Egypt's military?
Egypt's wealth?
Or the God of:
Israel?
The Exodus answered:
The Lord.
Revelation raises essentially the same question in another imperial:
World.
Who is:
Lord?
Caesar?
Empire?
Military power?
Economic power?
Or:
God and the Lamb?

5. Human Power Is Never Ultimate

Rome looked:
Permanent.

Its armies looked:
Unstoppable.
Its economy stretched across the Mediterranean:
World.
Its emperors possessed enormous:
Authority.
The churches of Asia Minor looked:
Small.
Yet Revelation reverses the apparent balance of:
Power.
Empire is:
Temporary.
God:
Reigns.
That truth matters far beyond ancient:
Rome.
Human power can be:
Impressive.
Institutions can appear:
Permanent.
Economies can appear:
Unshakable.
Civilizations can appear:
Invincible.
Revelation reminds us that none of them is:
God.
Every earthly power exists within creation.
And creation itself belongs to:
The Creator.

6. The Trumpets Also Echo Creation

There is another biblical background running beneath the:
Vision.
Genesis begins with God ordering:
Creation.
Light.
Sky.
Land.
Vegetation.
Sun.
Moon.
Stars.
Sea.
Living creatures.

Life.
Order emerges by God's:
Word.
But in Revelation 8, elements of that created order begin to be:
Struck.
Vegetation.
Sea.
Waters.
Heavenly lights.
It begins to feel almost like a partial:
Unmaking.
A kind of:
De-creation.
Not complete:
Destruction.
That distinction will matter.
But the ordered world begins to come apart at the:
Edges.
The world God made good bears the wounds of a creation alienated from its:
Creator.
Sin has never been merely:
Personal.
Human rebellion damages:
Relationships.
Communities.
Societies.
Nations.
And Scripture presents creation itself as caught within humanity's:
Brokenness.
Revelation expands that reality to a cosmic:
Scale.

7. “A Third”

Then comes one of the most important repeated expressions in the entire:
Passage.
A:
Third.
A third of the trees.
A third of the sea.
A third of the creatures.
A third of the ships.
A third of the waters.
A third of the sun.
A third of the moon.

A third of the stars.
Again and again:
A third.
We should not minimize the severity of:
That.
A third is:
Enormous.
John describes catastrophic:
Judgment.
Creation is deeply:
Affected.
Life is:
Lost.
Human security is:
Shaken.
But a third is not:
Everything.
The judgment has:
Limits.
Boundaries.
Restraint.
Even judgment has a:
Boundary.
The destructive forces do not possess unlimited:
Authority.
They can go:
This far.
Not:
Further.
Judgment is severe.
But it is not uncontrolled:
Chaos.

8. The Limitation Leaves Room for Warning

Why not:
Everything?
If this were the final end, why does so much:
Remain?
As the trumpet sequence develops, Revelation will eventually tell us something deeply:
Tragic.
Even after terrible judgments, people still refuse to:
Repent.
That gives the trumpets the character not merely of punishment but also of:

Warning.
The end has not fully:
Come.
The door has not completely:
Closed.
History:
Continues.
There remains time to:
Respond.
The trumpet says:
Listen.
Wake up.
Turn.
Recognize who is:
God.
We should call that mercy only with:
Care.
Judgment remains:
Judgment.
Suffering is not somehow made:
Pleasant.
But the limitation means history has not yet reached its final:
Conclusion.
The warning can still be:
Heard.

9. The First Trumpet — Earth and Vegetation

The first angel:
Sounds.
Hail and fire mixed with blood are hurled upon:
Earth.
The earth is struck by:
Hail and fire.
A third of the trees are:
Burned.
And the green grass is:
Burned.
The imagery strongly recalls:
Egypt.
But now the scale has expanded into John's great apocalyptic:
Vision.
The earth humanity depends upon for:
Life—
food—

shelter—
resources—
agriculture—
is suddenly shown to be:
Vulnerable.
Human civilization can become enormously:
Sophisticated.
But underneath all of our technology and achievement remains a basic:
Reality.
We depend upon:
Creation.
We require:
Land.
Water.
Air.
Food.
Life.
What we often treat as simply:
There—
is actually:
Gift.

10. The Second Trumpet — The Sea

The second angel:
Sounds.
Something like a great mountain burning with fire is thrown into the:
Sea.
That little word:
Like—
deserves respect.
John tells us what the object was:
Like.
He does not tell us:
It was an asteroid.
He does not tell us:
It was a missile.
He does not tell us:
It was a nuclear explosion.
He gives us visionary:
Imagery.
Something:
Like—
a great mountain burning with fire.
Good interpretation should be willing to stop where John:

Stops.
We do not have to solve the image by forcing it into a modern:
Category.
A third of the sea becomes:
Blood.
A third of its living creatures:
Die.
A third of the ships are:
Destroyed.
Again:
A third.
Severe.
But:
Limited.
And notice that the judgment touches more than:
Nature.
The ships matter.
Ships carried:
Commerce.
Trade.
Wealth.
Goods.
Imperial power.
The human world built upon the sea is struck along with the:
Sea.
What humanity builds depends upon what God:
Made.

11. The Third Trumpet — Wormwood

The third angel:
Sounds.
A great star falls from heaven, blazing like a:
Lamp.
It falls upon a third of the rivers and springs of:
Water.
And the star has a:
Name.
Wormwood.
In biblical imagery, wormwood carries associations with:
Bitterness.
Sorrow.
Judgment.
What should sustain life becomes:
Bitter.

Water—
one of the most basic necessities of human:
Existence—
becomes a source of:
Death.
The horror lies partly in the:
Reversal.
Something intended to sustain life becomes unable to do:
So.
Wormwood has attracted enormous modern:
Speculation.
But John's image already possesses biblical:
Meaning.
We do not need to find a modern Wormwood in tomorrow's:
Headline.
The image is already doing theological:
Work.
God's good creation has become wounded.
The life-giving waters have become:
Bitter.

12. The Fourth Trumpet — The Heavenly Lights

Then the fourth angel:
Sounds.
A third of the:
Sun—
moon—
and stars—
is struck.
Their light is:
Darkened.
A third of the day loses its:
Light.
And likewise the:
Night.
Again the Exodus echo becomes:
Strong.
Darkness once fell over:
Egypt.
Now darkness enters John's trumpet:
Vision.
But there is also another creation echo.
Genesis begins with:
Darkness.

Then God:
Speaks.
Light.
Light becomes one of the foundational realities of God's ordered:
Creation.
Now that light is partially:
Withdrawn.
Again:
De-creation.
Even the heavens are not:
Ultimate.
Sun.
Moon.
Stars.
They may appear permanent.
Ancient cultures might even regard them as:
Divine.
Revelation says:
They are creatures too.
They shine because God allows them to:
Shine.

13. Earth, Sea, Water, Sky

Now step back from the individual images.
Trumpet One:
Earth.
Trumpet Two:
Sea.
Trumpet Three:
Fresh water.
Trumpet Four:
Heavens.
The whole created environment surrounding human life has been:
Touched.
Where will humanity:
Go?
Land?
Struck.
Sea?
Struck.
Fresh water?
Struck.
Sky?
Struck.

The imagery progressively removes the illusion that some corner of creation can become our ultimate:
Refuge.
Creation is:
Good.
Creation is:
Gift.
Creation sustains our:
Lives.
But creation cannot be our:
God.
Only the Creator can:
Be God.

14. Then John Looks Up

After four trumpets, we might expect the fifth angel immediately to:
Sound.
Instead:
Another pause.
John sees an angel flying in:
The midst of heaven.
And the angel:
Cries.
Not whispers.
Not quietly:
Warns.
Cries with a loud:
Voice.
Woe.
Woe.
Woe.
Three times:
Woe.
The repetition is:
Ominous.
Three trumpets remain.
And three woes anticipate what is still:
Coming.
That is almost difficult to:
Imagine.
Earth has burned.
Sea has become blood.
Creatures have died.
Water has become bitter.

The heavens have darkened.
And the angel announces:
There is more.
The vision is:
Intensifying.

15. The Angel Marks a Transition

The first four trumpets primarily affect the created:
Order.
The remaining trumpets will increasingly involve humanity more:
Directly.
The angel therefore becomes a hinge within the trumpet:
Sequence.
Four trumpets have:
Sounded.
Three woes:
Remain.
And the warning is:
Public.
The angel flies in:
The midst of heaven.
The proclamation is imagined as extending broadly across the:
Earth.
It is:
Loud.
Public.
Unavoidable.
The inhabitants of the earth are being:
Warned.
Throughout Revelation that expression often carries more than a merely geographical:
Meaning.
The issue is one of:
Allegiance.
Where does your security:
Rest?
What kingdom defines your:
Life?
What throne receives your:
Worship?
The saints physically live upon:
Earth.
But their ultimate identity belongs before the throne and with:
The Lamb.

16. Revelation Is Not Asking Us to Decode the Newspaper

This may be especially important as the imagery becomes increasingly:
Strange.
A burning mountain.
Wormwood.
Darkened heavenly lights.
Our instinct can be:
What is it?
What modern catastrophe does it:
Predict?
What technology did John somehow:
See?
But Revelation 8:6–13 is not primarily asking:
Can you identify the catastrophe?
It is asking:
Will you hear the warning?
Biblical prophecy certainly speaks about what will:
Come.
But prophecy also calls God's people to faithfulness in the:
Present.
The prophet does not merely say:
Here is tomorrow.
The prophet says:
Because God is Lord of tomorrow, how should you live:
Today?
If studying Revelation produces an elaborate prophetic:
Timeline—
but not greater:
Faithfulness—
we have missed something.
If we can identify every trumpet but refuse to:
Repent—
we have missed something.
If we can debate every symbol but fail to:
Endure—
we have missed something.
Revelation was given to:
Churches.
Real churches.
Struggling churches.
Compromised churches.
Faithful churches.

Suffering churches.
And again and again:
Remain faithful.

17. The Trumpets Speak Both Judgment and Warning

For those suffering beneath evil, the trumpets announce:
Evil is not permanent.
Empire does not last:
Forever.
Oppression does not last:
Forever.
Injustice does not last:
Forever.
Death itself does not last:
Forever.
God will:
Act.
But to the complacent, the same trumpets say:
Judgment is real.
God's patience should not be mistaken for:
Indifference.
Grace should not be mistaken for:
Permission.
Delay should not be mistaken for:
Approval.
The invitation to repentance should be:
Heard.
That is why the repeated:
A third—
matters so much.
Terrible:
Judgment.
But not yet:
Everything.
The story has not reached its final:
Sentence.
The trumpet still:
Sounds.
And as long as the warning sounds:
Listen.

18. The Gifts Cannot Replace the Giver

Perhaps the first four trumpets expose one of humanity's oldest:
Temptations.
We take what God:

Gives—
and eventually forget the God who:
Gave it.
Land.
Water.
Resources.
Commerce.
Light.
Life.
We enjoy:
Creation—
while ignoring the:
Creator.
We enjoy:
Blessing—
while forgetting the One who:
Blesses.
Then the gifts begin to:
Shake.
And suddenly we discover they were never capable of being:
God.
When the earth is unstable—
where will we:
Stand?
When the sea cannot protect—
where will we:
Turn?
When the waters become bitter—
what will sustain:
Us?
When the lights grow dark—
where will we find:
Light?
Revelation's answer remains:
God.
And:
The Lamb.

19. The Lamb Has Not Disappeared

That is essential.
The imagery has become so dramatic that we could easily lose sight of:
Him.
But who opened the seventh:
Seal?

The:
Lamb.
Everything unfolding now proceeds from the seal opened by:
Him.
The Lamb remains at the center of the:
Story.
The Lamb who was:
Slaughtered.
The Lamb who:
Redeemed.
The Lamb who:
Shepherds.
The Lamb who leads His people to springs of living:
Water.
Judgment does not replace the:
Gospel.
Nor does the gospel require us to pretend judgment is not:
Real.
The Lamb:
Saves.
The Lamb:
Judges.
The Lamb:
Shepherds.
The Lamb opens the:
Seals.
These are not different:
Christs.
The same Jesus stands at the center of:
All.
The Judge is not a stranger to:
Suffering.
The Lamb bears the marks of:
Slaughter.
At the center of Christian faith stands the God who entered suffering:
Himself.
Judgment and grace meet in the:
Lamb.

20. The Trumpets Are Meant to Awaken Us

Perhaps the entire movement can be heard as one enormous:
Alarm.
Wake:
Up.

Creation is not:
God.
Empire is not:
God.
Human power is not:
God.
Wealth is not:
God.
The stars are not:
God.
The sea is not:
God.
You are not:
God.
There is:
God.
And there is:
The Lamb.
That is why our first question should not be:
What modern event is this?
Our first questions should be:
What is Revelation showing us about:
God?
Judgment?
Creation?
Repentance?
Faithfulness?
Endurance?
Those questions keep us anchored when the imagery becomes:
Difficult.
Revelation certainly speaks toward the:
Future.
But our task is not to force every symbol into the latest:
Headline.
A burning mountain does not need to become a particular:
Missile.
Wormwood does not need to become a modern:
Disaster.
Darkness does not require a twenty-first-century scientific:
Explanation.
John gives us theological imagery deeply rooted in:
Scripture.
We should hear it there:

First.

21. The Warning Crosses Every Generation

That is one reason Revelation remains so:
Powerful.
Every empire can hear:
You are not:
God.
Every church can hear:
Remain:
Faithful.
Every believer can hear:
Do not build your life upon what can be:
Shaken.
Every sinner can hear:
Turn.
And the Church must hear the warning:
Too.
We should never read Revelation merely as God's message for:
Other people.
The churches themselves are listening to:
Revelation.
Some have already been warned about:
Compromise.
Complacency.
False teaching.
Lovelessness.
Spiritual death.
Judgment should therefore produce:
Humility.
Not:
Arrogance.
Not:
Gloating.
Not endless:
Speculation.
Humility.
The proper response is not:
“I'm glad God is going to get them.”
It is:
“Lord, keep me faithful.”

22. Revelation Calls Us to Endurance, Not Fascination

Fascination with prophecy can be:
Easy.

Endurance is:
Hard.
Charts can be:
Interesting.
Faithfulness can be:
Costly.
Speculation can entertain:
Us.
Following the Lamb may require:
Everything.
John is interested in the:
Latter.
The real question is how we:
Live.
If God is truly:
Lord—
how should we:
Live?
If creation belongs to:
God—
how should we treat:
It?
If judgment is:
Real—
how seriously should we take:
Sin?
If mercy is still:
Offered—
how quickly should we:
Respond?
If the Lamb is victorious—
why would we compromise our allegiance to:
Him?
Revelation is not merely asking:
Can you figure out what happens next?
It is asking:
Will you remain faithful whatever happens next?
That is a very different:
Question.

23. The World Is Shaking, but the Throne Is Not

That truth from verse 5 continues beneath everything that:
Follows.
Earth:

Shakes.
Creation:
Suffers.
Lights:
Darken.
Human systems:
Fail.
But the throne remains:
Occupied.
Faith needs something that cannot be:
Shaken.
If our faith ultimately rests upon:
Health—
health can:
Fail.
Money—
money can:
Disappear.
Relationships—
relationships can:
Change.
Nations—
nations can:
Fall.
Creation itself—
creation can:
Shake.
Faith needs something:
More.
Not:
Panic.
Not:
Prediction.
Not:
Sensationalism.
God.
The:
Creator.
The:
Judge.
The:
Savior.
The One upon the:

Throne.
And the Lamb who stands at the center of the:
Story.

Pastoral Reflection

We spend much of our lives trying to make things:
Secure.
We save:
Money.
Buy:
Insurance.
Maintain:
Homes.
Protect our:
Health.
Plan for:
Retirement.
Build:
Careers.
Prepare for:
Emergencies.
None of those things is necessarily:
Wrong.
In fact, much of it is:
Wise.
But Revelation asks us a deeper:
Question.
What happens when the things we depend upon begin to:
Shake?
The first four trumpets systematically touch the world human beings depend upon for:
Life.
Earth.
Sea.
Water.
Light.
The message is not that creation is:
Evil.
Quite the opposite.
Creation belongs to:
God.
But creation was never intended to replace:
God.
The gift was never intended to become the:

Giver.
And perhaps that is one of the uncomfortable truths these trumpets force us to:
Face.
We can become so comfortable with God's gifts that we forget:
God.
Until something:
Shakes.
Then suddenly we remember how little we truly:
Control.
A diagnosis can:
Shake us.
A death can:
Shake us.
A financial crisis can:
Shake us.
A broken relationship can:
Shake us.
A world event can:
Shake us.
Sometimes it takes only one telephone call to remind us how fragile the life we considered secure really:
Was.
Revelation does not tell us that every hardship is one of these trumpet:
Judgments.
We should never make that:
Mistake.
But Revelation does remind us that everything created is:
Temporary.
Everything created can:
Shake.
Everything created has:
Limits.
Only God is:
God.
And there is another truth hidden within the repeated words:
A third.
The judgment is severe.
But it is:
Bounded.
The story is not:
Over.
The warning is still being:

Given.
The trumpet still says:
Wake up.
That means there is still time to:
Listen.
Still time to:
Turn.
Still time to:
Trust.
Still time to:
Follow the Lamb.
And perhaps that is why these frightening verses ultimately belong within a book about:
Endurance.
The purpose is not to make Christians terrified of:
Tomorrow.
The purpose is to make Christians faithful:
Today.
We do not need to know whether tomorrow contains an asteroid.
We need to know who holds:
Tomorrow.
We do not need to identify Wormwood in a modern:
Headline.
We need to know whether our lives belong to:
The Lamb.
We do not need to calculate when the sun will be:
Darkened.
We need to walk faithfully in the light we have been:
Given.
Because Revelation is not merely asking:
“Can you figure out what happens next?”
It is asking:
“Will you remain faithful whatever happens next?”
And that is a very different:
Question.

Something Worth Pondering

The first four trumpets strike almost everything humanity assumes will always be:
There.
The ground beneath our:
Feet.
The sea beyond the:
Shore.

The water we:
Drink.
The light above our:
Heads.
Things so dependable that we rarely stop to think about:
Them.
Until they are:
Gone.
Perhaps that is part of John's:
Point.
We are very good at turning God's gifts into things we believe we:
Own.
We assume:
Tomorrow.
We assume:
Health.
We assume:
Security.
We assume:
Stability.
We assume the sun will rise because it always:
Has.
Revelation reminds us that none of those things is:
God.
They are:
Gifts.
And gifts should lead us toward gratitude for the:
Giver.
The repeated “a third” reminds us of something else.
Even in judgment:
God sets boundaries.
The world has been:
Struck.
But the world has not yet been:
Ended.
The trumpet still:
Sounds.
The warning can still be:
Heard.
And as long as the warning can be heard, the appropriate response is not:
Speculation.
It is:
Repentance.

Faithfulness.
Endurance.
The trumpets do not invite us to guess tomorrow's headlines.
They summon us to hear today's:
Warning.

Ask Yourself This:

What have I begun treating as permanent that is actually:
Temporary?
Have I placed my security in something created rather than the:
Creator?
When the things around me shake, does my faith shake with:
Them?
Do I read Revelation primarily because I want to know what will:
Happen—
or because I want to know how God calls me to:
Live?
Have I become more interested in identifying the symbols than hearing the:
Warning?
When God gives time to repent, do I mistake His patience for:
Approval?
Do I recognize grace within the fact that the judgment is not yet:
Total?
And if everything I normally depend upon were suddenly:
Shaken—
the earth beneath me—
the resources around me—
the systems supporting me—
even the lights above me—
what would:
Remain?
The throne.
The Lamb.
The God who heard the prayers of His people before a single trumpet:
Sounded.
And perhaps that is why faith can endure even when creation itself begins to:
Shake.
Because faith was never meant to rest upon the things that can be:
Shaken.
Faith rests in:
God.

A Closer Look — Revelation 8:6

"And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound."
— Revelation 8:6, KJV

The vision is ready to move:
Forward.
The angels prepare.
After everything we have just witnessed, that preparation carries enormous:
Weight.
Something is about to:
Change.
The silence of verse 1 has:
Passed.
The seven angels received their trumpets in verse: 2
The incense has been:
Offered.
The prayers of the saints have:
Risen.
The censer has been filled with fire from the:
Altar.
That fire has been thrown upon the:
Earth.
Thunder has:
Sounded.
Voices have been:
Heard.
Lightning has:
Flashed.
The earth has:
Shaken.
And:
Now.
The vision moves:
Forward.

1. The Trumpets Have Been Waiting

We first encountered these seven angels four verses:
Earlier.
They were already standing before:
God.
They had already received their:

Trumpets.
But they did not immediately:
Blow them.
That is easy to:
Miss.
The trumpets have been in their hands since verse: 2
Only now do they come to their:
Lips.
Something happened between receiving the trumpets and preparing to sound:
Them.
Prayer.
John could have moved directly from:
The angels received seven trumpets—
to:
The angels sounded seven trumpets.
But he did:
Not.
Another angel came to the:
Altar.
Incense was offered with the prayers of all the:
Saints.
The smoke rose before:
God.
Fire came from the:
Altar.
Only after all of that do the seven angels prepare to:
Blow.

2. Prayer Stands Between Receiving and Sounding

That placement deserves our:
Attention.
It does not mean the prayers mechanically cause the judgments that:
Follow.
John does not tell us:
That.
The saints do not control God's judgment through:
Prayer.
But literarily, the sequence is impossible to:
Ignore.
Trumpets are:
Given.
Prayer is:
Offered.
God's presence and judgment are:

Manifested.
Then the trumpets are prepared to:
Sound.
Before the warning sounds upon earth:
Heaven has received the prayers of the:
Saints.
That takes us back toward the cry beneath the altar in Chapter: 6
How long?
They were told to rest a little:
Longer.
They:
Waited.
Revelation moved:
Forward.
But they were not:
Forgotten.
Once again:
The altar.
Once again:
The saints.
Once again:
Prayer.
Delay was:
Real.
Forgetfulness was:
Not.

3. The Seven Angels Are Servants

John again refers to:
The seven angels.
These are the same angels introduced in verse: 2
They stand before:
God.
They have received:
Trumpets.
And now they prepare to carry out the task for which those trumpets were:
Given.
That distinction remains:
Important.
The angels possess extraordinary:
Power.
But they are not independent:
Powers.
They stand before:

God.
The trumpets were given to:
Them.
Their authority is:
Derived.
Their task is:
Assigned.
They do not determine the course of:
History.
They serve the One who:
Does.
The imagery may become:
Terrifying.
But it is not:
Chaotic.
Seven angels.
Seven trumpets.
An altar.
A censer.
Incense.
Prayer.
Fire.
Now:
Preparation.
There is order to what John:
Sees.
The universe has not escaped God's:
Control.

4. Having the Trumpet Did Not Mean It Was Time to Blow It

The angels already possess everything they:
Need.
The instruments have been:
Provided.
The servants have been:
Positioned.
The assignment has been:
Given.
Yet they:
Waited.
Possessing the means to do something is not always the same as having the proper moment to:
Do it.

That is a surprisingly practical spiritual lesson hidden within this:
Verse.
We often confuse readiness with immediate:
Action.
If we are ready, we want to:
Go.
If we have the opportunity, we want to:
Take it.
If we think we know what should happen, we want to make it:
Happen.
The angels model something:
Different.
They are:
Ready.
And until the proper moment:
They wait.
Heaven does not run ahead of:
God.
The angels do not decide:
We have waited long enough.
They receive.
They wait.
They prepare.
Then they:
Act.

5. “Prepared Themselves”

Now waiting gives way to:
Preparation.
The seven angels made ready to blow the:
Trumpets.
The phrase suggests deliberate:
Action.
Not:
Panic.
Not:
Confusion.
Not uncontrolled:
The seven angels prepared themselves to sound the:
Preparation.
That matters because of what comes:
Next.
Hail.
Fire.

Blood.
A burning mountain.
Death in the sea.
Bitter water.
Darkness.
If we isolate those images from everything that has preceded them, divine judgment can appear like an uncontrolled explosion of:
Anger.
But John has carefully prepared the:
Scene.
Silence.
Prayer.
Altar.
Fire.
Then:
Preparation.
Nothing feels:
Impulsive.
The saints cried:
How long?
They:
Waited.
Heaven became:
Silent.
Their prayers rose before:
God.
Only then do the angels prepare to:
Sound.
Judgment is presented as:
Solemn.
Measured.
Deliberate.

6. The God Who Judges Has Listened First

That may be one of the most important features of the entire:
Sequence.
Before the first trumpet sounds:
God has listened.
Before creation is struck:
The prayers have risen.
Before judgment descends:
The cries of God's people have stood before His:
Throne.
Revelation refuses to separate God's mercy from God's:

Justice.
The God who hears suffering people is also the God who confronts the evil that causes:
Suffering.
Only a few verses earlier the Lamb was:
Shepherd.
Leading His people toward springs of living:
Water.
God was wiping every tear from their:
Eyes.
Now judgment is about to move through:
Creation.
Those truths must remain:
Together.
If God cares about the:
Tears—
then what causes those tears:
Matters.
If God cares about:
Injustice—
then injustice cannot continue forever without:
Answer.
If God hears the cries of the:
Oppressed—
then oppression cannot be eternally:
Ignored.
The Lamb has not disappeared merely because verse 6 does not mention His:
Name.
Who opened the seventh:
Seal?
The:
Lamb.
The trumpet sequence emerges from the seal He:
Opened.
The Shepherd and the Judge belong to the same:
Story.

7. Trumpets Are Meant to Be Heard

The angels prepare to:
Blow.
A trumpet is designed to be:
Heard.
It is not a subtle:
Instrument.

It:
Announces.
Warns.
Summons.
Interrupts.
Scripture already has a rich language of:
Trumpets.
At Sinai, trumpet sound accompanies the awesome presence of:
God.
The mountain:
Shakes.
The people:
Tremble.
At Jericho, trumpets sound around a city that appears:
Impenetrable.
Then its walls:
Fall.
The prophets use trumpet imagery as:
Warning.
Alarm.
A summons to:
Wake up.
Return to:
God.
That background matters as Revelation's trumpets prepare to:
Sound.
Before they are puzzles to be:
Solved—
they are warnings to be:
Heard.
The first question is not:
What modern event does this represent?
The more fundamental question is:
Will you:
Listen?

8. The Silence Has Ended

Remember how the chapter:
Began.
Silence in heaven for about half an:
Hour.
Now the atmosphere has completely:
Changed.
Silence gave way to:

Prayer.
Prayer gave way to:
Fire.
Fire gave way to:
Thunder.
And now thunder gives way to:
Trumpets.
The silence was never the end of the:
Story.
It was a:
Pause.
Not the:
Conclusion.
We should be careful pastorally with:
That.
Revelation 8 does not give us a formula promising that every season of personal silence will immediately be followed by dramatic visible:
Intervention.
But within John's vision, silence unquestionably precedes:
Action.
Heaven was:
Quiet.
Heaven was not:
Inactive.
From earth, the saints could see:
Suffering.
Waiting.
Loss.
Perhaps:
Silence.
John is allowed to see another:
Perspective.
Their prayers:
Rise.
The altar:
Stands.
The angels:
Wait.
The trumpets are:
Held.
The purposes of God continue moving:
Forward.
Earth is not the whole:

Story.

9. Verse 6 Is a Threshold

The first five verses centered upon:
Silence.
Altar.
Incense.
Prayer.
Fire.
Verse 6 turns us toward:
Trumpets.
It is the doorway between those two:
Scenes.
Behind it:
Preparation.
Ahead of it:
Judgment.
All seven angels prepare.
Not merely the:
First.
All:
Seven.
The entire trumpet sequence stands ready, even though the trumpets will sound one at a:
Time.
From our perspective, events unfold:
Sequentially.
First.
Then:
Second.
One day.
Then:
Another.
One prayer.
Then:
Waiting.
We cannot stand outside time and see the whole:
Story.
But our inability to see what comes next does not mean there is no:
Next.
Our uncertainty is not evidence of divine:
Uncertainty.
We do not know what tomorrow:
Holds.

That does not mean tomorrow lies outside God's:
Hands.

10. The Throne Still Defines Reality

This will matter when the trumpet imagery becomes:
Frightening.
The angels are not rogue:
Agents.
The judgments do not represent independent cosmic forces escaping God's:
Control.
The entire vision remains centered upon the:
Throne.
The throne was occupied in Chapter: 4
The throne remained occupied while the seals were:
Opened.
The throne remained occupied while the saints were:
Sealed.
The throne remained occupied during the:
Silence.
And the throne remains occupied as the trumpets prepare to:
Sound.
The earth may:
Shake.
The throne does:
Not.
Creation may be:
Struck.
God is not:
Threatened.
Empires may:
Fall.
God:
Reigns.
That is why Revelation can be frightening without becoming:
Hopeless.
The terrible imagery exists within a larger:
Reality.
The throne.
The Lamb.
The saints.
The prayers.
The promises.
The final:
Victory.

11. The Church Must Hear the Trumpet Too

It is easy to imagine that warnings are always meant for:
Someone else.
The unbeliever.
The empire.
The persecutor.
The corrupt.
But Revelation was sent to:
Churches.
And some of those churches had already been called to:
Repent.
Ephesus needed to:
Listen.
Pergamum needed to:
Listen.
Thyatira needed to:
Listen.
Sardis needed to:
Listen.
Laodicea certainly needed to:
Listen.
The repeated command was:
Let anyone who has an ear:
Listen.
Now the trumpets are about to:
Sound.
Judgment should therefore produce:
Sobriety.
Humility.
Repentance.
Compassion.
Faithfulness.
Not:
Gloating.
We can read every:
Verse.
Study every:
Symbol.
Compare every:
Timeline.
And still refuse to:
Hear.
Information is not the same thing as:

Transformation.
Revelation is not merely asking us to understand the:
Trumpet.
It is asking us to:
Hear it.

12. Warning Can Be Mercy

The trumpet will be:
Loud.
Warnings sometimes need to:
Be.
Imagine a bridge has collapsed ahead and someone stands in the road shouting:
Stop!
The shouting is not:
Cruel.
The warning is:
Mercy.
A whisper may not wake someone from a burning:
House.
A trumpet:
Might.
Revelation's imagery is severe because the reality it addresses is:
Serious.
Human rebellion is not:
Sustainable.
Creation does not belong to:
Us.
Empire is not:
Eternal.
God will not remain silent:
Forever.
Yet Revelation does not give us a God who delights in:
Destruction.
The judgments belong within a story that has already included:
Patience.
Witness.
Calls to repentance.
The prayers of suffering:
People.
And above all:
The Lamb who was:
Slaughtered.
We need the whole:

Picture.
The God who wipes away:
Tears—
and the God who refuses to allow what produces those tears to reign:
Forever.

13. Christian Readiness Is Faithfulness

The angels are:
Ready.
Soon the trumpets will:
Sound.
But Revelation does not tell the Church:
Calculate precisely when.
It tells the Church:
Remain faithful.
That distinction is:
Essential.
Readiness is not the same as:
Prediction.
Christian readiness means belonging to the:
Lamb.
Worshiping:
God.
Resisting:
Compromise.
Loving:
Faithfully.
Witnessing:
Truthfully.
Enduring:
Patiently.
Repenting when:
Necessary.
Continuing to:
Follow.
We do not need the date to live:
Ready.
We do not need to know when history reaches its:
Conclusion.
We need to know how Christ calls us to live:
Today.

14. What We Trust Determines How We Endure

The first four trumpets will soon touch:
Land.

Sea.
Water.
Light.
Things humanity assumes will simply continue:
Being there.
The trumpets will expose their:
Fragility.
Created things make poor:
Gods.
Everything created has:
Limits.
Everything created can:
Change.
Everything created can:
Shake.
Only the Creator is:
God.
If our ultimate security rests upon things that can be:
Shaken—
then when they shake:
So do we.
But if our security rests in the God whose throne cannot be:
Shaken—
then even in a shaking world, faith can:
Stand.
That takes us back to Chapter: 6
Who is able to:
Stand?
Chapter 7 answered:
Those who belong to:
God.
Those gathered before the:
Throne.
Those shepherded by the:
Lamb.
Standing does not mean avoiding every:
Shaking.
God's people:
Suffer.
Grieve.
Wait.
Cry:
How long?

Endure.
Standing means the shaking does not get the final word over who they:
Are.

15. Before the Trumpets, Remember the Prayer

Verse 6 leaves us standing at the:
Edge.
Seven angels.
Seven trumpets.
All:
Ready.
One verse from now the first angel will:
Blow.
But before we cross that threshold, remember the:
Order.
Before:
Hail—
there was:
Prayer.
Before:
Fire—
there was:
Prayer.
Before the sea is:
Struck—
there was:
Prayer.
Before:
Wormwood—
prayer.
Before:
Darkness—
prayer.
Again, that does not mean Christians control judgment through:
Prayer.
They do:
Not.
It means their suffering has not been excluded from God's:
Concern.
Their cries:
Matter.
Their tears:
Matter.
Their prayers:

Matter.
Their faithfulness:
Matters.
Empires may forget their:
Victims.
History may forget their:
Names.
Persecutors may forget the people they:
Harmed.
The world may move:
On.
God does:
Not.
That is good news for everyone who has ever prayed:
How long?
The answer may not come when we:
Want.
It may not come how we:
Expect.
We may not see its fullness during our earthly:
Lives.
But Revelation insists the prayers do not disappear into:
Nothing.
They rise before:
God.
First:
The prayers.
Now:
The trumpets.
The saints have spoken toward:
Heaven.
Now heaven is about to speak toward:
Earth.
And the first trumpet is about to:
Sound.

Pastoral Reflection

There are seasons in life when it feels as though nothing is:
Happening.
We pray.
We wait.
We pray:
Again.
And still:

Nothing.
At least nothing we can:
See.
Revelation 8 gives us a remarkable picture of what our limited perspective cannot always:
Know.
The angels received their trumpets in verse: 2
But they did not sound them:
Immediately.
Something happened during the:
Waiting.
Prayer rose before:
God.
That does not mean every prayer will produce the visible result we:
Want.
It does not mean God will always act according to our preferred:
Schedule.
It certainly does not mean prayer gives us control over:
God.
But it does mean waiting should never automatically be interpreted as:
Abandonment.
There are times when the only thing we know how to say is:
“Lord, how long?”
There are times when heaven seems:
Silent.
There are times when we wonder whether anything is:
Changing.
And faith sometimes has to live in that:
Space.
Between the prayer and the:
Answer.
Between the promise and the:
Fulfillment.
Between the trumpet being placed into the angel's hand and the moment it is finally raised to the:
Lips.
That space can be:
Hard.
But Revelation reminds us:
Silence is not absence.
Waiting is not abandonment.
Delay is not necessarily forgetfulness.
The angels were:

Waiting.
The saints were:
Praying.
God was:
Listening.
And history was still moving toward His:
Purpose.
Sometimes faith endures until God changes the:
Circumstances.
Sometimes faith endures through circumstances that do not:
Change.
And sometimes faith endures all the way:
Home.
But in every case, faith rests in something greater than what it can presently:
See.
It rests in:
God.

Something Worth Pondering

The seven angels had possessed their trumpets since verse: 2
But possessing the trumpets did not mean it was time to:
Blow them.
They:
Waited.
And perhaps there is something here for those of us who find waiting so:
Difficult.
We often assume that if God intends to act, He should act:
Now.
If God has heard, we should see the:
Answer.
If God cares, circumstances should immediately:
Change.
But Revelation gives us a different:
Picture.
Heaven can be ready while earth is still:
Waiting.
God can be at work before we can see the:
Work.
The story can be moving even when our chapter seems:
Still.
The trumpets have been in their hands since verse 2.
Only now do they come to their:
Lips.
And perhaps the question faith must sometimes ask is not:

“Why hasn't God done something?”
But:
“Can I trust God while I wait for what I cannot yet see?”

Ask Yourself This:

How do I respond when God does not act as quickly as I:
Want?
Do I interpret waiting as:
Abandonment?
Do I interpret silence as:
Absence?
Can I continue praying when I cannot yet see an:
Answer?
Can I remain faithful between God's promise and its:
Fulfillment?
Am I willing to let God determine not only what He will do, but also:
When?
And when the world around me appears completely ordinary, can I remember that there may be more happening than I can:
See?
The saints have:
Prayed.
God has:
Heard.
The angels have:
Waited.
The trumpets are:
Ready.
And now—
the first angel is about to:
Blow.

A Closer Look — Revelation 8:7

“The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.”
— Revelation 8:7, KJV

The preparation is:
Over.
Seven angels have stood ready with seven:
Trumpets.
The prayers of the saints have risen before:
God.
Fire from the altar has been thrown upon the:
Earth.
The angels have prepared to:
Blow.
And now:
The first angel acts.
The first trumpet:
Sounds.
And immediately—
creation is:
Struck.

1. The First Angel Blows His Trumpet

Chapter 8 began remarkably:
Slowly.
Silence.
Waiting.
Incense.
Prayer.
Altar.
Fire.
Thunder.
Lightning.
Earthquake.
Preparation.
But once the trumpets begin, the pace:
Changes.
The first angel blows.
And immediately:
Judgment falls.

That contrast helps us understand the deliberate nature of everything that came:
Before.
Heaven was not slow because heaven was:
Confused.
The angels were not waiting because God could not decide what to:
Do.
The pause belonged to the:
Vision.
Prayer came before:
Judgment.
But now the waiting has:
Ended.
The trumpet that had been:
Given—
held—
prepared—
is finally:
Sounded.

2. The Trumpet Is a Warning

Throughout Scripture, trumpets can announce:
Gathering.
Battle.
Royal presence.
Divine visitation.
Danger.
Judgment.
A trumpet does not quietly suggest:
Something may be happening.
It announces:
Pay attention.
That is worth remembering before we become absorbed in the extraordinary images that:
Follow.
Hail.
Fire.
Blood.
Burning earth.
Burning trees.
Burning grass.
Our first instinct may be to ask:
What exactly are these things?
But before asking what they represent, we should hear what the trumpet:

Does.
It:
Interrupts.
Warns.
Demands:
Attention.
The first trumpet has sounded.
The warning can now be:
Heard.

3. Hail and Fire Take Us Back to Egypt

The first thing John sees is:
Hail.
And for readers steeped in Israel's Scriptures, hail would carry an immediate biblical:
Association.
Egypt.
In the Exodus story, hail falls upon:
Egypt.
But not hail:
Alone.
Fire accompanies the:
Hail.
That makes John's language especially:
Striking.
Hail.
And:
Fire.
Revelation is not simply repeating the Egyptian plagues:
Exactly.
The details are not:
Identical.
The sequence is not:
Identical.
John is not writing:
Exodus II.
But the theological echo is:
Powerful.
The God who confronted Pharaoh remains the God who confronts rebellious:
Power.

4. The Question Behind the Plagues Was Always: Who Is Lord?

Egypt was more than a location on a:

Map.
Egypt represented:
Empire.
Oppression.
A ruler who believed he could resist:
God.
A political order built upon the suffering of God's:
People.
Pharaoh repeatedly heard God's demand and repeatedly answered:
No.
Behind that confrontation stood a fundamental:
Question.
Who is really:
Lord?
Pharaoh?
Egypt's gods?
Egypt's armies?
Egypt's wealth?
Or:
The Lord?
The plagues answered that:
Question.
Now Revelation raises it:
Again.
Who is really:
Lord?
Rome?
Caesar?
Military power?
Economic power?
Empire?
Revelation has answered from the throne room:
Forward.
God:
Is.
And the Lamb:
Reigns.

5. Every Empire Eventually Encounters Its Limits

Egypt did.
Babylon did.
Persia did.
Greece did.
Rome would.

Human beings repeatedly build structures that appear:
Permanent.
History repeatedly demonstrates that they are:
Not.
Revelation places that historical reality inside a theological:
Claim.
Only God's kingdom is ultimately:
Unshakable.
Rome might control:
Roads.
Armies.
Ports.
Markets.
Cities.
But Rome did not own:
Creation.
The earth belongs to:
God.
The first trumpet therefore does more than describe a terrifying:
Event.
It confronts the illusion that human power is:
Ultimate.
It is:
Not.

6. Creation Belongs to the Creator

The hail and fire are hurled toward:
Earth.
The first realm struck is the created world beneath humanity's:
Feet.
That matters.
Human beings often think of creation primarily in terms of its usefulness to:
Us.
Land to:
Cultivate.
Trees to:
Harvest.
Grass for:
Animals.
Resources to:
Consume.
But creation belongs first to:
God.
The Creator remains Lord over what He has:

Made.
Creation is not a self-sustaining reality independent of:
Him.
It exists because God:
Wills.
Sustains.
Orders.
And governs:
It.
The first trumpet confronts humanity with the Creator through the created:
World.

7. “Mixed With Blood”

Then John adds something even more:
Disturbing.
Hail and fire are mixed with:
Blood.
The image is almost impossible to:
Visualize.
Perhaps that is part of its:
Power.
This is visionary:
Language.
It is meant to:
Shock.
Blood carries several associations throughout:
Scripture.
Life.
Sacrifice.
Violence.
Death.
Here, surrounded by judgment imagery, the effect is:
Ominous.
The trumpet does not announce a harmless natural:
Disturbance.
Something deadly is:
Happening.
And once again the Exodus background is:
Near.
Blood belongs prominently to that:
Story.
The Nile became:
Blood.
The waters sustaining Egypt became signs of:

Judgment.
John gathers familiar biblical images into a new and terrifying:
Scene.

8. We Do Not Need to Turn the Images Into Modern Technology

This is where interpreters can become extremely:
Creative.
Perhaps the hail is:
Missiles.
Perhaps the fire is:
Nuclear warfare.
Perhaps the blood represents some chemical:
Phenomenon.
But John does not tell us:
That.
We should not pretend that he:
Did.
Hail.
Fire.
Blood.
Those images already carry enormous biblical and theological:
Weight.
We do not need to drag John into the twenty-first century before his vision can:
Speak.
We need first to enter:
His world.
Exodus gives us the primary:
Background.
Apocalyptic imagery can gather biblical images and combine them in new:
Ways.
The images do not have to correspond exactly to one particular:
Plague.
John's purpose is theological.
The God who confronted Pharaoh still confronts rebellious:
Power.

9. Judgment and Deliverance Can Belong to the Same Event

The Exodus pattern also reminds us of something:
Important.
For Egypt, the plagues meant:
Judgment.

For enslaved Israel, those same events meant approaching:
Deliverance.
The same divine action could therefore be experienced very differently depending upon where someone stood in relation to:
God.
That is difficult.
But it is deeply:
Biblical.
When God judges an oppressor, those suffering beneath oppression may experience that judgment as:
Liberation.
When God defeats evil, those suffering beneath evil experience its defeat as:
Hope.
That matters because Revelation was written to:
Churches.
Some believers knew:
Pressure.
Exclusion.
Persecution.
Antipas had already been:
Killed.
To churches living beneath the shadow of empire, Revelation says:
The powers confronting you are not:
Ultimate.
God has not surrendered His creation to:
Them.

10. Prayer Rose; Judgment Falls

John tells us that the hail, fire, and blood were:
Hurled—
to the earth.
The language is:
Forceful.
And we have seen this direction before.
Only a few verses earlier:
Prayer rose.
From earth toward:
Heaven.
Then fire from the altar moved:
Down.
From heaven toward:
Earth.
Now the first trumpet continues that downward:
Movement.

Again, we should not turn this into a mechanical:
Formula.
The saints do not control God through their:
Prayers.
But John deliberately places these movements near one:
Another.
The cries of earth have reached:
Heaven.
Now heaven responds toward:
Earth.
The suffering of God's people has not been:
Forgotten.

11. The First Trumpet Begins a Movement Through Creation

Earth is struck:
First.
Then the trumpet sequence will move through:
Sea.
Fresh water.
Heavenly lights.
Earth.
Sea.
Water.
Sky.
The created order becomes the stage upon which judgment is:
Displayed.
Genesis showed God establishing:
Order.
Revelation 8 begins showing elements of that order being:
Wounded.
Not completely:
Destroyed.
But:
Struck.
That is why the language of:
De-creation—
can help us understand the vision.
Creation appears to be coming apart at the:
Edges.
The world humanity assumes will always sustain it begins to show its:
Fragility.

12. “A Third”

Then John gives us an important:
Boundary.
The earth is struck by:
Hail and fire.
A third of the trees are:
Burned.
A third is:
Enormous.
We should not emphasize limitation so strongly that the judgment begins to sound:
Mild.
It is anything but:
Mild.
Imagine one-third of something upon which life depends being:
Destroyed.
The scale is:
Staggering.
John wants us to feel the seriousness of:
Judgment.
But a third is also not:
Everything.
That matters just as:
Much.
A third.
Not:
All.
The judgment is severe.
And the judgment is:
Limited.

13. Even Judgment Has Boundaries

We have seen this principle:
Before.
The riders of the seals were given:
Authority.
The martyrs were told to:
Wait.
The four winds were held back until God's servants were:
Sealed.
Again and again, destructive forces operate within:
Limits.
They do not possess unlimited:
Authority.

Evil does not determine the:
Boundary.
The angels do not determine the:
Boundary.
Chance does not determine the:
Boundary.
The vision remains centered upon the sovereignty of:
God.
Even judgment has:
Limits.
That becomes particularly important because the trumpet judgments are not yet the final:
End.
History:
Continues.
There is still something left to:
Hear.

14. A Warning Means There Is Still Time to Listen

A trumpet sounds because there is someone to:
Hear.
A warning comes because response remains:
Possible.
The judgment is:
Severe.
But the story is not yet:
Finished.
Later in the trumpet sequence, Revelation will describe people who survive and still refuse to:
Repent.
That makes the warning all the more:
Tragic.
The problem will not be that God never:
Warned.
The question will be whether humanity:
Listened.
That takes us back to:
Pharaoh.
Plague after:
Plague.
Warning after:
Warning.
Yet Pharaoh repeatedly hardened his:
Heart.

Signs cannot force:
Repentance.
Consequences may:
Awaken.
Judgment may:
Warn.
But biblical repentance means more than recognizing that something powerful has:
Happened.
It means turning toward:
God.

15. “A Third of the Trees”

John then becomes more:
Specific.
Trees are:
Burned.
Trees are among creation's most visible signs of:
Life.
They provide:
Shade.
Fruit.
Wood.
Habitat.
Beauty.
And in an agrarian world they could carry substantial economic:
Value.
The first trumpet therefore does not merely create a frightening spectacle in the:
Sky.
It strikes something upon which human beings:
Depend.
That dependence is easy to:
Forget.
Modern technology can make us feel almost:
Independent.
Turn a faucet:
Water.
Flip a switch:
Light.
Visit a store:
Food.
Adjust a thermostat:
Comfort.

But beneath every technological system remain:
Land.
Water.
Energy.
Plants.
Animals.
Minerals.
Climate.
Creation.
Human ingenuity rearranges what God has:
Made.
It does not create existence from:
Nothing.
We remain:
Creatures.
That is not an:
Insult.
It is simply:
True.

16. “And All Green Grass”

Then the wording:
Changes.
A third of the trees.
But:
All green grass.
John could have said:
A third of the grass.
He does:
Not.
The imagery intensifies within the first trumpet:
Itself.
And we should resist the temptation to turn this into agricultural:
Arithmetic.
Apocalyptic imagery does not always function like an engineering:
Diagram.
John can place limited judgment and devastating scope beside one:
Another.
A third of the trees.
All green grass.
The point is not to calculate the exact percentage of vegetation that:
Remains.
The point is:
The land has been terribly:

Struck.
Creation is:
Wounded.
Human security is:
Threatened.
And yet the final end has not:
Come.

17. Created Things Cannot Carry Ultimate Trust

Grass seems:
Ordinary.
Trees seem:
Stable.
Earth seems:
Permanent.
We rarely wake up wondering whether the ground beneath our feet will still be there:
Tomorrow.
The first trumpet takes things humanity regards as dependable and exposes their:
Fragility.
That does not mean creation is:
Evil.
Genesis calls creation:
Good.
Revelation will eventually move toward creation being made:
New.
God's final purpose is not to discard His:
Creation.
The biblical story moves toward:
Renewal.
New heaven.
New earth.
God dwelling with His:
People.
So Chapter 8 must ultimately be read within the larger biblical:
Story.
Judgment is not God's hatred of:
Creation.
The Creator judges a world wounded by rebellion on the way toward the final defeat of evil and renewal of:
All things.
Creation is:
Good.

But creation cannot bear the weight of being:
God.

18. Not Every Disaster Is Ours to Interpret

This is an especially important pastoral:
Boundary.
Revelation 8:7 portrays catastrophic judgment within John's:
Vision.
That does not give Christians permission to identify every earthly catastrophe as a specific act of divine:
Judgment.
If someone's farm burns:
Down—
we are not authorized to announce:
God judged that person.
If wildfire destroys a:
Community—
we are not authorized to declare:
This is Revelation 8:7.
We do not possess access to God's private:
Counsel.
And Scripture itself warns us against simplistic equations between personal tragedy and personal:
Guilt.
When suffering occurs, our first response should not ordinarily be:
Speculation.
It should be:
Compassion.
Prayer.
Help.
Presence.
And:
Humility.
Revelation gives us a theological vision.
It does not appoint us interpreters of every other person's:
Suffering.

19. Judgment Should Turn Us Inward Before We Point Outward

The trumpet should not first make us ask:
Who is God going to:
Punish?
It should make us ask:
Where is my:

Allegiance?
What am I:
Trusting?
Where do I need to:
Repent?
Remember the seven:
Churches.
Some were:
Faithful.
Some:
Compromised.
Some:
Comfortable.
Some spiritually:
Dying.
Some tolerated what Christ:
Condemned.
Some had grown:
Lukewarm.
Revelation's warnings were never intended merely for people outside the church:
Walls.
The world must:
Listen.
Empire must:
Listen.
The Church must:
Listen.
We must:
Listen.
Grace is not divine:
Indifference.
God's patience should never be mistaken for God's:
Approval.

20. The Warning Is Severe Because the Matter Is Serious

There is a sense in which the first trumpet is both:
Terrible—
and:
Merciful.
Terrible because:
Judgment falls.
Merciful because:
The final end has not yet come.

The warning can still be:
Heard.
The trumpet itself is a form of:
Communication.
God is still:
Speaking.
Imagine someone standing before a collapsed bridge shouting:
Stop!
The warning may be:
Loud.
Disturbing.
Urgent.
But silence would be less:
Merciful.
The trumpet says:
Listen.
Turn.
The world has not yet reached its final:
End.
There is still time to:
Respond.

21. Fear Alone Cannot Create Faith

Yet judgment alone cannot force:
Repentance.
Pharaoh demonstrates:
That.
A person can witness extraordinary things and still refuse to:
Yield.
Fear may awaken:
Attention.
Consequences may expose:
Reality.
But faith is more than terror of:
Punishment.
Faith:
Trusts God.
Faith:
Follows the Lamb.
That is why Revelation keeps the Lamb before:
Us.
Before the trumpets came:
The Lamb.
The slaughtered:

Lamb.
The redeeming:
Lamb.
The shepherding:
Lamb.
The Lamb who leads His people toward living:
Water.
The One who warns is also the One who:
Saves.
The call is not merely:
Run from judgment.
It is:
Come to God.
Follow the:
Lamb.

22. Awake, Not Afraid

The first trumpet does not call the Church to:
Panic.
It calls the Church to:
Listen.
Panic asks:
How can I control what is coming?
Faith asks:
Whom can I trust?
The earth can be:
Struck.
Trees can:
Burn.
Grass can:
Disappear.
But the throne remains:
Occupied.
Most of us may never stand beneath apocalyptic hail mixed with:
Fire.
But every one of us eventually experiences something we thought secure becoming:
Uncertain.
Health.
Employment.
Finances.
Relationships.
Plans.
Life itself.

Created things cannot carry the weight of ultimate:
Trust.
They were never designed:
To.
We can:
Enjoy them.
Steward them.
Care for them.
Thank God for them.
But we cannot ask them to be:
God.
Everything created is:
Gift.
And every gift should ultimately direct our gratitude toward the:
Giver.

23. The First Trumpet Has Sounded

There is no returning to the silence of verse: 1
The movement has:
Begun.
The first warning has been:
Given.
Creation has been:
Struck.
And three more trumpets will soon move through the created:
Order.
Earth.
Then:
Sea.
Then:
Water.
Then:
Sky.
But the central question is not whether the trumpet is loud:
Enough.
It:
Is.
The question is whether anyone will:
Listen.
Because the trumpet does not invite us merely to predict what happens:
Next.
It calls us to consider how we will live:
Now.

Pastoral Reflection

There is something unsettling about watching ordinary things become:
Unreliable.
The earth beneath our:
Feet.
The trees around our:
Homes.
The grass growing beneath those:
Trees.
We hardly think about these things because they seem so:
Ordinary.
So:
Dependable.
So:
Permanent.
Until they are:
Not.
And perhaps that is part of the power of the first:
Trumpet.
John begins not in some distant corner of the universe but with the world beneath humanity's:
Feet.
The first trumpet reminds us that we are:
Creatures.
We depend upon things we did not:
Create.
Soil.
Water.
Air.
Sunlight.
Plants.
Life.
And beneath all of those things, whether we acknowledge Him or not, we depend upon:
God.
There is humility in recognizing:
That.
Human beings are remarkably:
Capable.
We have built:
Cities.
Crossed:
Oceans.

Split the:
Atom.
Walked upon the:
Moon.
Built machines capable of calculations that once seemed:
Impossible.
And yet none of those accomplishments changes one fundamental:
Truth.
We remain:
Creatures.
We cannot make ourselves:
God.
Revelation 8:7 strips away the illusion that created things can provide ultimate:
Security.
That does not mean we should fear:
Creation.
It means we should receive creation as:
Gift.
Care for it as:
Stewards.
Enjoy it with:
Gratitude.
But never confuse the gift with the:
Giver.
And when the things we thought secure begin to:
Shake—
faith does not have to pretend that the shaking does not:
Hurt.
Faith does not have to call loss:
Pleasant.
Faith does not have to smile while everything:
Burns.
Faith simply remembers where ultimate security was supposed to be:
All along.
Not in the:
Earth.
Not in the:
Trees.
Not in the:
Grass.
Not in the:
Empire.

Not in the:
Economy.
Not even in our ability to understand what happens:
Next.
But in:
God.
The first trumpet is:
Frightening.
It is supposed to:
Be.
Warnings are supposed to get our:
Attention.
But the warning comes before the final:
End.
And therefore even this terrible trumpet still says:
Listen.
Turn.
Remember who is:
God.
Follow the:
Lamb.

Something Worth Pondering

Pharaoh probably believed Egypt was:
Secure.
Rome certainly believed Rome was:
Powerful.
Every empire eventually begins to believe its own version of:
Forever.
And every human being can do something remarkably:
Similar.
We assume tomorrow because we had:
Today.
We assume health because we are healthy:
Now.
We assume security because nothing has shaken us:
Lately.
We assume permanence because change has not yet:
Come.
Then something:
Happens.
And suddenly we discover that what we thought was permanent was actually:
Gift.
The first trumpet does not tell us to live:

Afraid.
It tells us to live:
Awake.
There is a tremendous:
Difference.
Fear says:
Everything might disappear.
Faith says:
Even if everything changes, God remains.
The earth can be:
Shaken.
The trees can be:
Burned.
The grass can:
Disappear.
Empires can:
Fall.
But none of those things sits upon the:
Throne.
Only:
God.
And perhaps that is why Revelation can describe a world being shaken without asking the Church to:
Panic.
The Church already knows where its security:
Lives.

Ask Yourself This:

What created thing have I begun trusting as though it were:
Permanent?
My health?
My money?
My career?
My home?
My country?
My plans?
My ability to remain in:
Control?
Do I receive creation as a gift from:
God—
or have I quietly begun treating the gift as though it were the:
Giver?

When something I depend upon is shaken, where does my heart immediately:
Turn?
Toward:
Fear?
Toward:
Control?
Toward:
Anger?
Or toward:
God?
When I see another person suffering, am I tempted to:
Explain—
when I should first:
Love?
And when Revelation's trumpet sounds, am I more interested in figuring out what catastrophe it might:
Predict—
or in hearing what God is saying to me:
Now?
The first trumpet has:
Sounded.
The earth has been:
Struck.
The warning has been:
Given.
And still—
before the final end—
there is time to:
Listen.
Turn.
Trust.
And follow the:
Lamb.

A Closer Look — Revelation 8:8

“And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood;”
— Revelation 8:8, KJV

The first trumpet has:
Sounded.
The earth has been:
Struck.
Hail and fire mixed with blood have been hurled upon the:
Earth.
Trees have:
Burned.
Green grass has:
Burned.
And now the vision moves almost immediately to the:
Second angel.
There is very little time to:
Recover.
The trumpets are beginning to sound one after:
Another.
The first struck the:
Land.
The second turns toward the:
Sea.
Later the third will strike the:
Fresh waters.
And the fourth will strike the:
Heavens.
Earth.
Sea.
Rivers and springs.
Sun, moon, and stars.
Creation itself is becoming the stage upon which judgment is:
Revealed.

1. The Second Trumpet Sounds

Again the trumpet:
Sounds.
Again the warning is:
Given.

Again heaven speaks toward:
Earth.
The first trumpet was not an isolated:
Event.
The warning:
Continues.
Within John's vision, there is a clear literary:
Progression.
First trumpet.
Then:
Second.
The judgments:
Accumulate.
The created order is progressively:
Affected.
One trumpet has not brought history to its final:
Conclusion.
Another sounds.
And there will be:
More.
The repeated trumpets themselves tell us:
Listen.
God is still:
Speaking.

2. The Judgment Moves to the Sea

For John's first readers, the sea was far more than a beautiful place for:
Recreation.
The Mediterranean was central to:
Life.
Commerce.
Travel.
Military movement.
Communication.
Food.
Trade.
Empire.
Ships carried:
Grain.
Goods.
Soldiers.
Officials.
Messages.
Luxury items.

People.
Wealth.
The sea was one of the great highways of the Roman:
World.
So when Revelation turns toward the sea, the vision touches something economically and politically:
Significant.
Strike the sea—
and human life feels the:
Consequences.
But the sea carries an even deeper biblical:
Meaning.

3. The Sea Is Powerful, but God Rules It

Throughout Scripture, the sea can evoke:
Danger.
Chaos.
Threat.
For ancient people without modern navigation, weather forecasting, or rescue technology, the sea could be terrifyingly:
Uncontrollable.
Human beings might sail upon:
It.
But they could never truly:
Master it.
Yet Scripture repeatedly insists:
God can.
God sets the sea's:
Boundaries.
God makes a path through the:
Sea.
God stills the:
Sea.
What appears chaotic to humanity is never beyond the authority of the:
Creator.
Revelation has already given us a beautiful picture of:
That.
Before the throne in Chapter 4, John saw something like a sea of:
Glass.
What humanity experiences as turbulent and uncontrollable appears before God's throne as:
Still.
The throne is not threatened by:
Chaos.

Now that same realm becomes the setting for:
Judgment.

4. “Something Like”

Then John gives us two extremely important:
Words.
Something:
Like.
We should underline those words in our:
Thinking.
John does not say:
A great mountain was thrown into the sea.
He says:
Something like a great mountain.
That matters.
John is describing a:
Vision.
He sees something for which ordinary language may not be entirely:
Adequate.
So he uses:
Comparison.
It was:
Like.
Something resembling.
Something appearing as.
Something best described as:
A great mountain.
John knows what a mountain:
Is.
Yet he does not simply call what he sees a:
Mountain.
He tells us it was:
Like one.
That should make interpreters:
Cautious.

5. When John Says “Like,” We Should Be Careful About Saying “Obviously”

This may be one of the healthiest interpretive disciplines we can carry through:
Revelation.
John says:
Something like a great mountain.
And interpreters sometimes answer:

Obviously, that means an asteroid.
Or:
Obviously, John saw a nuclear weapon.
Or:
Obviously, this represents a volcano.
But John's:
Like—
should restrain our:
Obviously.
John has given us what he wants us to:
Have.
Something like:
A great mountain.
Burning with:
Fire.
Thrown into:
The sea.
We do not need to improve his:
Description.
We certainly do not need to turn possibility into:
Certainty.
Sometimes faithful interpretation must be humble enough to say:
We do not know exactly what John:
Saw.
And that is:
All right.

6. A Great Mountain

A mountain is an extraordinary image because mountains appear:
Permanent.
Massive.
Stable.
Immovable.
Generations come and:
Go.
Civilizations rise and:
Fall.
But the mountain:
Remains.
Throughout Scripture, mountains can also carry associations with:
Strength.
Power.
Kingdoms.
Permanence.

So the image of something like a great mountain being moved is inherently:
Dramatic.
Because this mountain-like object is not:
Standing.
It is being:
Thrown.
Something apparently enormous and immovable is suddenly:
Moving.
What appears permanent becomes:
Unstable.
Revelation continues shaking the things humanity assumes cannot be:
Shaken.

7. Only God Is Truly Unshakable

Earth can:
Shake.
Mountains can:
Move.
Empires can:
Fall.
Creation itself can be:
Wounded.
But God remains:
God.
John emphasizes the scale of what he:
Sees.
Not merely something like a:
Mountain.
Something like a:
Great mountain.
Whatever it is, the image is intentionally:
Overwhelming.
Apocalyptic imagery has a way of correcting our sense of:
Scale.
Human beings have a remarkable ability to imagine ourselves:
Large.
Important.
Powerful.
In control.
Then Revelation gives us:
Thrones.
Angels.
Multitudes.
Stars.

Mountains.
Seas.
Cosmic judgment.
And suddenly we remember:
We are creatures.
But small does not mean:
Insignificant.
The God before whom mountains can be thrown is also the God before whom the prayers of ordinary saints:
Rise.
Majesty does not make God:
Distant.
Power does not make God:
Indifferent.

8. “Burning With Fire”

The mountain-like object is:
Burning.
Again:
Fire.
Fire appeared in the first:
Trumpet.
Before that, fire came from the:
Altar.
And now fire accompanies the second trumpet's:
Judgment.
In biblical imagery, fire can accompany:
Divine presence.
Holiness.
Purification.
Testing.
Judgment.
Here the context emphasizes:
Judgment.
Something enormous is:
Burning.
And it is about to enter the:
Sea.
We should allow the image to affect us before rushing to:
Explain it.
Imagine what John:
Sees.
A vast body of:
Water.

Something enormous.
Mountain-like.
Burning.
Hurled toward:
It.
John wants us to:
See.
Hear.
Feel.
The scale.
The danger.
The judgment.
Interpretation should help us understand the image.
It should not drain the image of its:
Power.

9. The Mountain May Carry Biblical Resonance Without Becoming a Code

There may be an Old Testament echo behind the mountain:
Imagery.
The prophets sometimes use mountains in connection with kingdoms and:
Powers.
That makes such associations worth:
Considering.
But John does not say:
This mountain is Babylon.
So neither should:
We.
The image may carry several associations at:
Once.
Size.
Power.
Permanence.
Kingdom.
Catastrophe.
Judgment.
That is one of the strengths of apocalyptic:
Imagery.
Symbols can be richer than a one-to-one:
Code.
A great burning mountain is not merely:
Information.
It is:
Vision.

Theology.
Warning.
Imagination.
We can acknowledge the biblical resonance without turning possibility into:
Certainty.

10. “Was Thrown”

Again John uses forceful:
Language.
The mountain-like object does not gently descend into the:
Sea.
It is:
Thrown.
And that tells us something important about:
Scale.
The object is:
Great.
Mountain-like.
Burning.
Enormous.
Yet it can still be:
Thrown.
What appears overwhelming to humanity is not overwhelming to:
God.
A mountain is enormous to:
Us.
But creation remains:
Creation.
The Creator and creation do not exist on the same:
Level.
That distinction runs throughout:
Revelation.
Great cities.
Great rulers.
Great wealth.
Great armies.
Great mountains.
Human beings are easily impressed by:
Greatness.
Revelation repeatedly asks:
Great compared with:
Whom?
Caesar looks:
Large—

until we see the:
Throne.
Empire looks:
Permanent—
until we see the:
Kingdom.
Death looks:
Final—
until we see the:
Lamb.
A mountain looks:
Immovable—
until it is:
Thrown.

11. “Into the Sea”

The destination is:
The sea.
The first trumpet struck:
Land.
The second enters:
Water.
The vision continues moving through:
Creation.
And once again, human dependence becomes:
Visible.
The Mediterranean world depended heavily upon the:
Sea.
Fishing.
Transportation.
Trade.
Food.
Communication.
Military movement.
Commerce.
The sea carried much of the economic life of the ancient:
World.
So striking the sea does not merely disturb:
Nature.
It threatens human:
Systems.
Strike the sea—
and trade is:
Struck.

Strike the sea—
and food is:
Struck.
Strike the sea—
and transportation is:
Struck.
Strike creation—
and human systems feel the:
Consequences.

12. Human Economies Depend Upon Creation

We sometimes speak about "the economy" as though it were an independent:
Thing.
But every economy ultimately depends upon:
Creation.
Land.
Water.
Energy.
Food.
Materials.
People.
Transportation.
Human commerce cannot float above the created:
World.
Creation is not merely the background against which the important human story:
Occurs.
Creation participates in the biblical:
Drama.
Creation:
Groans.
Suffers.
Is wounded.
Awaits:
Renewal.
The second trumpet exposes something human beings frequently:
Forget.
Our systems may be sophisticated.
Our economies may be enormous.
Our technology may be astonishing.
But beneath them all is a created world we did not:
Make.
And cannot completely:
Control.

13. The Exodus Echo Continues

The sea also carries us back toward:
Exodus.
There God made a path through the:
Sea.
Israel passed:
Through.
Egypt's pursuing power was:
Defeated.
The sea became simultaneously a place of:
Deliverance—
and:
Judgment.
That double meaning fits Revelation:
Well.
For the oppressed:
Deliverance.
For the oppressor:
Judgment.
Revelation was written to churches living beneath the pressure of:
Empire.
The martyrs had cried:
How long?
The faithful knew what it meant to live beneath powers larger than:
Themselves.
Judgment therefore means more than:
Destruction.
It means evil does not get to continue:
Forever.
A God who never confronts evil would not be good news to evil's:
Victims.

14. But Judgment Never Gives Christians Permission to Celebrate Suffering

That distinction is:
Essential.
The promise that evil will not reign forever is:
Hope.
But Christians must never become cheerleaders for:
Destruction.
We do not point toward human suffering and celebrate:
Pain.
Judgment should produce:

Sobriety.
Humility.
Repentance.
Compassion.
Awe before:
God.
The burning mountain is not entertainment.
The sea being struck is not something over which the Church should:
Gloat.
The Church knows too well what suffering:
Costs.
And the Church follows a Lamb who was Himself:
Slaughtered.

15. Mountains Make Poor Gods

One of the strongest themes running through these trumpets is the disruption of what humanity assumes is:
Stable.
Earth.
Vegetation.
Sea.
Water.
Heavenly lights.
Again and again:
What appeared permanent proves:
Fragile.
Revelation is dismantling false:
Security.
Land is:
Good.
Sea is:
Good.
Trade can be:
Good.
Human work can be:
Good.
Material things can be:
Good.
The problem comes when good things become ultimate:
Things.
A gift becomes an idol when it takes the place of the:
Giver.
Security becomes:
God.

Wealth becomes:
God.
Nation becomes:
God.
Career becomes:
God.
Health becomes:
God.
Control becomes:
God.
And idols eventually prove unable to carry the weight placed upon:
Them.
Mountains make poor:
Gods.
Because even mountains can:
Move.

16. Faith Must Be Anchored Deeper Than Permanence

Life eventually teaches us:
Things change.
People:
Change.
Bodies:
Change.
Jobs:
Change.
Circumstances:
Change.
Nations:
Change.
The world:
Changes.
Mountains:
Move.
If faith depends upon everything remaining:
Stable—
then instability will eventually shake that:
Faith.
But biblical faith does not promise:
Nothing will ever change.
It says:
God remains faithful when everything changes.
That is central to the entire journey of:
Revelation.

The churches receiving this book lived in a world where faithfulness could become:
Costly.
Their social position could:
Change.
Their economic security could:
Change.
Their safety could:
Change.
Their lives could:
Change.
John does not promise them an unchanging:
World.
He shows them an unchanging:
God.
That is the difference between mere optimism and Christian:
Hope.
Optimism says:
Things will probably turn out:
Fine.
Christian hope says:
Whatever happens, God remains:
Faithful.

17. Faith Does Not Pretend Catastrophe Is Pleasant

A burning mountain falling into the sea is not:
Pleasant.
Judgment is not:
Pleasant.
Suffering is not:
Pleasant.
Faith does not require us to rename terrible things:
Good.
Faith can say:
This is:
Terrible.
This:
Hurts.
This is:
Loss.
This is:
Grief.
And still:
God is God.

The throne remains behind the:
Trumpets.
We must never allow the catastrophe in the foreground to make us forget the throne in the:
Background.

18. And the Lamb Remains in the Story

The Lamb opened the seventh:
Seal.
The Lamb redeemed a people from every tribe and language and people and:
Nation.
The Lamb shepherds His:
People.
The Lamb leads them toward living:
Water.
He remains central even when the imagery becomes:
Terrifying.
We do not encounter Revelation merely as people who know:
Fear.
We know the:
Lamb.
The One who was:
Slaughtered.
The One who:
Redeems.
The One who:
Shepherds.
The One who:
Saves.
Ultimate power belongs not to:
Caesar.
Not to military:
Force.
Not to economic:
Might.
Not to the burning:
Mountain.
Ultimate authority belongs to the:
Lamb.
And the One who rules bears:
Wounds.
That tells us something about the character of the One who:
Judges.
The Judge is also the:

Redeemer.

19. The Burning Mountain Does Not Get the Last Word

If Revelation ended in Chapter:
8—
we would have:
Fire.
Blood.
Death.
Darkness.
But Revelation does not end:
Here.
The story continues toward:
New creation.
Through judgment—
toward:
Renewal.
Through Babylon's fall—
toward:
New Jerusalem.
Through death—
toward:
Life.
Through tears—
toward the day when God wipes them:
Away.
Judgment matters.
Judgment is:
Real.
Judgment is:
Terrible.
But catastrophe is not the destination of:
Revelation.
God's presence:
Is.
Revelation moves toward the day when God makes all things:
New.
And because the Church knows where the story is going, it can endure the difficult:
Middle.

20. We Do Not Need to Identify the Mountain to Trust God

Perhaps this is one of the most freeing truths in the:

Verse.
We do not have to determine whether the mountain-like object is:
Literal.
Symbolic.
A kingdom.
A catastrophe.
An asteroid.
A volcanic event.
Or something beyond our present:
Understanding.
John himself says:
Something like.
Faith can live with:
Mystery.
We may remain uncertain about the:
Mountain.
We need not remain uncertain about the:
Throne.
We may debate the precise nature of the:
Image.
We need not debate the central theological claim:
God reigns.
A healthy reading of Revelation learns to:
Hold tightly to what the text makes clear.
Hold more loosely what the text leaves mysterious.
Do not turn possibilities into:
Certainties.
Do not build theology upon:
Guesswork.
And do not allow curiosity about symbols to overshadow faithfulness to:
Christ.

21. Mystery Does Not Mean Meaninglessness

We may not know precisely what the mountain-like object:
Is.
But we can understand what the vision:
Does.
It shakes confidence in what appears:
Permanent.
It reveals creation's:
Vulnerability.
It announces divine:
Judgment.
It warns:

Humanity.
It reminds us who ultimately:
Rules.
The sea is not:
God.
The mountain is not:
God.
Empire is not:
God.
Commerce is not:
God.
Our ability to explain everything is not:
God.
God is:
God.
The warning therefore:
Continues.
The final judgment has not yet:
Arrived.
There remains time to:
Hear.
Before the third trumpet sounds, perhaps we should allow the image to remain before us for one more:
Moment.
Something like a great:
Mountain.
Burning with:
Fire.
Thrown into:
The sea.
And perhaps we should hear the question beneath the:
Image.
What do I believe cannot be:
Moved?
Because Revelation's answer is:
Almost everything can.
Except:
God.

Pastoral Reflection

Most of us build our lives around certain assumptions of:
Permanence.
Tomorrow morning the house will still be:
There.

The job will still be:
There.
The people we love will still be:
There.
Our health will still be:
There.
The routines defining our days will still be:
There.
And most of the time those assumptions are perfectly:
Reasonable.
We could hardly function if we awakened every morning expecting everything to:
Disappear.
But somewhere along the way, reasonable expectation can quietly become ultimate:
Trust.
We begin to believe:
This cannot change.
Then life teaches us:
Otherwise.
Sometimes with:
Warning.
Sometimes without:
Warning.
One telephone call.
One doctor's appointment.
One conversation.
One company announcement.
One accident.
One goodbye.
And something we thought was immovable suddenly:
Moves.
That does not mean every disruption in our lives is divine:
Judgment.
We must never make that careless theological:
Leap.
But Revelation 8:8 confronts us with a truth we would often rather:
Avoid.
Created things are not:
Permanent.
Even mountains can:
Move.

And if our faith depends upon everything around us remaining where we put it, sooner or later our faith will be:
Shaken.
Christian faith offers something:
Different.
It does not promise:
Nothing will ever move.
It promises that when everything moves:
God remains.
That is why the Church can:
Endure.
Not because Christians always understand what is:
Happening.
Not because Christians are protected from every:
Loss.
Not because Christians can decode every:
Symbol.
But because beneath everything that can be shaken stands the One who cannot:
Be.
The mountain can:
Move.
The sea can:
Change.
The empire can:
Fall.
The circumstances can:
Collapse.
And still:
God is God.

Something Worth Pondering

John does something wonderfully humble in this:
Verse.
He says:
“Something like a great mountain.”
He does not pretend to know more than he:
Sees.
Perhaps we could learn something from:
That.
Especially when reading:
Revelation.
There are places where Scripture speaks with tremendous:
Clarity.

God reigns.
The Lamb is worthy.
Christ will triumph.
Evil will not have the final word.
God will dwell with His people.
Those truths deserve our:
Confidence.
Then there are images that leave us:
Wondering.
What exactly is the burning:
Mountain?
John says:
Something like.
Perhaps sometimes faithful interpretation needs to be willing to say:
Something like may be:
Enough.
We do not need certainty about every symbol in order to have certainty about:
God.
And perhaps that is true beyond:
Revelation.
We do not understand everything that happens in our own:
Lives.
Sometimes we cannot explain why something moved that we thought was:
Immovable.
Sometimes all we can say is:
I don't understand this.
Faith does not require us to pretend:
Otherwise.
Faith simply knows where to stand when the mountain:
Moves.
Not upon the:
Mountain.
Upon:
God.

Ask Yourself This:

Have I confused something stable with something:
Eternal?
Can I accept that there are parts of Revelation I may not completely:
Understand—
without forcing an explanation the text itself does not:

Give?
If something I have depended upon suddenly:
Moves—
where will I:
Stand?
The mountain is:
Great.
The mountain is:
Burning.
The mountain is:
Thrown.
The sea is:
Struck.
But above it all:
The throne has not moved.
The Lamb has not changed.
And God remains: God.

A Closer Look — Revelation 8:9

“And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.”
— Revelation 8:9, KJV

Verse 8 gave us the:
Event.
Something like a great mountain—
burning with fire—
was thrown into the:
Sea.
Now verse 9 gives us the:
Consequences.
And they are:
Devastating.
Living creatures:
Die.
Ships are:
Destroyed.
The second trumpet strikes both:
Creation—
and the human world built within:
Creation.

1. The Vision Moves From Event to Consequence

The burning mountain was dramatic enough to command our:
Attention.
But Revelation does not allow us merely to stand at a distance and admire the terrifying:
Image.
Something happens because the mountain enters the:
Sea.
There are:
Consequences.
The sea is not an empty:
Stage.
It contains:
Life.
Human beings travel upon:
It.
Commerce moves across:
It.

Livelihoods depend upon:
It.
So when the sea is struck, the effects spread:
Outward.
Living creatures:
Die.
Ships are:
Destroyed.
Creation suffers.
Human civilization suffers.
The two are more closely connected than we sometimes:
Remember.

2. Creation Is Interconnected

Damage one part of creation and other parts may be:
Affected.
Change the water—
and the creatures living within it:
Suffer.
Disrupt the sea—
and human activity upon it is:
Disrupted.
Human beings sometimes speak as though we stand outside:
Nature.
We do:
Not.
We live within:
Creation.
We depend upon:
It.
What happens to the earth can eventually affect:
Us.
What happens to the sea can eventually affect:
Us.
What happens to water can eventually affect:
Us.
We are not spectators standing outside the created:
Order.
We are:
Creatures.

3. “A Third”

There it is:
Again.
A:

Third.
The same boundary we encountered in the first trumpet continues into the:
Second.
A third of the living:
Creatures.
A third of the:
Ships.
The judgment is:
Severe.
But it is:
Limited.
That repeated fraction is too prominent to:
Ignore.
John keeps giving us the same:
Pattern.
A third.
A third.
A third.
Judgment is:
Real.
Judgment is:
Terrible.
But judgment has not yet become:
Total.
Creation is:
Wounded.
Creation is not yet:
Ended.

4. Even the Devastation Has a Boundary

The mountain-like object falls into the sea, but the destruction does not become:
Unlimited.
The vision does not say:
Everything died.
It does not say:
Every ship was destroyed.
It says:
A third.
That boundary belongs to the theological message of these:
Trumpets.
The judgments are not uncontrolled:
Chaos.
The world still exists after the trumpet:

Sounds.
History:
Continues.
More trumpets will:
Sound.
More warnings will be:
Given.
The final end has not yet:
Come.
And because the final end has not yet come, there remains time to:
Hear.
Time to:
Recognize.
Time to:
Repent.
Time to:
Turn.
The warning is severe because the stakes are:
Serious.
But the warning comes before the final:
End.

5. “The Living Creatures in the Sea”

John directs our attention first toward:
Life.
Before:
Ships.
Before:
Commerce.
Before:
Human wealth.
Living:
Creatures.
And now those creatures:
Die.
That should bother:
Us.
The sea creatures are not merely scenery surrounding the human:
Story.
They are part of God's:
Creation.
Part of what God:
Made.
Their death contributes to the tragedy of:

Judgment.
The judgment does not affect only those we might identify as:
Guilty.
Creation itself becomes caught within the consequences of a rebellious:
World.
That is one of the painful biblical realities surrounding:
Sin.
Its consequences rarely remain neatly contained within the person who commits:
It.

6. Sin Rarely Stays Within the Boundaries We Imagine

One person's:
Violence—
can devastate a:
Family.
One person's:
Greed—
can harm a:
Community.
One ruler's:
Ambition—
can send thousands into:
War.
One generation's:
Choices—
can affect generations that:
Follow.
Human rebellion does not occur in some invisible spiritual world separated from physical:
Reality.
We live within:
Creation.
Our actions occur within:
Creation.
And their consequences can spread through:
Creation.
The biblical story has presented humanity and creation as connected from the:
Beginning.
Humanity is formed from the:
Ground.
Placed within:
Creation.

Given responsibility within:
Creation.
When humanity falls, even the ground becomes part of the consequences of that:
Rebellion.
Humanity and creation remain:
Connected.

7. Creation Groans, but Groaning Is Not Its Final Destiny

Elsewhere Scripture describes creation as:
Groaning.
Waiting.
Longing for:
Liberation.
That larger biblical hope matters when we read Revelation: 8
The creation that suffers here will not suffer:
Forever.
The creation wounded in Chapter 8 will eventually give way to the new creation of Chapters:
21 and 22.
That does not make the suffering here:
Unimportant.
It makes the suffering:
Temporary.
The death of living creatures is:
Real.
The wounded sea is:
Real.
But neither represents creation's final:
Destiny.
Revelation does not move toward creation being:
Discarded.
It moves toward:
Renewal.

8. Death Enters the Sea

John's language is painfully:
Direct.
The living creatures:
Died.
He does not soften the:
Image.
Judgment brings:

Death.
And that creates theological:
Tension.
Because Revelation does not ultimately celebrate:
Death.
Death itself will eventually be:
Defeated.
Death is not God's final:
Purpose.
Yet here death appears within the judgments of:
History.
We should not pretend that tension is:
Easy.
Nor should we make death sound:
Pleasant.
It is:
Not.
The death of living creatures is:
Loss.
And loss should make us:
Sober.

9. Apocalyptic Judgment Is Not Entertainment

Revelation can sometimes be approached almost like a disaster:
Movie.
What happens:
Next?
How much worse does it:
Get?
What spectacular catastrophe follows:
This one?
But John is not writing:
Entertainment.
He is issuing:
Warning.
If judgment excites us more than it humbles us, something has gone wrong in our:
Reading.
The proper response is not:
Glee.
It is:
Awe.
Repentance.
Humility.

Faithfulness.
Compassion.
The Church should never become emotionally invested in watching others:
Suffer.
Especially because at the center of this book stands One who was Himself:
Slaughtered.

10. Remember the Lamb

We cannot separate Revelation's judgment from the:
Lamb.
The One through whom God's victory comes bears the marks of:
Sacrifice.
The Lamb was:
Slaughtered.
The Lamb:
Redeems.
The Lamb:
Shepherds.
The Lamb will:
Triumph.
That should shape the spirit in which Christians read every scene of:
Judgment.
Justice is real.
But so is the:
Cross.
Judgment is real.
But so is:
Grace.
The Judge is not indifferent to:
Suffering.
The One at the center of the story entered suffering:
Himself.
That should keep our reading:
Humble.

11. “And a Third of the Ships”

Now John moves from marine life toward human:
Activity.
Ships.
For the ancient Mediterranean world, ships were:
Essential.
They carried:
Food.
Goods.
People.

Messages.
Soldiers.
Materials.
Luxury products.
Wealth.
The sea connected much of the Roman:
World.
A ship therefore represented far more than a wooden vessel floating upon:
Water.
It could represent:
Livelihood.
Trade.
Transportation.
Commerce.
Imperial reach.
Human enterprise.
So when ships are destroyed, the consequences extend far beyond the point of:
Impact.

12. Behind Every Ship Are People

Behind the ships are:
Sailors.
Merchants.
Workers.
Families.
Communities.
Customers.
People who expected those ships to reach:
Port.
The destruction of commerce therefore creates consequences beyond the loss of:
Property.
Livelihoods are:
Affected.
Food can be:
Affected.
Trade can be:
Affected.
Communities can be:
Affected.
That is another way the vision shows us an interconnected:
World.
The sea is struck.

Creatures:
Die.
Ships are:
Destroyed.
And consequences spread through:
Society.

13. Every Economy Exists Inside Creation

We often speak about:
Markets.
Trade.
Economies.
Supply chains.
As though they were almost:
Abstract.
But every economy depends upon the created:
World.
Food must come from:
Somewhere.
Materials must come from:
Somewhere.
Energy must come from:
Somewhere.
Goods must be:
Transported.
People must be:
Fed.
Commerce cannot float above:
Creation.
It exists within:
Creation.
That is exactly what verse 9:
Shows.
Strike the sea—
and creatures:
Die.
Strike the sea—
and ships are:
Destroyed.
Creation and human civilization are:
Connected.

14. Even Empire Is Dependent

Rome could command:
Armies.

Issue:
Laws.
Collect:
Taxes.
Build:
Roads.
Control:
Territories.
But Rome still depended upon:
Ships.
And the ships depended upon:
The sea.
That is a profound:
Irony.
Empires present themselves as:
Powerful.
Stable.
Independent.
Yet every empire depends upon things it did not:
Create.
Weather.
Water.
Harvests.
Resources.
Health.
People.
Creation.
No ruler creates:
Air.
No empire creates:
Water.
No economy creates:
Life.
Human beings:
Arrange.
Develop.
Build.
Trade.
Govern.
But underneath everything lies a creation we did not bring into:
Existence.

15. Revelation Challenges Human Pretension, Not Human Dignity

That distinction is:
Important.
Scripture gives humanity enormous:
Dignity.
We are made in God's:
Image.
Human creativity is:
Real.
Human achievement is:
Real.
Ancient ships capable of crossing the Mediterranean represented remarkable:
Skill.
So do the accomplishments of every:
Generation.
Revelation does not require us to despise human:
Achievement.
It requires us not to confuse achievement with:
Divinity.
The fact that we can build something does not make us:
Sovereign.
The fact that we can understand something does not mean we completely:
Control it.
The fact that we can cross the sea does not mean we own the:
Sea.
Human beings are:
Remarkable.
Human beings are not:
God.

16. Technology Can Give Us an Illusion of Control

Every generation discovers ways to manage things that once frightened:
Us.
And that is often:
Good.
But management can quietly become an illusion of:
Mastery.
We begin to believe:
We control.
Until something reminds us:
We do not.
The sea has a way of teaching:

Humility.
Human beings can build extraordinary:
Ships.
But the sea remains larger than the:
Ship.
Creation has a way of reminding us of our:
Scale.
And Revelation takes that humility one step:
Further.
Creation itself remains beneath the authority of:
God.
If humanity cannot ultimately master creation, how much less can humanity challenge creation's:
Creator?

17. “Were Destroyed”

The language is:
Final.
The ships are not merely:
Delayed.
Damaged.
Diverted.
They are:
Destroyed.
Something built for movement and commerce is rendered:
Useless.
And every one of those ships was presumably going:
Somewhere.
Every voyage had a:
Destination.
Every cargo had an intended:
Port.
Every merchant had an expected:
Profit.
Every journey had a:
Plan.
Then:
Destruction.
Plans are:
Interrupted.
Destinations are:
Interrupted.
Expectations are:
Interrupted.

The world does not always follow the route we:
Charted.

18. Human Plans Are Always Conditional

We rarely think about:
That.
We say:
Tomorrow I will:
Go.
Next year I will:
Do.
Eventually I will:
Become.
Planning is not:
Wrong.
Responsible living requires:
Planning.
But every plan contains an unspoken:
Condition.
If life:
Allows.
Scripture does not teach us:
Do not plan.
It teaches:
Do not worship the plan.
Plan:
Faithfully.
Work:
Responsibly.
Prepare:
Wisely.
But remember:
You are not God.

19. Sometimes the Ship Does Not Reach the Port

That truth extends far beyond Revelation: 8
We expected the career to go one:
Way.
It went:
Another.
We expected retirement to look one:
Way.
It looked:
Different.
We expected a relationship to:

Last.
It did:
Not.
We expected health to:
Remain.
It:
Changed.
One of the great challenges of endurance comes when the ship we expected to carry us somewhere no longer reaches the:
Port.
Faith can feel relatively easy when the voyage is proceeding according to our:
Plan.
It becomes harder when the voyage is:
Interrupted.
But changed plans do not place us beyond God's:
Reach.
A destroyed plan is not a destroyed:
God.

20. Faith Does Not Require Us to Pretend the Ship Wasn't Lost

That distinction is:
Crucial.
When the ship is destroyed, faith does not say:
There was no:
Ship.
When living creatures die, faith does not say:
Nothing was:
Lost.
When a plan collapses, faith does not say:
It didn't:
Matter.
Loss is:
Loss.
Grief is:
Grief.
Disappointment is:
Disappointment.
Christian faith is not:
Denial.
It tells the:
Truth.
Something was:

Lost.
Something:
Hurt.
Something we hoped for did not:
Happen.
But faith refuses to make the loss the final:
Word.

21. Dependence Can Produce Gratitude

Recognizing our dependence does not have to produce:
Fear.
It can produce:
Gratitude.
Water is:
Gift.
Food is:
Gift.
Transportation is:
Gift.
Health is:
Gift.
Community is:
Gift.
Life is:
Gift.
Creation is:
Gift.
Sometimes we recognize the value of ordinary things only when they are:
Threatened.
Revelation can teach us gratitude before:
Loss.
We do not have to wait until something disappears before recognizing it as:
Gift.
We can thank God:
Now.

22. Creation Is Not Disposable Scenery

The sea creatures matter because creation:
Matters.
Biblical faith does not teach that the physical world is merely disposable packaging surrounding the truly important spiritual:
World.
God made:
Creation.
God called it:

Good.
God's redemptive purpose reaches toward its:
Renewal.
We need not worship:
Nature.
But neither should we:
Despise it.
The alternative to worshiping creation is not abusing:
Creation.
It is worshiping the Creator and receiving creation as His:
Gift.
If the destruction of creation were:
Meaningless—
it would hardly function as such a powerful image of:
Judgment.
The tragedy works because something valuable is being:
Lost.

23. Judgment Is Not Revelation's Destination

We must keep the end of the book in:
View.
Revelation will not end with a wounded:
Sea.
It will move toward the river of the water of:
Life.
Here:
Death in the waters.
Later:
The river of life.
Here:
Creation wounded.
Later:
Creation renewed.
Here:
Ships destroyed.
Later:
Nations walking by God's light.
Revelation is going:
Somewhere.
Judgment is not the final destination of the:
Book.
God dwelling with His people:
Is.
Death:

Gone.
Mourning:
Gone.
Crying:
Gone.
Pain:
Gone.
All things made:
New.
That is why hope can survive verse: 9

24. The Story Is Larger Than the Catastrophe

Verse 9 is:
Terrible.
Creatures:
Die.
Ships are:
Destroyed.
But Christians read Chapter 8 knowing there will be a Chapter: 21
And a Chapter: 22
The catastrophe is not the entire:
Story.
That is true within Revelation.
And sometimes we desperately need to remember it within our own:
Lives.
The catastrophe can feel like the entire:
Story.
But it may be only one:
Chapter.
The sea has been:
Struck.
But Revelation is not:
Finished.
The ship has been:
Destroyed.
But God is not:
Finished.
Death has appeared.
But God is not:
Finished.
Do not put a period where God has placed a:
Comma.

25. Endurance Depends Upon Knowing the Story Continues

Without hope, endurance can become little more than:
Stubbornness.
Christian endurance is:
Different.
It holds on because it trusts that God's story is moving toward:
Redemption.
That does not mean we know exactly what tomorrow will:
Bring.
We do:
Not.
Christian hope is not certainty about:
Circumstances.
It is confidence in:
God.
Faith reads beyond the present:
Verse.
Not because it knows the details of the next:
Verse.
But because it knows who holds the entire:
Story.

26. The Warning Still Calls for Response

Again:
A third.
Not:
Everything.
There is:
Devastation.
But there is also:
Restraint.
The final end has not yet:
Arrived.
That leaves space for:
Response.
The trumpet still:
Warns.
And warning before the final end can itself be understood as:
Mercy.
Not because judgment is:
Pleasant.
It is:

Not.
But because warning says:
Listen while there is still:
Time.
The tragedy will be refusing to:
Listen.

27. Catastrophe Does Not Automatically Produce Repentance

Pharaoh received:
Warnings.
He witnessed extraordinary:
Signs.
And repeatedly:
Resisted.
We sometimes imagine that if something sufficiently dramatic happened, everyone would immediately believe in:
God.
Scripture gives us little reason for such:
Confidence.
People interpret events through what they:
Love.
Fear.
Desire.
And:
Worship.
A sign can awaken one person and harden:
Another.
The deeper question is not merely:
What did you see?
It is:
Will you:
Turn?
The trumpet calls for more than:
Recognition.
It calls for:
Repentance.
Faith.
Allegiance.
Worship.
A changed:
Life.

28. The Churches Were Being Taught Faithfulness, Not Disaster Prediction

The first readers of Revelation were not being trained to become professional predictors of:
Catastrophe.
They were being called to remain faithful to:
Jesus.
In a world filled with competing claims upon their:
Allegiance.
Rome offered:
Order.
Trade.
Roads.
Commerce.
Military protection.
Economic opportunity.
Its sea lanes were part of that imperial:
System.
Revelation does not deny those realities.
It says:
Do not confuse imperial security with ultimate:
Security.
Even the ships can be:
Destroyed.
What empire depends upon can:
Fail.
What humanity builds can:
Break.
What seems secure can:
Disappear.
God's kingdom does not depend upon the survival of any human:
System.

29. The Sea Can Change; the Lamb Does Not

Governments:
Change.
Economies:
Change.
Cultures:
Change.
Technologies:
Change.
The gospel remains:

Gospel.
The sea can:
Change.
The ships can be:
Destroyed.
The Lamb remains:
Worthy.
The economy can:
Collapse.
The throne remains:
Occupied.
Creation can:
Groan.
God's promise remains:
True.
That is where endurance:
Lives.
Not in:
Pretending.
Not in:
Denial.
Not in forced:
Optimism.
But in refusing to believe that death, destruction, or loss gets to write the final:
Sentence.

30. God Gets the Last Word

Death:
Speaks.
Destruction:
Speaks.
Empire:
Speaks.
Loss:
Speaks.
The sea itself seems to:
Speak.
But none of them speaks:
Last.
God:
Does.
Verse 9 is not the end of:
Revelation.

And the painful verse we may be living today is not necessarily the end of our:
Story.
It may contain:
Loss.
Confusion.
Disappointment.
A ship we thought would reach port—
but:
Did not.
Faith does not pretend to know exactly what tomorrow will:
Bring.
It knows something:
Better.
Who holds:
Tomorrow.
Another angel will:
Sound.
Another warning will be:
Given.
But the question remains:
Will humanity:
Listen?
Will the Church:
Listen?
Will:
We?
Because the destruction is not given merely so that we can marvel at its:
Scale.
It reminds us of the seriousness of rebellion and the fragility of everything we are tempted to trust instead of:
God.

Pastoral Reflection

There is something especially painful about this verse because it speaks of two kinds of:
Loss.
Living creatures:
Die.
Human achievements are:
Destroyed.
Creation suffers.
Human plans suffer.
And both are caught within the same:

Scene.
Most of us know what it is like to have some kind of “ship” we expected to reach:
Port.
We had a:
Plan.
We knew where life was:
Going.
We could almost see the:
Destination.
Then something:
Changed.
The job disappeared.
The relationship ended.
The diagnosis came.
The opportunity closed.
Someone we loved died.
The future we imagined suddenly became a future that could no longer:
Exist.
And sometimes the hardest part is not merely losing what we:
Had.
It is losing what we thought we were going to:
Have.
A ship carries more than:
Cargo.
It carries:
Expectation.
Destination.
Possibility.
Future.
When the ship is destroyed, all of those things can seem to sink with:
It.
Revelation does not teach us to look at such loss and say:
It doesn't matter.
It:
Matters.
Verse 9 does not hide the:
Death.
It does not pretend the ships were not:
Destroyed.
Christian faith is not:
Denial.
But Christian faith does say something:

Else.
The ship was never:
God.
The plan was never:
God.
The destination was never:
God.
The future we imagined was never:
God.
And when something we expected to carry us into tomorrow disappears, the God who holds tomorrow remains:
Present.
Sometimes faith endures until God changes the:
Circumstances.
Sometimes faith endures through circumstances that do not:
Change.
And sometimes faith endures all the way:
Home.
That does not make loss:
Easy.
It makes endurance:
Possible.
Because our hope was never finally supposed to rest in whether the ship reached:
Port.
Our hope rests in:
God.

Something Worth Pondering

There is a profound difference between:
Planning for tomorrow—
and:
Believing we own tomorrow.
The ships of Revelation 8:9 were going:
Somewhere.
They carried:
Goods.
People.
Plans.
Destinations.
Then suddenly:
They did not.
That is uncomfortable because every one of us has:
Ships.

Things carrying our hopes toward a future we have:
Imagined.
Some of those ships will reach:
Port.
Some may:
Not.
Wisdom plans the:
Voyage.
Faith remembers who owns the:
Sea.
And when life changes the route—or even destroys the ship—faith does not have to pretend the loss does not:
Hurt.
It simply refuses to believe that the loss has destroyed:
God.
A destroyed plan is not a destroyed:
God.
And sometimes that single truth is enough to help faith endure another:
Day.

Ask Yourself This:

What "ship" am I depending upon to carry me into the future I have Planned?
My:
Career?
My:
Savings?
My:
Health?
My:
Marriage?
My:
Retirement?
My:
Family?
My:
Plans?
Have I wisely prepared for tomorrow—
or have I quietly begun believing that tomorrow belongs to:
Me?
Can I thank God for creation without treating creation as:
God?
Can I acknowledge loss without allowing loss to define the entire:

Story?
If something I planned never reaches its intended:
Port—
can I still trust the One who rules the:
Sea?
And when the things humanity builds are:
Destroyed—
what remains?

A Closer Look — Revelation 8:10

“And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters;”
— Revelation 8:10, KJV

The progression:
Continues.
The first angel sounded.
The:
Earth—
was struck.
The second angel sounded.
The:
Sea—
was struck.
Now the third angel lifts his:
Trumpet.
And the judgment moves:
Again.
This time toward something human beings need directly for:
Life.
Water.
Not the vast salt water of the:
Sea.
But:
Rivers.
Springs.
Fresh:
Water.
The trumpet judgments are moving through:
Creation.
And with every trumpet, something humanity depends upon is revealed to be:
Vulnerable.

1. The Third Angel Sounds

Again there is no indication of:
Hesitation.
The seven angels prepared.
The time came.
The first:

Sounded.
The second:
Sounded.
Now the third:
Sounds.
These are not competing voices delivering unrelated:
Messages.
Together the trumpets form one unfolding:
Warning.
Creation is being:
Shaken.
Human security is being:
Exposed.
Rebellion is being:
Confronted.
And humanity is being called to:
Listen.

2. From the Sea to Fresh Water

The movement is:
Deliberate.
Earth.
Sea.
Now:
Rivers and springs.
The first trumpet affected the land upon which human beings:
Live.
The second affected the sea supporting life, transportation, and:
Commerce.
Now the third reaches toward the water people:
Drink.
That makes this trumpet feel increasingly:
Near.
A person can live without many:
Things.
Water is not one of:
Them.
The judgment is touching one of life's most basic:
Necessities.

3. “And a Great Star”

John sees something:
Great.
Verse 8 gave us something like a great:
Mountain.

Verse 10 gives us a great:
Star.
Again the scale is:
Enormous.
But this time John's attention turns:
Upward.
A star appears in the:
Heavens.
Stars normally appear remarkably:
Stable.
Night after night they remain above:
Us.
Generations live and die beneath the same:
Sky.
Stars therefore easily suggest:
Order.
Stability.
Permanence.
But this star does not remain:
Fixed.
It:
Falls.

4. Another Apparently Stable Thing Moves

The pattern continues.
A mountain can be:
Thrown.
A star can:
Fall.
The earth can:
Burn.
The sea can:
Change.
Things humanity regards as permanent are revealed to be:
Created.
And creation is not:
God.
That does not make creation:
Bad.
It makes creation:
Creation.
The distinction matters.
The created order is:
Good.

Beautiful.
Necessary for life.
But it is not:
Ultimate.
Only the Creator:
Is.

5. “Fell From Heaven”

Again the movement is:
Downward.
Earlier:
The prayers of the saints rose toward:
God.
Then:
Fire came from the altar toward the:
Earth.
Something like a great mountain was thrown into the:
Sea.
Now:
A great star falls from:
Heaven.
Revelation continually brings heaven and earth into the same:
Story.
The prayers of God's people upon earth matter in:
Heaven.
What happens before the throne matters upon:
Earth.
The visible and invisible dimensions of John's vision belong to one:
Reality.
And now something brilliant moves suddenly:
Downward.

6. The Star Falls

John does not say the star gently:
Descends.
It:
Falls.
The word gives the scene:
Movement.
Suddenness.
Something that appeared above is now moving rapidly:
Downward.
Elsewhere in Scripture, falling can carry theological associations such as:
Defeat.
Humiliation.

Judgment.
Loss of position.
But we should be careful not to force every possible meaning into this particular:
Image.
For now, John tells us what he:
Sees.
A great star:
Falls.
And that is enough to move the vision:
Forward.

7. Is This a Literal Star?

That is one of those questions Revelation naturally:
Produces.
If by “star” we mean an astronomical body like our:
Sun—
the image immediately creates physical questions that John is not trying to:
Answer.
John is describing an apocalyptic:
Vision.
His purpose is not to teach:
Astronomy.
He tells us what he:
Saw.
A great:
Star.
Falling from:
Heaven.
Blazing like a:
Lamp.
That is the language of the:
Vision.
We should allow it to remain visionary before forcing it into modern scientific:
Categories.

8. Interpretive Restraint Is Still Our Friend

Some have tried to identify the star as a:
Comet.
Meteor.
Asteroid.
Missile.
Satellite.
Nuclear event.

Historical disaster.
But the text does not make those:
Identifications.
Neither should we pretend that it:
Does.
Verse 11 will give the star a:
Name.
Wormwood.
And that name will take us into the biblical and theological meaning of the:
Vision.
For verse 10, however, we do not need to identify the object more precisely than John:
Does.
Sometimes faithful interpretation means allowing mystery to remain:
Mystery.

9. “Burning as It Were a Lamp”

Again John uses:
Comparison.
The star is blazing:
Like a lamp.
There is that word:
Like.
Just as John previously saw something **like** a great mountain, he now sees a star blazing **like** a:
Lamp.
He is describing:
Appearance.
Imagine the scene.
Dark:
Sky.
Something brilliant.
Burning.
Moving.
Falling.
Fire streaking through the:
Heavens.
John wants us to:
See it.
The object is not a faint point of:
Light.
It:
Blazes.
The image is meant to be:

Overwhelming.

10. Not Every Light Is Comforting

We often associate light with:
Goodness.
Truth.
Hope.
And Scripture frequently uses light in precisely those:
Ways.
But context determines the meaning of an:
Image.
A blazing object falling from heaven is not:
Comforting.
That reminds us of an important interpretive:
Principle.
Fire does not always mean exactly the same:
Thing.
Water does not always mean exactly the same:
Thing.
Stars do not always mean exactly the same:
Thing.
Biblical symbols are not mathematical:
Equations.
Star does not automatically equal:
This.
Fire does not automatically equal:
That.
Images must be read within their:
Context.

11. The Star Has a Destination

The star does not fall:
Randomly.
John tells us where it:
Falls.
Upon a third of the:
Rivers—
and upon the springs of:
Water.
The judgment has moved from salt water to:
Fresh water.
And that matters enormously because rivers and springs are:
Lifelines.
Rivers have supported:
Communities.

Agriculture.
Transportation.
Food.
Commerce.
Life.
Springs provide water close to its:
Source.
Fresh.
Flowing.
Life-sustaining.
John names:
Both.
Rivers.
And:
Springs.
The vision reaches the places from which life-giving water is:
Drawn.

12. The Judgment Reaches the Source

That makes the image particularly:
Powerful.
It is one thing for a container of water to become:
Contaminated.
It is another for the:
Source—
to be affected.
If the spring itself is struck, everything depending upon it can:
Suffer.
Human beings can:
Dig wells.
Build reservoirs.
Construct pipelines.
Install faucets.
Develop treatment systems.
But we do not create the fundamental substance of:
Water.
We receive it from:
Creation.
The trumpet therefore touches something humanity can manage but cannot ultimately:
Create.

13. Modern Convenience Can Hide Ancient Dependence

Turn the:
Faucet.

Water:
Appears.
Because it appears so easily, we can forget everything behind that simple:
Moment.
Source.
Treatment.
Storage.
Pumping.
Distribution.
Infrastructure.
But behind all of it remains:
Water.
Something humanity did not:
Invent.
John's ancient readers would have felt that dependence even more:
Directly.
Reliable fresh water could determine whether a community:
Flourished—
or:
Struggled.
A damaged source could be:
Catastrophic.
The technology changes.
The dependence:
Does not.

14. Water Means Life

Throughout Scripture, water is associated with:
Life.
Provision.
Cleansing.
Refreshment.
Restoration.
That makes corrupted water especially:
Tragic.
And Revelation has already placed another image of water before:
Us.
At the end of Chapter 7, the Lamb leads His people toward springs of the water of:
Life.
Now, only a few verses later, springs of water are:
Struck.
The contrast is:
Sharp.

Living water.
And water touched by:
Judgment.
The Lamb leading toward:
Life.
A fallen star moving toward waters that will become:
Bitter.
But we should allow verse 11 to explain that bitterness when we:
Arrive.

15. The Gift Cannot Replace the Giver

Water is:
Essential.
But water is still:
Created.
That distinction is at the heart of these trumpet:
Judgments.
The first trumpet challenges confidence in the:
Land.
The second challenges confidence in the:
Sea.
The third reaches one of the most fundamental resources of:
Life.
Water.
None of these things is:
Evil.
They are:
Gifts.
But the gift cannot replace the:
Giver.
Water sustains earthly:
Life.
But water is not the source of its own:
Existence.
Creation points beyond itself toward the:
Creator.

16. “A Third”

Again the boundary:
Appears.
A third of the:
Rivers.
Not:
All.
A:

Third.
By now the pattern should sound:
Familiar.
Severe.
But not:
Total.
The falling star does not strike every:
River.
It does not strike every:
Spring.
The judgment operates within a:
Limit.
But restraint does not mean:
Mildness.
Imagine losing a third of the fresh water available to a:
Population.
Partial does not mean:
Insignificant.
The judgment is severe enough to:
Warn.
But the final end has not yet:
Come.

17. The Trumpet Is Still a Warning

A trumpet is meant to be:
Heard.
It says:
Pay attention.
Something is:
Happening.
Something requires:
Response.
The third trumpet is therefore doing more than:
Destroying.
It is:
Warning.
Humanity is again being confronted with the fragility of created:
Security.
The world upon which we depend is not:
Self-sustaining.
Creation depends upon:
God.
And because we depend upon creation, we ultimately depend upon:
God.

18. We Are Dependent Creatures

Human pride often prefers:
Independence.
Self-sufficiency.
Control.
But Scripture repeatedly teaches:
Dependence.
Creaturely dependence is not a defect in human:
Design.
It is part of what it means to be:
Human.
We were never intended to be self-existent:
Beings.
Only God is:
Self-existent.
The problem is not that we:
Depend.
The problem is forgetting upon whom we:
Depend.
Water.
Food.
Breath.
Time.
Life.
Creation.
All:
Gift.

19. Even Necessary Things Cannot Become Ultimate Things

This trumpet makes that truth especially:
Sharp.
Water is genuinely:
Necessary.
Revelation is certainly not saying water is:
Bad.
Water is:
Good.
Water is:
Essential.
But even something essential to earthly life is not:
God.
That principle extends beyond:

Water.
Good things can become ultimate things in our:
Hearts.
Security.
Prosperity.
Technology.
Nation.
Career.
Reputation.
Control.
Anything created can become something we ask to do what only God can:
Do.
The problem is not receiving God's:
Gifts.
The problem is asking the gifts to become:
God.

20. Crisis Often Reveals What We Were Trusting

Sometimes we do not realize how deeply we trust something until it is:
Threatened.
Money—
until it is:
Gone.
Health—
until it:
Changes.
Employment—
until it:
Ends.
A relationship—
until it:
Breaks.
Control—
until we discover we never possessed as much of it as we:
Thought.
The third trumpet exposes:
Dependence.
What happens when the:
River—
cannot be trusted?
What happens when the:
Spring—
cannot be trusted?
Human vulnerability suddenly becomes impossible to:

Ignore.
And that vulnerability points beyond the gift toward the:
Giver.

21. We Often Mistake Normal for Guaranteed

The sun rose:
Yesterday.
So we expect it:
Tomorrow.
Water came from the faucet:
Today.
So we expect it:
Tomorrow.
Our body worked:
Today.
So we expect it:
Tomorrow.
Most of those expectations are perfectly:
Reasonable.
But reasonable expectation is not the same as ultimate:
Guarantee.
We can become so accustomed to God's gifts that we stop recognizing them as:
Gifts.
Gift becomes:
Expectation.
Expectation becomes:
Assumption.
And assumption can become:
Entitlement.
Gratitude interrupts that:
Progression.
Gratitude says:
Today is:
Gift.

22. Warning Can Teach Gratitude

That may seem like a strange lesson to learn from:
Judgment.
But difficult passages can make ordinary blessings newly:
Visible.
Clean water.
Food.
Shelter.
Health.

Another day.
Another conversation.
Another opportunity to:
Love.
We do not have to wait until something disappears before recognizing its:
Value.
Revelation can teach us gratitude before:
Loss.
Not fearful gratitude.
Not:
I had better enjoy this because God may take it away.
But humble gratitude:
I did not create this.
I do not own tomorrow.
Thank You for:
Today.

23. Do Not Let the Spectacle Replace the Message

The falling star naturally attracts our:
Attention.
Great.
Falling.
Blazing.
Like a lamp.
It would be easy to spend all our time asking:
What is it?
But the star is not the theological center of:
Revelation.
God:
Is.
One of the constant dangers in reading this book is becoming fascinated with:
Stars.
Beasts.
Horns.
Numbers.
Trumpets.
Bowls.
And somehow overlooking:
God.
That would be a remarkable way to miss the point of a book called:
Revelation.

24. Revelation Reveals Jesus Christ

The book began by telling us:

That.
Before:
Seals.
Before:
Trumpets.
Before:
Dragons.
Before:
Beasts.
There was:
Jesus Christ.
Everything must ultimately be read in light of:
Him.
The star may:
Fall.
The rivers may be:
Struck.
The waters may become:
Bitter.
But the Lamb remains the One who leads His people toward:
Living water.
That is not incidental.
That is:
Hope.

25. The Present Wound Does Not Cancel the Future Healing

Creation may be:
Wounded.
But God's purpose for creation remains:
Alive.
Water may become:
Bitter.
But the river of life still waits:
Ahead.
Death may appear.
But resurrection remains:
True.
The world is genuinely:
Broken.
Not imaginary.
Not insignificant.
Broken.
But broken is not the same as:

Abandoned.
God has not abandoned what He:
Created.
If He intended merely to discard creation, Revelation would not end with creation made:
New.

26. Hope Does Not Minimize Suffering

We should never rush so quickly toward restoration that we minimize present:
Pain.
The waters struck by this trumpet will bring terrible consequences in the next:
Verse.
This is:
Serious.
Christian hope does not say suffering is:
Unreal.
It says suffering is not:
Final.
Those are very different:
Claims.
Faith can look directly at:
Pain.
Loss.
Brokenness.
And still say:
This does not get the last:
Word.
The third trumpet is not the last:
Word.

27. The River of Life Still Waits Ahead

Eventually John will see:
The river of the water of life.
Bright as:
Crystal.
Flowing from the throne of God and of the:
Lamb.
That is where Revelation's water imagery ultimately:
Ends.
Not in:
Bitterness.
In:
Life.

The waters struck here remind us how dependent earthly life is upon:
Water.
The final vision reveals where life ultimately:
Originates.
The:
Throne.
God.
And the:
Lamb.

28. Faith Lives Between What Is and What Will Be

We are not at Revelation: 22
Not:
Yet.
We still live in a world where creation can be:
Damaged.
Where people:
Suffer.
Where death:
Occurs.
Where things can become:
Bitter.
Christian faith does not deny the world as it:
Is.
It lives between:
What is—
and:
What will be.
That is where endurance becomes:
Necessary.
If everything were already restored, endurance would not be:
Needed.
Faith holds onto what God has promised while living amid what still:
Hurts.

29. Verse 10 Stops Before Wormwood Explains the Bitterness

There is a temptation to move too quickly into the next:
Verse.
We already know the star will be called:
Wormwood.
We know bitterness is:
Coming.
But verse 10 has not taken us there:

Yet.
Verse 10 gives us:
The third angel.
The trumpet.
The great star.
The fall.
The blazing lamp.
The rivers.
The springs.
The third.
That is enough.
Verse 11 will give the star its:
Name.
And with that name, the vision will move more deeply into:
Bitterness.
Judgment.
Consequences.
Death.
We should allow verse 11 to do that work for:
Itself.

30. The Source of Life Has Not Changed

So before moving forward, look once more at the:
Scene.
A great:
Star.
Falling from:
Heaven.
Blazing like a:
Lamp.
Striking rivers and:
Springs.
The sources of earthly life have been:
Touched.
And once again humanity is reminded:
The gift is not the:
Giver.
Rivers can be:
Struck.
Springs can be:
Changed.
Stars can:
Fall.
Creation can be:

Wounded.
But none of those things changes the One from whom all life ultimately:
Comes.
The throne remains:
Occupied.
The Lamb remains:
Present.
And the promise of living water remains:
Ahead.

Pastoral Reflection

There are few things we take more for granted than:
Water.
We turn a:
Handle.
Fill a:
Glass.
Take a:
Shower.
Wash our:
Hands.
Water the:
Garden.
Make:
Coffee.
And rarely do we stop to think:
What an extraordinary:
Gift.
Until it is not:
Available.
Then suddenly almost everything else becomes:
Secondary.
Revelation 8:10 takes something ordinary and makes it:
Vulnerable.
Rivers.
Springs.
Fresh water.
The very sources from which life is:
Sustained.
And perhaps that exposes something about the way we:
Live.
We become accustomed to:
Gift.
Then gift becomes:

Expectation.
Expectation becomes:
Assumption.
And assumption can quietly become:
Entitlement.
We forget to say:
Thank You.
Not only for:
Water.
For:
Life.
For another:
Morning.
For another:
Meal.
For another:
Conversation.
For another opportunity to:
Love.
For another day in which God's mercy has carried us farther than we sometimes:
Realize.
The third trumpet reminds us that creation is not:
Owed to us.
It is:
Gift.
And gifts are best received with:
Gratitude.
There will be time in the next verse to consider what happens when the waters become:
Bitter.
For now, verse 10 leaves us with the vulnerability of the:
Source.
And perhaps that is enough to make us look again at the ordinary things around us and say:
Thank You.
Because the river is:
Gift.
The spring is:
Gift.
The day is:
Gift.
Life is:

Gift.
But none of those gifts is:
God.
And when created things prove fragile, the Creator remains:
Faithful.

Something Worth Pondering

The star in Revelation 8:10 is:
Spectacular.
A great:
Star.
Falling from:
Heaven.
Blazing like a:
Lamp.
It would be easy to spend all our time trying to identify:
It.
Asteroid?
Comet?
Meteor?
Something:
Else?
But perhaps we could correctly identify the object and still miss the:
Message.
The star falls upon the sources of:
Water.
And suddenly humanity discovers how dependent it:
Is.
Sometimes the things that shake us most deeply are the things that reveal what we had quietly begun taking for:
Granted.
The ordinary blessings of life are ordinary only because God has allowed us to experience them so:
Often.
Water.
Food.
Health.
Friendship.
Family.
Work.
Rest.
Another:
Day.
Perhaps gratitude begins when we stop asking:

What am I guaranteed?
And begin asking:
What have I been given?
Because everything created is:
Gift.
And every gift points beyond itself toward the:
Giver.

Ask Yourself This:

What blessing have I received so regularly that I have stopped recognizing it as:
Gift?
What do I assume will simply be there:
Tomorrow?
Health?
Family?
Work?
Home?
Food?
Water?
Time?
Have I allowed:
Expectation—
to become:
Entitlement?

A Closer Look — Revelation 8:11

"And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter."
— Revelation 8:11, KJV

Verse 10 showed us the:
Star.
Great.
Falling from:
Heaven.
Blazing like a:
Lamp.
Striking a third of the rivers and the springs of:
Water.

Now John tells us its:
Name.
Wormwood.
And suddenly the image acquires another layer of:
Meaning.
The star is no longer merely something spectacular falling from the:
Sky.
Its name tells us how we are meant to understand what it:
Produces.
Bitterness.
Judgment.
Consequences.
Death.

1. The Star Has a Name

Names matter in:
Revelation.
Babylon.
Abaddon.
Apollyon.
Faithful and True.
King of kings.
Lord of lords.
Names can:
Identify.
Characterize.
Reveal.
And here:
Wormwood.
John does not tell us the star's astronomical:
Composition.
Orbit.
Size.
Speed.
Point of origin.
He gives us something far more important for understanding the:
Vision.
Its:
Name.
That should guide our:
Interpretation.
Modern curiosity asks:
What physical object is this?
John directs our attention toward another:

Question.
What does this image:
Mean?
And the name takes us directly into the biblical language of:
Bitterness.

2. Wormwood Was Known for Bitterness

Wormwood was associated especially with an intensely bitter:
Taste.
That made it a natural biblical image for things that were:
Bitter.
Painful.
Corrupted.
Judicial.
The significance is therefore not merely:
Botanical.
It is:
Theological.
John did not invent the image from:
Nothing.
Wormwood already carried a biblical:
History.
And John's readers who knew the Scriptures could hear those echoes behind the:
Name.

3. Wormwood Already Had a Biblical Vocabulary

Deuteronomy warns about a heart turning away from:
God.
The imagery includes a poisonous root producing:
Wormwood.
Jeremiah repeatedly uses wormwood in contexts of:
Judgment.
Corruption.
Unfaithfulness.
Consequences.
Lamentations takes the image into deeply personal:
Suffering.
Affliction is remembered as something:
Bitter.
Almost something that can be:
Tasted.
Amos gives the image a moral dimension when justice itself is turned into:
Wormwood.
Something meant to produce righteousness has become:

Bitter.
Taken together, those passages create a biblical vocabulary.
Wormwood speaks of:
Bitterness.
Judgment.
Corruption.
Suffering.
Consequences.
So when John writes:
“The name of the star is Wormwood”—
he is not simply giving a strange name to a mysterious:
Object.
He is drawing upon a world of biblical:
Meaning.

4. The Name Describes the Effect

Wormwood:
Falls.
The waters become:
Wormwood.
The thing named for bitterness produces:
Bitterness.
That is one of the verse's central:
Movements.
The star does not merely possess a:
Name.
Its character spreads into what it:
Touches.
The water becomes what the name:
Represents.
Bitter.
And what once sustained:
Life—
now becomes dangerous to:
Life.

5. Sin Often Advertises Sweetness

That bitter result gives us an important biblical:
Pattern.
Rebellion rarely introduces itself by saying:
I would like to destroy your:
Life.
It says:
This will make you:
Happy.

This will make you:
Free.
This will satisfy:
You.
This will give you what you:
Deserve.
The advertisement is:
Sweet.
The consequences may become:
Bitter.
That pattern is older than:
Revelation.
It reaches back toward:
Eden.
The fruit appeared:
Desirable.
The promise sounded:
Attractive.
Humanity reached for what seemed to offer:
More.
And discovered:
Loss.

6. Wormwood Is the Taste of the Lie Exposed

Rebellion promises:
Freedom—
and can produce:
Bondage.
Fulfillment—
and can leave:
Emptiness.
Control—
and can produce:
Chaos.
Life—
and ultimately moves toward:
Death.
Wormwood exposes the difference between the promise and the:
Result.
What looked:
Desirable—
becomes:
Painful.
What promised:

Life—
produces:
Death.
What seemed:
Sweet—
becomes:
Bitter.
The advertisement disappears.
Reality:
Arrives.

7. “A Third”

And once again:
A third.
By now John has made the refrain impossible to:
Miss.
A third of the trees.
A third of the sea.
A third of the sea creatures.
A third of the ships.
A third of the rivers and springs.
Now:
A third of the waters.
The judgment remains:
Severe.
But not yet:
Total.
The limitation does not make the judgment:
Small.
A third of a vital water supply becoming bitter would be:
Catastrophic.
Partial does not mean:
Minor.
Limited does not mean:
Painless.
But the world has not yet reached its final:
End.
The trumpet still:
Warns.
There is still time to:
Hear.

8. “The Waters Became Wormwood”

Water is:
Gift.

Water sustains:
Life.
Refreshes.
Cleanses.
Nourishes.
But now the gift has become:
Bitter.
That is part of the tragedy of the:
Verse.
There is a difference between losing a gift and having the gift itself become:
Corrupted.
No water would be:
Terrible.
Bitter water is terrible in another:
Way.
The thing remains before:
You.
It looks like what you:
Need.
But it can no longer safely provide what it once:
Provided.

9. Corruption Can Leave the Appearance Intact

That gives Wormwood a powerful biblical:
Resonance.
Corruption does not always make something:
Disappear.
Sometimes the outward form:
Remains.
The institution still:
Exists.
The relationship still:
Exists.
The practice still:
Exists.
The words still:
Exist.
But something within has become:
Bitter.
Amos could speak of justice becoming:
Wormwood.
Justice may still be called:
Justice.
But if it has been corrupted, the name does not make it:

Just.
Religion can still be called:
Religion.
But if truth, mercy, and faithfulness disappear, the name does not make it:
Faithful.
Water may still look like:
Water.
And yet be:
Bitter.

10. Revelation Has Already Warned Us About Appearance and Reality

The seven churches taught us:
That.
Sardis had a reputation for being:
Alive.
Christ said it was:
Dead.
Laodicea believed itself:
Rich.
Christ exposed its:
Poverty.
Appearance and reality are not always the same:
Thing.
Wormwood exposes what is really:
There.
The water may still:
Flow.
But its character has:
Changed.
The judgment reveals the bitter:
Reality.

11. Bitterness Can Spread

A bitter source affects what flows from:
It.
That is physically true within John's:
Vision.
And it provides a legitimate pastoral question for human:
Life.
What takes root within us can eventually flow:
Outward.
Bitterness can affect:
Words.

Relationships.
Memory.
Compassion.
Prayer.
How we interpret other people's:
Actions.
One wound can begin coloring an entire:
World.
But we need to make an important:
Distinction.
John's immediate subject is divine judgment within an apocalyptic:
Vision.
He is not primarily giving us a psychological lesson about:
Resentment.
The text comes:
First.
Pastoral application follows.
Good interpretation moves from:
Text—
to:
Life.
Not from our lives backward into the:
Text.

12. “Many Died”

Now the consequence becomes painfully:
Human.
Until this point the third trumpet has spoken about:
A star.
Rivers.
Springs.
Waters.
Now:
People.
Many:
Died.
John does not give us a:
Number.
He says:
Many.
That is:
Enough.
The point is not statistical:
Precision.

The point is:
Loss.
Human life is being:
Lost.

13. “Many” Is Made Up of People

Apocalyptic language can become so enormous that individual suffering becomes:
Abstract.
But “many” is made up of:
People.
Lives.
Stories.
Relationships.
Families.
Judgment is not merely abstract:
Theology.
It has:
Consequences.
That is why Scripture's teaching about judgment should never become merely an intellectual:
Exercise.
Something has gone terribly:
Wrong.
And something terribly serious is being:
Addressed.

14. Death Should Never Become Casual Language

Especially for the:
Church.
If we speak about judgment without:
Grief.
Humility.
Seriousness.
Something may have gone wrong in our:
Reading.
“Many died” should not make us:
Smile.
It should make us:
Sober.
Jesus Himself wept in the presence of:
Death.
Christian theology never requires emotional indifference toward:
Death.
Death is an:

Enemy.
Even when Revelation describes death within judgment, death remains part of the brokenness God will ultimately:
Defeat.

15. The Church Should Sound More Like the Lamb Than the Accuser

We can proclaim judgment:
Truthfully—
without becoming:
Cruel.
We can warn:
Seriously—
without becoming:
Vindictive.
We can believe God judges evil without enjoying the suffering of:
People.
That matters because Revelation's central figure is not an executioner intoxicated with:
Power.
He is the:
Lamb.
Slaughtered.
Standing.
Redeeming.
Shepherding.
The way we speak about judgment should reflect the One we:
Follow.

16. “Because the Water Was Made Bitter”

John tells us why they:
Died.
The water was made:
Bitter.
The source of life became a source of:
Death.
That reversal is one of the verse's most powerful:
Images.
Water normally says:
Live.
Here it says:
Die.
Something within creation has been:
Reversed.

And that brings us back to a theme running through the first four:
Trumpets.
De-creation.

17. The Trumpets Move Against the Pattern of Creation

Genesis moves toward:
Life.
Waters are ordered.
Land appears.
Vegetation grows.
The seas fill with living:
Creatures.
Lights appear in the:
Heavens.
Creation moves toward:
Fullness.
The trumpets move in another:
Direction.
Land:
Burned.
Sea:
Struck.
Creatures:
Die.
Fresh water:
Bitter.
Heavenly lights will soon be:
Darkened.
The ordered world humanity inhabits is being progressively:
Wounded.
This is not a mechanical reversal of Genesis line by:
Line.
But de-creation is an appropriate theological:
Lens.

18. Rebellion Against the Creator Moves Toward Death

God creates:
Life.
Sin moves toward:
Death.
God creates:
Order.
Sin produces:
Disorder.
God creates:

Communion.
Sin fractures:
Relationship.
The trumpet judgments expose the direction in which rebellion:
Leads.
Humanity cannot reject the source of life indefinitely while expecting life to remain untouched:
Forever.
Sin is more than:
Mistakes.
Imperfections.
Bad choices.
Personal preferences.
At its deepest level, sin is rebellion against the God who gives:
Life.
And separation from the source of life moves toward:
Death.

19. Grace Also Tells Us How Serious Sin Is

The seriousness of sin is revealed not only by:
Judgment.
It is also revealed by the:
Cross.
If sin were:
Trivial—
redemption would not require the:
Cross.
The Lamb's wounds tell us two things at:
Once.
Sin is terribly:
Serious.
And God loves terribly:
Deeply.
We therefore must never separate Wormwood from the:
Lamb.
The bitter waters are not the whole:
Story.

20. Two Waters Stand Before Us

At the end of Chapter 7:
Springs of the water of:
Life.
Here:
Waters made:
Bitter.

Life-giving:
Water.
Death-giving:
Water.
The Lamb's:
Destination.
The world's:
Judgment.
Revelation places the contrast directly before:
Us.
And the theological question underneath it is:
Where is life actually:
Found?

21. We Repeatedly Drink From Wells That Cannot Bear Our Hope

Humanity seeks life in:
Wealth.
Power.
Approval.
Pleasure.
Achievement.
Control.
Status.
These things are not necessarily evil in:
Themselves.
But none can satisfy the deepest thirst of the human:
Soul.
Money cannot defeat:
Death.
Achievement cannot guarantee:
Love.
Power cannot create:
Peace.
Pleasure cannot produce permanent:
Meaning.
Control cannot eliminate:
Uncertainty.
Every created well eventually reveals its:
Limit.
Not necessarily because it is:
Bad.
But because it was never designed to be:
God.

The gift cannot become the:
Giver.

22. The Question Is Where We Drink

That is where Wormwood becomes more than an ancient:
Image.
Where do we seek:
Life?
What do we expect to:
Satisfy?
What do we trust to make everything:
Well?
Jesus once spoke beside a well about:
Living water.
Water becoming within a person a spring welling up toward eternal:
Life.
And Revelation will complete that biblical picture with:
The river of the water of life.
The tree of life.
The throne of God and of the:
Lamb.
No curse.
No death.
The biblical story moves from creation through fall and redemption toward:
New creation.

23. Wormwood Is Not the Destination

That deserves to be said:
Clearly.
Bitterness is:
Real.
Judgment is:
Real.
Death is:
Real.
But none is:
Final.
God does not end Revelation with bitter:
Water.
He ends it with:
Living water.
Wormwood belongs to a world passing through:
Judgment.
Living water belongs to the world God is making:
New.

The destination of faith is not:
Bitterness.
It is:
Life.

24. Some Experiences Really Are Bitter

That theological truth now opens the door for responsible pastoral:
Application.
Some seasons of life really are:
Bitter.
Grief can be:
Bitter.
Betrayal can be:
Bitter.
Injustice can be:
Bitter.
Disappointment can be:
Bitter.
Watching someone suffer can be:
Bitter.
Waiting without understanding can be:
Bitter.
Faith does not require different:
Vocabulary.
If something is bitter, we may call it:
Bitter.

25. The Bible Gives Us Permission to Lament

Scripture contains:
Tears.
Questions.
Complaints.
Cries.
How long?
Why?
Where are You?
Those are not foreign to biblical:
Faith.
Sometimes lament exists precisely because faith still:
Believes.
We speak to God because somewhere within the pain we still believe God:
Hears.
The saints beneath the altar cried:
How long?
Their prayer was not:

Condemned.
It was:
Received.
Their suffering was:
Seen.

26. Bitter Water Can Become Prayer

When life becomes bitter, we can bring that bitterness before:
God.
We do not have to:
Disguise it.
Sweeten it.
Pretend it tastes:
Good.
God already knows what the water tastes:
Like.
Prayer gives us permission to stop:
Pretending.
Sometimes prayer is:
Lord, this hurts.
Sometimes:
Lord, I don't understand.
Sometimes:
Lord, I am tired.
Sometimes:
Lord, help me.
Those are:
Prayers.

27. Endurance Does Not Mean Enjoying Wormwood

Endurance is not spiritual:
Masochism.
It does not say:
I love suffering.
It says:
Suffering will not make me let go of:
God.
Faith can taste the bitterness and still hold the cup before:
God.
That is:
Endurance.
Not:
Denial.
Not:
Pretending.

Not forced:
Cheerfulness.
Trust.
Sometimes trembling:
Trust.
But:
Trust.

28. We Must Guard Against Becoming Wormwood Ourselves

Here we are clearly making a pastoral application beyond John's immediate:
Image.
But it is worth:
Making.
Pain can shape:
Us.
And if pain remains unhealed, we can begin distributing our bitterness to:
Others.
We were:
Hurt.
So we:
Hurt.
We were:
Betrayed.
So we trust:
No one.
We were:
Disappointed.
So we become:
Cynical.
What happened to us can begin flowing:
Through us.
But hurt does not have to become:
Identity.
The bitter thing that happened to us does not have to become the defining character of who we:
Become.
Grace can do remarkable work:
There.
Grace does not erase:
History.
But grace can keep history from:
Owning us.

29. Sometimes Faith Endures Beside Bitter Water

Christ does not always meet us in bitter places by immediately changing the:
Circumstances.
Sometimes He:
Does.
Sometimes He:
Does not.
But His presence can keep bitterness from becoming our final:
Identity.
We have said it before:
Sometimes faith endures until God changes the:
Circumstances.
Sometimes faith endures through circumstances that do not:
Change.
And sometimes faith endures all the way:
Home.
Wormwood does not invalidate any of those forms of:
Endurance.
Sometimes endurance simply says:
Lord, this is bitter.
But I am still:
Here.
And I am still:
Yours.

30. The Standing Lamb Changes How We Face Death

Verse 11 says:
Many died.
We cannot erase those:
Words.
Death remains:
Enemy.
Death remains:
Painful.
Death remains worthy of:
Grief.
But death does not possess ultimate:
Authority.
Because Revelation has already shown us something death cannot:
Explain.
A Lamb:
Slaughtered—
yet:
Standing.

Death happened.
But death did not:
Win.
The standing Lamb is God's answer to the apparent finality of:
Death.
That is why Christians can face Wormwood without ultimate:
Despair.
Not without:
Tears.
Not without:
Questions.
Not without:
Grief.
But without the belief that death gets the final:
Word.
The Lamb:
Lives.

31. Bitter Water Is Not Eternal

Some bitterness can last:
Years.
Some wounds remain throughout an earthly:
Lifetime.
So we should never casually tell someone:
This will pass soon.
We do not know:
That.
But measured against God's final promise, bitterness does not possess:
Eternity.
Living water:
Does.
Wormwood belongs to the world passing through:
Judgment.
Living water belongs to the world God is making:
New.
The third trumpet therefore both:
Warns—
and:
Points.
It warns:
Rebellion has bitter consequences.
It points:
Life is found in God.
It warns:

Created sources can fail.
It points:
The true Source remains.

32. Another River Is Coming

The trumpet has:
Sounded.
The star has:
Fallen.
The waters have become:
Bitter.
Many have:
Died.
Those are terrible:
Words.
We should not minimize:
Them.
We should not pretend judgment is:
Easy.
We should not ignore those who:
Die.
But they are not the last words of:
Revelation.
Another river is:
Coming.
Revelation moves:
From bitter water—
to:
Living water.
From death—
to:
Life.
From judgment—
to:
New creation.
From a world wounded by sin—
to the God who says:
See, I am making all things:
New.
Wormwood is:
Loud.
But Wormwood is not:
Final.

Pastoral Reflection

There are seasons in life when the water becomes:
Bitter.
Something we once trusted:
Changes.
Something we once enjoyed becomes associated with:
Pain.
A:
Place.
A:
Memory.
A:
Relationship.
A:
Dream.
A season of:
Life.
Something happened.
And afterward the water simply did not taste the:
Same.
There can be a temptation among Christians to hurry too quickly toward making everything sound:
Better.
Someone grieves, and we immediately offer an:
Explanation.
Someone suffers, and we immediately search for the:
Lesson.
Someone hurts, and we immediately remind them that everything will eventually be:
Fine.
Those things may contain:
Truth.
But sometimes the faithful thing is simply to sit beside someone and acknowledge:
The water is:
Bitter.
Scripture does not hide:
Bitterness.
It names:
Wormwood.
It names:
Lament.
It names:

Grief.
It names:
Death.
And because Scripture tells the truth about bitterness, its promise of living water means something:
More.
God does not promise living water because bitter water never:
Exists.
He promises living water because bitter water does not get to exist:
Forever.
That distinction:
Matters.
Faith does not require us to call the bitter:
Sweet.
Faith says:
This is bitter—
and I still trust:
God.
This hurts—
and I still:
Pray.
I do not understand—
and I still follow the:
Lamb.
I am grieving—
and I still believe death will not:
Win.
That is:
Endurance.
Sometimes faith does not look like standing triumphantly upon a:
Mountain.
Sometimes faith looks like sitting beside bitter water and whispering:
Lord, I am still:
Here.
Perhaps the answer does not come:
Immediately.
Perhaps the water does not immediately become:
Sweet.
But the Lamb:
Remains.
The throne:
Remains.
And somewhere beyond Wormwood—

the river of life is still: Flowing.

Something Worth Pondering

Sin often promises something:
Sweet.
That is why temptation:
Works.
If rebellion always looked like:
Death—
we would rarely choose:
It.
Instead it promises:
Freedom.
Control.
Pleasure.
Recognition.
Security.
Power.
Then eventually we discover that some cups have a bitter:
Bottom.
Wormwood reminds us that choices have:
Consequences.
But Revelation gives us another image of:
Water.
Living:
Water.
Water flowing from the throne of God and of the:
Lamb.
Perhaps the deepest question is not merely:
What am I drinking?
But:
Where am I going when I am thirsty?
Because we will all:
Thirst.
For:
Meaning.
Love.
Hope.
Security.
Forgiveness.
Life.
Every false well eventually reveals its:
Limit.
But Jesus still offers:

Living water.
Wormwood may describe part of the:
Journey.
It does not describe the:
Destination.

Ask Yourself This:

Am I drinking from something that promised sweetness but has begun producing:
Bitterness?
Is there some bitter experience in my life that I have been afraid to name honestly before:
God?
Can I pray:
Lord, this is bitter—
without believing such honesty means I have lost my:
Faith?
Has something bitter that happened to me begun producing bitterness through:
Me?
Do I need God's grace not only to carry me through what happened—
but to keep what happened from defining who I:
Become?
And when Wormwood seems to fill the:
Cup—
can I remember that Wormwood is not the final water in the:
Story?
The star:
Falls.
The waters become:
Bitter.
Many:
Die.
But the Lamb still:
Lives.
The throne remains:
Occupied.
And beyond the bitter waters—
the river of life still:
Flows.

A Closer Look — Revelation 8:12

“And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.”
— Revelation 8:12, KJV

The fourth angel:
Sounds.
And the movement of the first four trumpets reaches its:
Climax.
First:
Earth.
Then:
Sea.
Then:
Fresh water.
Now John looks toward the:
Heavens.
Sun.
Moon.
Stars.
The created order humanity assumes will always function normally is being:
Shaken.

1. The Fourth Angel Sounds

The sequence continues without:
Interruption.
The angels received their trumpets.
They prepared to:
Sound.
The first angel:
Sounded.
The second:
Sounded.
The third:
Sounded.
Now the:
Fourth.
And with this trumpet, the opening group reaches its:
Completion.
The first four trumpets move systematically through the created:

World.
Land.
Sea.
Fresh water.
Heavenly lights.
Creation itself has become the arena of:
Judgment.

2. John's Eyes Move Upward

Until now the trumpet judgments have focused upon things around and beneath:
Humanity.
The:
Earth.
The:
Sea.
The:
Rivers.
The:
Springs.
Now the vision turns:
Upward.
The:
Sun.
The:
Moon.
The:
Stars.
The scope has become unmistakably:
Cosmic.
The judgment is not confined to one:
City.
Nation.
Empire.
Region.
John portrays the created order itself being:
Touched.

3. The Heavens Seem Untouchable

Human beings can alter:
Land.
Sail the:
Sea.
Redirect:
Rivers.

Dig:
Wells.
But the sun, moon, and stars appear far beyond human:
Reach.
For generations people are born and:
Die.
Empires rise and:
Fall.
Cities are built and:
Destroyed.
Yet the sun still:
Rises.
The moon still:
Appears.
The stars still:
Shine.
They seem almost:
Permanent.
And that is precisely why the fourth trumpet is so:
Powerful.
Revelation touches what appears:
Untouchable.

4. “A Third of the Sun Was Struck”

Again:
A third.
By now the pattern is:
Established.
The judgment is:
Severe.
But it is not yet:
Total.
The sun is not completely:
Extinguished.
A third is:
Struck.
That familiar boundary tells us the same thing it has told us throughout these opening:
Trumpets.
Judgment is:
Real.
Judgment is:
Terrible.
But the final end has not yet:

Come.

5. Sun, Moon, and Stars

John does not stop with the:
Sun.
A third of the:
Moon.
A third of the:
Stars.
The principal lights of the visible heavens are gathered into one:
Scene.
Sun.
Moon.
Stars.
And that language makes Genesis difficult not to:
Hear.
The opening chapter of Scripture describes God placing lights in the:
Heavens.
The greater:
Light.
The lesser:
Light.
The:
Stars.
They mark:
Days.
Seasons.
Years.
They give light upon the:
Earth.
Now those same heavenly lights are:
Struck.

6. Creation Is Partially Unraveling

That gives the trumpet the character of:
De-creation.
Genesis moves toward:
Order.
Light.
Life.
Fullness.
The trumpets move toward:
Disruption.
Earth:
Burned.

Sea:
Struck.
Fresh water:
Bitter.
Heavenly lights:
Darkened.
The ordered world is being partially:
Unmade.
Not completely.
A:
Third.
But enough for humanity to discover that the creation it assumes to be permanent is not:
Ultimate.

7. De-Creation Is Not Yet Destruction

That distinction:
Matters.
Revelation 8 does not describe creation disappearing:
Entirely.
The sun still:
Exists.
The moon still:
Exists.
The stars still:
Exist.
Day and night still:
Exist.
But their ordinary function has been:
Disturbed.
The world continues.
But wounded.
The familiar remains.
But changed.
The trumpet judgments are:
Partial.
Broad in:
Scope.
Bounded in:
Extent.

8. God Has Not Lost Control

The darkening of the heavens is not creation suddenly escaping God's:
Authority.
Quite the:

Opposite.
The trumpet sounds because God remains:
Sovereign.
Chaos has not overthrown the:
Throne.
God confronts a world disordered by:
Rebellion.
The judgment itself remains within:
Limits.
That repeated limitation matters because Revelation does not portray God desperately trying to regain control of:
History.
The throne was occupied before the seals:
Opened.
It remains occupied while the trumpets:
Sound.

9. Egypt Is in the Background Again

The Exodus echoes continue.
One of the plagues upon Egypt brought:
Darkness.
A land accustomed to the light of the sun was plunged into:
Darkness.
Egypt possessed:
Power.
Wealth.
Religion.
Military strength.
Pharaoh.
But Pharaoh could not command the:
Light.
He could command:
People.
He could not command the:
Sun.
The darkness exposed the limits of imperial:
Power.

10. What Egypt Learned, Rome Also Needed to Learn

Rome could command:
Armies.
Govern:
Provinces.
Collect:
Taxes.

Build:
Roads.
Control:
Trade.
But Rome did not create the:
Sun.
Rome did not hang the:
Moon.
Rome did not make the:
Stars.
Whatever claims an emperor might make, Caesar remained a:
Creature.
The heavens belonged to:
God.
History belonged to:
God.
Ultimate authority belonged to:
God—
and to the:
Lamb.

11. No Human Power Is Ultimate

That gives the fourth trumpet an unavoidable political dimension without reducing it to partisan:
Politics.
Every human government is:
Limited.
Every ruler is:
Mortal.
Every empire is:
Temporary.
No government controls:
Creation.
No ruler commands the:
Dawn.
No nation owns the:
Stars.
Earthly authority may be:
Real.
It is never:
Ultimate.
The fourth trumpet confronts every human power tempted to forget the:
Difference.

12. The Heavenly Lights Were Themselves Objects of Worship

Throughout the ancient world, people sometimes worshiped what they saw in the:
Sky.
Sun.
Moon.
Stars.
Celestial bodies could be associated with divine:
Powers.
Biblical faith consistently rejects that:
Worship.
Genesis itself quietly makes the point.
The sun is not:
God.
The moon is not:
God.
The stars are not:
Gods.
They are:
Created.

13. The Creator Is Greater Than the Lights

Revelation makes their creatureliness impossible to:
Miss.
The lights can be:
Struck.
Anything created cannot be the:
Creator.
The sun is:
Magnificent.
But it is not:
God.
The moon is:
Beautiful.
But it is not:
God.
The stars inspire:
Wonder.
But they are not:
God.
Creation should lead us toward worship of its:
Creator—

not worship of creation:
Itself.

14. Good Things Make Terrible Gods

That principle extends beyond celestial:
Bodies.
Family is:
Good.
Work can be:
Good.
Country can be:
Good.
Money can be:
Useful.
Achievement can be:
Good.
Routine can be:
Comforting.
But none can bear the weight of being:
God.
Idolatry often begins not with something obviously:
Evil—
but with something:
Good.
A gift becomes the source of our:
Identity.
Security.
Meaning.
Hope.
And eventually we ask the gift to provide what only the:
Giver—
can provide.

15. The Trumpets Keep Removing False Absolutes

Earth.
Sea.
Water.
Now:
Light.
One after another, things humanity depends upon are shown to be:
Created.
Finite.
Dependent.
Valuable—
but not:

Ultimate.
Revelation does not teach us to despise creation.
It teaches us to worship the:
Creator.
The gift is:
Good.
The Giver is:
God.

16. “Their Light Was Darkened”

The result of the fourth trumpet is:
Darkness.
The lights remain.
But their light is:
Diminished.
Especially in the ancient world, darkness was more than a minor:
Inconvenience.
Without modern illumination:
Work slowed.
Travel became more difficult.
Danger increased.
Movement became:
Restricted.
Familiar surroundings became harder to:
Recognize.
Darkness changes how we experience the same:
World.

17. Darkness Disorients

Light helps us:
See.
Recognize.
Navigate.
Move.
Without it, what was familiar can become:
Uncertain.
That gives the fourth trumpet tremendous emotional:
Force.
The world is still:
There.
But humanity can no longer experience it in the ordinary:
Way.
The things by which people orient themselves are no longer functioning as:
Expected.
Judgment brings:

Disorientation.

18. Keep the Vision Primary

There is an obvious pastoral application in that:
Disorientation.
But we should not rush there too:
Quickly.
John is first describing cosmic:
Judgment.
The sun is:
Struck.
The moon is:
Struck.
The stars are:
Struck.
Their light is:
Darkened.
That is the:
Vision.
Only after hearing John's vision on its own terms should we ask what darkness might teach us about:
Faith.
Trust.
Orientation.
Endurance.
The text comes:
First.
Application:
Follows.

19. Darkness Has a Biblical History

Darkness appears throughout Scripture in contexts of:
Chaos.
Judgment.
Fear.
Mourning.
The Day of the:
Lord.
The prophets sometimes portray divine judgment with cosmic:
Language.
The sun:
Darkened.
The moon:
Changed.
The stars withholding their:

Light.
John stands within that prophetic:
Tradition.
The fourth trumpet sounds like the world of Israel's:
Prophets.
When God confronts evil, the imagery can be so great that the created order itself appears to:
Respond.

20. The Fourth Trumpet Is an Alarm in the Sky

The warning has now appeared:
Everywhere.
Earth speaks the:
Warning.
Sea speaks the:
Warning.
Fresh water speaks the:
Warning.
Now the heavens speak the:
Warning.
Humanity can look:
Down—
and encounter it.
Out—
and encounter it.
Up—
and encounter it.
Creation itself has become a trumpet:
Sermon.
And its message is remarkably:
Consistent.
You are not:
God.
Creation is not:
God.
Empire is not:
God.
Security is not:
God.
Only God is:
God.

21. “A Third of the Day”

Now the effect reaches something even more familiar:
Time.

A third of the day is kept from:
Shining.
And likewise the:
Night.
Day and night structure ordinary human:
Life.
We wake.
Work.
Rest.
Days become:
Weeks.
Weeks become:
Years.
The rhythm feels almost:
Automatic.
The sun rises.
The sun sets.
Another day:
Passes.
Then Revelation disturbs the:
Rhythm.

22. Predictability Is Not Providence

That distinction is worth:
Remembering.
The regularity of creation can make us imagine that things simply:
Happen.
Morning simply:
Comes.
Night simply:
Falls.
Seasons simply:
Change.
But regularity does not mean independence from:
God.
Christian faith understands the ordinary order of creation itself as:
Gift.
The fact that something happened yesterday does not mean we created its happening:
Today.
We set the alarm:
Clock.
We do not command the:
Dawn.

23. Normalcy Can Quietly Become an Idol

Routine is a wonderful:
Gift.
Predictability helps us:
Live.
Plan.
Work.
Rest.
But normalcy can become something we begin to assume we are:
Owed.
Tomorrow must look like:
Today.
Next year must look like:
This year.
The plan must unfold the way we:
Expect.
Then something changes.
And we discover how much confidence we had placed in:
Predictability.
Predictability is not:
Providence.
God is not faithful because tomorrow looks like:
Yesterday.
God is faithful because God is:
God.

24. Every Sunrise Is Gift

Perhaps the fourth trumpet can teach us to notice the ordinary before it becomes:
Extraordinary.
The sun rose:
Today.
Another day was:
Given.
Another opportunity to:
Live.
Love.
Serve.
Forgive.
Pray.
We did not manufacture the:
Morning.
We received:
It.

That should produce:
Humility.
And:
Gratitude.
The ordinary is ordinary largely because God has allowed us to experience His gifts so: Regularly.

25. The Judgment Touches Day and Night

John specifically includes:
Both.
Day.
And:
Night.
There is no unaffected half of the:
Cycle.
Sun.
Moon.
Stars.
Day.
Night.
The scope is:
Comprehensive.
Yet the measure remains:
A third.
Broad.
But:
Bounded.
That is the pattern of the first four:
Trumpets.

26. The Boundary Still Means There Is Time

Again:
Not all.
Not yet.
The final end has not:
Come.
There is still time to:
Hear.
Turn.
Repent.
Endure.
The trumpet is an:
Alarm.
And alarms are unpleasant because the danger they announce is:
Real.

A fire alarm is not cruel because it disturbs our:
Comfort.
Its purpose is to make us:
Respond.
The trumpets repeatedly say:
Wake up.
Look at what you:
Trust.
Look at what you:
Worship.
Look at where your allegiance:
Lies.

27. Fear Is Not the Final Goal

Revelation is not merely trying to make Christians:
Afraid.
Fear alone cannot sustain:
Faithfulness.
The purpose is to redirect trust toward the One who actually deserves:
It.
The heavens can be:
Darkened.
God cannot.
The sun can lose:
Light.
The moon can lose:
Light.
The stars can lose:
Light.
God does not become:
Darkened.

28. Created Light Is Not Ultimate Light

That contrast will become magnificent by the end of:
Revelation.
Here:
Sun struck.
Moon struck.
Stars struck.
Light diminished.
Later:
The glory of God.
The Lamb as:
Lamp.
No:

Night.
Revelation moves from created light that can be darkened toward divine light that cannot be:
Extinguished.
The created lights can:
Fail.
The Creator's glory:
Cannot.

29. Faith Can Live Through Darkness

Now the pastoral application becomes:
Appropriate.
Darkness can be:
Frightening.
Confusing.
Lonely.
Disorienting.
There are seasons when we cannot:
See.
Earlier, heaven became:
Silent.
Yet God remained:
Present.
Now the heavens become partially:
Darkened.
And God still:
Remains.
Silence did not remove:
God.
Neither does:
Darkness.

30. Sometimes We Cannot See Very Far

We prefer:
Answers.
Direction.
Certainty.
A clearly illuminated:
Road.
Sometimes God gives those:
Things.
Sometimes He:
Does not.
Faith does not require:
Omniscience.

Thank:
God.
We do not have to understand every:
Symbol.
Predict every:
Event.
Explain every:
Mystery.
Know every step of the:
Road.
We need to know whom we:
Trust.

31. Darkness Changes Our Vision, Not God's Character

That distinction can carry us through difficult:
Seasons.
There are times when we do not know what God is:
Doing.
But we can still know something about who God:
Is.
Darkness changes what we can presently:
See.
It does not change who God:
Is.
The cross remains the:
Cross.
The tomb remains:
Empty.
The Lamb remains:
Worthy.
God's promise remains God's:
Promise.
What we cannot see does not rewrite what God has already:
Done.

32. The Fourth Trumpet Completes the First Group

With verse 12, the first four trumpets form a completed:
Movement.
Earth.
Sea.
Fresh water.
Heavenly lights.
Creation has been systematically:
Touched.
But something changes:

Next.
Before the fifth trumpet sounds, an angel will appear in:
The midst of heaven.
And the cry will be:
Woe.
Woe.
Woe.
The first four trumpets have focused upon creation.
The final three will move into a darker and more direct phase of the:
Vision.
Verse 12 therefore stands at a:
Boundary.

33. The Lamb Has Not Moved

And at the boundary, we should look again toward the center of the:
Book.
The judgments have:
Changed.
The imagery has:
Changed.
Creation has:
Changed.
The light has:
Changed.
But the center of Revelation has:
Not.
The Lamb remains:
Worthy.
The throne remains:
Occupied.
That is the difference between:
Creation—
and:
Creator.

34. What Seems Permanent Is Not Ultimate

The sun seems:
Permanent.
The stars seem:
Permanent.
Civilizations seem:
Permanent.
Our routines sometimes seem:
Permanent.
Our plans sometimes seem:

Permanent.
But Revelation teaches us to distinguish what appears lasting from what is truly:
Ultimate.
Everything created is:
Gift.
Beautiful.
Valuable.
Worth caring:
For.
Worth thanking God:
For.
But not worthy of ultimate:
Trust.
Only God is ultimately:
Unshakable.

35. Darkness Does Not Get the Final Word

Revelation does not end with a darkened:
Sky.
It ends with:
Light.
Not merely sunlight:
Restored.
Something:
Greater.
The glory of:
God.
And the:
Lamb.
So the fourth trumpet leaves us with a question of:
Trust.
Will we build our lives upon things that can be:
Darkened?
Or upon the One whose light can never be:
Extinguished?
The trumpet does not tell us to despise the:
Sun.
It tells us not to worship:
It.
It does not tell us to fear every:
Darkness.
It tells us to remember who remains present within:
It.

The sun may be:
Struck.
The moon may be:
Darkened.
The stars may lose their:
Light.
But above them all:
The throne:
Remains.

Pastoral Reflection

Most of us know something about:
Darkness.
Not merely the darkness that comes when the sun:
Sets.
There are seasons when life itself seems to become:
Dark.
A direction that once seemed clear becomes:
Uncertain.
A future that once seemed predictable becomes:
Clouded.
Something happens that we did not:
Expect.
And suddenly we cannot see very far:
Ahead.
We ask:
What happens now?
Where is this going?
How will this turn out?
And sometimes the most truthful answer is:
I don't:
Know.
That can be difficult for people of:
Faith.
We sometimes imagine faith means always knowing what God is:
Doing.
But Scripture gives us faithful people who often did:
Not.
Abraham did not know every step of the:
Journey.
Joseph did not understand the:
Prison.
Job did not understand his:
Suffering.

The disciples did not understand the:
Cross.
The saints beneath the altar still asked:
How long?
Faith is not always:
Seeing.
Sometimes faith is remembering who God is when we cannot see what God is:
Doing.
Revelation 8:12 gives us a darkened:
World.
Sun.
Moon.
Stars.
Even the ordinary rhythm of day and night is:
Disturbed.
And yet God has not lost His:
Throne.
The lights:
Change.
God does:
Not.
That may be one of the most important things we can remember when our own lives become:
Dark.
The darkness may change what we can:
See.
It does not change who God:
Is.
Sometimes faith endures until God changes the:
Circumstances.
Sometimes faith endures through circumstances that do not:
Change.
And sometimes faith endures all the way:
Home.
But in every case, endurance depends upon something deeper than our ability to see the entire:
Road.
It depends upon knowing the One who walks with us through the:
Darkness.

Something Worth Pondering

We rarely think about the sun until it does not:
Shine.

We rarely think about light until we are surrounded by:
Darkness.
We rarely think about how much we depend upon the ordinary until the ordinary becomes:
Uncertain.
Perhaps that is one reason the fourth trumpet feels so:
Unsettling.
It touches what seems:
Automatic.
Day.
Night.
Sun.
Moon.
Stars.
The rhythm of the:
World.
And Revelation reminds us:
Even the ordinary is:
Gift.
Another sunrise is:
Gift.
Another evening is:
Gift.
Another day with someone we love is:
Gift.
Another opportunity to forgive is:
Gift.
Another opportunity to serve is:
Gift.
Another opportunity to pray is:
Gift.
Perhaps wisdom is learning to recognize the gift before darkness teaches us what we had:
Overlooked.
And when darkness does come, faith remembers something:
Else.
We do not worship the light in the:
Sky.
We worship the One who made:
It.

Ask Yourself This:

What have I quietly begun treating as:
Permanent?
My:
Health?
My:
Routine?
My:
Career?
My:
Savings?
My:
Plans?
My:
Security?
Have I confused:
Predictability—
with:
Providence?
When life becomes dark and I cannot see very far ahead, do I assume God has:
Left?
Or can I remember that darkness changes my vision without changing God's:
Presence?
Do I need to understand everything before I can:
Trust?
Or can I trust the character of God when I cannot understand the circumstances around: Me?

A Closer Look — Revelation 8:13

"And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabiters of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!"
— Revelation 8:13, KJV

The fourth trumpet has:
Sounded.
The sun has been:
Struck.
The moon has been:
Struck.
The stars have been:

Struck.
Light itself has been partially:
Darkened.
And then John:
Looks.
And:
Hears.
But the fifth trumpet does not immediately:
Sound.
Instead:
An angel.
A loud:
Voice.
And three terrible:
Words.
Woe.
Woe.
Woe.
Something is about to:
Change.

1. “And I Beheld, and Heard”

Revelation repeatedly unfolds through:
Sight—
and:
Sound.
John:
Sees.
Hears.
Looks.
Is shown.
The visions are not merely ideas being explained to:
Him.
They are experiences overwhelming his:
Senses.
And here both come together.
John:
Looks.
And John:
Hears.
Something is moving through the:
Heavens.
And it has something to:
Say.

2. The Trumpet Sequence Pauses

That is the first thing we should:
Notice.
Four trumpets have:
Sounded.
We naturally expect the fifth to follow:
Immediately.
It does:
Not.
The sequence:
Stops.
We have seen Revelation do this:
Before.
Movement.
Then:
Pause.
The pause is not accidental.
It tells us:
Pay attention.
Something is changing.

3. The First Four Trumpets Now Form a Complete Unit

Looking backward, their pattern is:
Clear.
The first trumpet strikes the:
Earth.
The second strikes the:
Sea.
The third strikes fresh:
Water.
The fourth strikes the heavenly:
Lights.
Land.
Sea.
Fresh water.
Sky.
Creation has been systematically:
Touched.
Human beings have certainly suffered within these judgments.
Ships were:
Destroyed.
People died from bitter:
Water.
But the primary objects struck have belonged to the created:

Order.
Verse 13 now closes that movement.

4. The Final Three Will Be Different

Three trumpets remain.
But verse 13 gives them another:
Name.
Woes.
That sets them apart from the first:
Four.
The seven trumpets therefore divide naturally into:
Four—
and:
Three.
Four judgments centered upon:
Creation.
Then:
Three woes.
The tone is about to become even more:
Severe.
And before we enter that darkness, heaven sends a:
Warning.

5. An Angel Appears

John hears an:
Angel.
The KJV directs our attention to a heavenly messenger who warns:
The earth.
A heavenly:
Messenger.
The temptation with Revelation is to ask immediately:
What does the angel represent?
Perhaps the better first question is:
What does the angel do?
It:
Flies.
It:
Cries.
It:
Warns.
Its primary function in this verse is:
Proclamation.

6. Hear the Messenger Before Speculating About Symbols

The angel does not need to become the emblem of a modern:
Nation.
John does not identify it that:
Way.
Neither should:
We.
Angels throughout Scripture serve God as:
Messengers.
Servants.
Heralds.
They speak with the authority of the One who:
Sends them.
Here the message is a warning of:
Coming
Judgment.
But context must determine which associations matter:
Here.
And here the angel's role is unmistakable.
It is a herald of:
Woe.
We do not need to manufacture additional meaning when John has already given us the angel's:
Purpose.

7. “Through the Midst of Heaven”

The angel is not standing upon the:
Ground.
It flies in:
The midst of heaven.
High overhead.
Visible.
Public.
Its proclamation fills the space between heaven and:
Earth.
This is not a private message whispered only to:
John.
The warning is meant to be:
Heard.
That fits the trumpet imagery perfectly.
Trumpets announce.
Trumpets summon.

Trumpets warn.
And now the angel makes the seriousness of the remaining trumpets impossible to:
Miss.

8. “Saying With a Loud Voice”

The angel does not merely:
Speak.
It:
Cries.
And not quietly.
With a loud:
Voice.
There is urgency in the:
Announcement.
The warning is not:
Subtle.
It is not intended to blend into the background:
Noise.
Heaven wants the warning:
Heard.

9. Chapter 8 Has Moved From Silence to Woe

Remember how this chapter:
Began.
Silence.
About half an:
Hour.
Then:
Prayer.
Fire.
Thunder.
Lightning.
Earthquake.
Trumpets.
And now:
Woe.
The movement has been extraordinary.
Heaven began:
Silent.
The chapter ends with a loud cry crossing:
The midst of heaven.
Silence has become:
Warning.

10. The Silence Was Never Emptiness

That matters.
When heaven was:
Silent—
heaven was not:
Empty.
God was:
Present.
The Lamb was:
Present.
The prayers of the saints were:
Present.
The silence did not mean nothing was:
Happening.
It was the solemn pause before what would:
Follow.
And now what follows is impossible to:
Ignore.
Woe.

11. "Woe"

This is one of Scripture's strongest words of:
Warning.
Woe is more than:
Sadness.
More than:
Discomfort.
It is a prophetic cry announcing:
Distress.
Calamity.
Judgment.
Israel's prophets used the language of woe when confronting:
Injustice.
Pride.
Oppression.
Idolatry.
Rebellion.
The word carries moral and theological:
Weight.
Something is seriously:
Wrong.
And consequences are:
Coming.

12. “Woe, Woe, Woe”

John does not say it:
Once.
He says it:
Three times.
Woe.
Woe.
Woe.
And three trumpets:
Remain.
The structure is:
Deliberate.
Three:
Woes.
Three remaining:
Trumpets.
The repetition slows us:
Down.
John could simply have told us:
Three terrible trumpets remain.
Instead he makes us hear the:
Warning.
Once.
Again.
Again.
Woe.
Woe.
Woe.
Do not rush past:
This.

13. The Warning Comes Before the Woes

That may be one of the most important details in the:
Verse.
The fifth trumpet has not yet:
Sounded.
The angel warns before the woe:
Arrives.
Warning comes:
First.
That does not make the coming judgment less:
Serious.
But it means the danger is not:
Hidden.

The world is:
Warned.

14. Warning Can Be Mercy

A warning exists because response still:
Matters.
If danger were irrelevant, there would be no reason to:
Warn.
A fire alarm is intentionally:
Disruptive.
It is:
Loud.
Unpleasant.
Impossible to ignore.
But its unpleasant sound can serve a merciful:
Purpose.
Wake:
Up.
Something is:
Wrong.
The angel functions as heaven's:
Alarm.
Woe.
Woe.
Woe.
Listen while there is still time to:
Listen.

15. “To the Inhabiters of the Earth”

Now the warning has an:
Audience.
The inhabitants of the:
Earth.
That phrase becomes important throughout:
Revelation.
And we should not reduce it merely to:
Geography.
The saints also physically live upon the:
Earth.
The churches live upon the:
Earth.
Followers of the Lamb work, love, suffer, serve, and die upon the:
Earth.
Yet Revelation often uses language about the inhabitants of the earth with a deeper theological:

Weight.
The phrase can point toward:
Allegiance.
Orientation.
Identity.

16. Revelation Is Constantly Asking Where We Belong

That may be one of the great questions of the:
Book.
God—
or:
Empire?
Lamb—
or:
Beast?
New Jerusalem—
or:
Babylon?
Faithful worship—
or:
Idolatry?
The question is not merely:
Where do you live?
It is:
To whom do you belong?
The saints inhabit the earth.
But their deepest allegiance belongs to the:
Lamb.

17. Christians Live Here but Serve Another Lord

Christian hope does not require us to pretend we are detached from this:
World.
We live:
Here.
Work:
Here.
Love:
Here.
Suffer:
Here.
Serve:
Here.
And eventually, unless Christ comes first, we die:
Here.
But our ultimate allegiance does not belong to:

Earthly power.
Empire.
Wealth.
Culture.
Nation.
Security.
It belongs to:
Christ.
The Church lives upon the earth while serving another:
Lord.

18. Revelation Is About Allegiance

That may be one of the best keys for understanding the entire:
Book.
Not merely:
What will happen?
But:
Whom will you worship?
Whom will you follow?
To whom do you belong?
The trumpets expose the fragility of false:
Allegiances.
Earth can:
Burn.
Sea can be:
Struck.
Water can become:
Bitter.
Heavenly lights can become:
Dark.
Every created thing proves incapable of providing ultimate:
Security.

19. The Remaining Trumpets Are Ready

The angel warns about the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to:
Blow.
Three angels.
Three trumpets.
Three:
Woes.
They stand ready.
But remember where those trumpets came:
From.
They were:

Given.
The angels did not invent:
Them.
They did not seize:
Them.
They received:
Them.
The darkness about to unfold has not escaped divine:
Authority.

20. Even the Woes Are Not Autonomous

This becomes especially important before:
Chapter 9.
The imagery is about to become some of the strangest and most disturbing in the entire:
Book.
But evil never becomes God's equal:
Opposite.
There is no cosmic:
Tie.
The throne remains:
Occupied.
The Lamb still holds the:
Scroll.
The woes unfold inside a story whose ending does not belong to:
Them.

21. Carry the Throne Into Every Dark Scene

That is a good rule for reading:
Revelation.
When the imagery becomes frightening:
Remember the throne.
When the beasts appear:
Remember the throne.
When Babylon boasts:
Remember the throne.
When darkness spreads:
Remember the throne.
John showed us the throne before he showed us these:
Judgments.
That order:
Matters.
Before the chaos:
Sovereignty.
Before the seals:

The Lamb.
Before the trumpets:
Worship.
Before the woes:
The throne remains.

22. The Woes Are Not Revelation's Destination

Three woes remain.
But Revelation does not end with:
Woe.
It ends somewhere:
Else.
God dwelling with:
Humanity.
Tears wiped:
Away.
Death no:
More.
Mourning no:
More.
Crying no:
More.
Pain no:
More.
All things made:
New.
Woe belongs to the:
Journey.
Not the final:
Destination.

23. Judgment Means Evil Does Not Get Forever

Why does judgment belong to the:
Story?
Because evil cannot be permitted to reign:
Forever.
If oppression had no:
End—
if injustice had no:
Answer—
if death had the final:
Word—
then the cries of the suffering would remain unanswered:
Forever.
The God who wipes away tears also confronts what causes those:

Tears.
Judgment means God refuses to give evil the final:
Word.

24. But Judgment Must Never Become Our Excuse for Cruelty

That distinction is:
Essential.
God's judgment belongs to:
God.
Christians are not commissioned to become gleeful spectators of another person's:
Suffering.
We follow the:
Lamb.
The Lamb conquered through faithful:
Witness.
Sacrifice.
Faithfulness.
The Church must never become what it:
Opposes.
Empire uses:
Coercion.
The Church follows the:
Lamb.
The beast demands:
Worship.
The Church worships:
God.
Babylon seduces with wealth and:
Power.
The Church follows the:
Lamb.

25. Woe Should Produce Self-Examination Before Accusation

When Christians hear:
Woe—
our first response should not be:
Good. I know who deserves:
That.
Revelation was given to:
Churches.
Christian:

Communities.
People expected to:
Listen.
A healthier response is:
Lord, what do I need to:
Hear?
Warning is wasted if we apply it only to:
Others.
It is easy to recognize someone else's:
Idols.
Compromises.
Failures.
Revelation asks us to examine our:
Own.

26. Warning Becomes Grace When It Makes Us Listen

That sounds almost:
Paradoxical.
But warning can become:
Grace—
if it turns us toward:
God.
The worst response to the trumpet may not be:
Fear.
It may be:
Indifference.
To hear the trumpet and:
Ignore it.
To hear the warning and remain:
Unchanged.
Later Revelation will show people enduring terrible judgment and still refusing to:
Repent.
That hardness may be more frightening than the catastrophe:
Itself.

27. Prophecy Is About More Than Prediction

This is especially important when reading:
Revelation.
Prophecy reveals God's perspective so God's people can live faithfully:
Now.
The question is not merely:
Can I identify the fifth trumpet?
The question is:
Will I follow:

Jesus?
We can create:
Charts.
Timelines.
Diagrams.
Calculations.
Theories.
And still fail to:
Love.
Forgive.
Serve.
Pray.
Endure.
Remain faithful.
That would be a tragic reading of:
Revelation.

28. Revelation Seeks Transformation

Not merely:
Information.
John wants the churches to:
See differently.
Worship differently.
Live differently.
Endure differently.
Even die differently, if:
Necessary.
Because they know who truly:
Reigns.
The angel's cry reaches every generation not because every generation can map every symbol neatly onto its own:
Century.
But because every generation faces the temptation to worship something other than:
God.

29. Babylon Changes Clothes

Empires change:
Names.
Technology:
Changes.
Economies:
Change.
Cultures:
Change.

But the temptation to place ultimate trust in:
Power.
Wealth.
Security.
Control.
Human achievement.
That remains remarkably:
Familiar.
Babylons rise and:
Fall.
Beasts come and:
Go.
Empires appear and:
Disappear.
But the Lamb remains:
Worthy.

30. The Church's Calling Does Not Change

Worship:
God.
Follow:
Christ.
Bear faithful:
Witness.
Refuse:
Idolatry.
Love one:
Another.
Endure.
That calling remains when circumstances are:
Easy.
And when circumstances become:
Woe.
The Church does not need a different Lord for difficult:
Times.
It needs to remain faithful to the Lord it already:
Has.

31. Endurance Is Allegiance Stretched Across Time

Perhaps that is one way to say what this entire journey through Revelation has been teaching:
Us.
Faith says:
I belong to:
Christ.

Endurance says:
I **still** belong to:
Christ.
After:
Suffering.
After:
Waiting.
After:
Disappointment.
After:
Darkness.
After:
Woe.
Endurance is not hiding until the storm:
Passes.
It is remaining faithful while the storm:
Rages.

32. The Angel's Cry Therefore Tests Allegiance

Woe is:
Coming.
What will you:
Do?
Panic?
Compromise?
Give your worship to:
Power?
Seek ultimate security wherever you can:
Find it?
Or remain faithful to the:
Lamb?
Revelation does not promise an easy:
Road.
The saints:
Suffer.
The martyrs cry:
How long?
Creation is:
Struck.
Judgment:
Falls.
But suffering with hope is not the same as suffering without:
Hope.
Revelation gives us a:

Destination.
God.
The Lamb.
New creation.
Life.
Presence.

33. Woe Cannot Cancel the Destination

Three woes remain.
They will be:
Terrible.
But they cannot overturn God's:
Promise.
The trumpet judgments are inside the:
Story.
They are not the author of the:
Story.
The Lamb still holds the:
Scroll.
Never forget:
That.
Nothing we have seen has escaped the larger reality established in the throne:
Room.

34. Chapter 8 Ends Beneath a Warning

And perhaps that is exactly where it should:
End.
Not every chapter of Scripture ends with:
Comfort.
Sometimes Scripture leaves us with:
Warning.
Sometimes the faithful response is simply to:
Listen.
The angel is still:
Flying.
Its cry is still echoing across:
The midst of heaven.
Woe.
Woe.
Woe.
We do not need to rush into:
Chapter 9.
Let the warning:
Remain.

35. Everything Created Has Been Shaken

Look back across the first four:
Trumpets.
Earth:
Struck.
Sea:
Struck.
Fresh water:
Struck.
Heavenly lights:
Struck.
Creation has testified to the fragility of everything humanity assumes is:
Permanent.
And yet something has not been:
Struck.
The:
Throne.

36. That Is Where Faith Stands

Not upon an unchanging:
Earth.
Not upon an unchanging:
Economy.
Not upon an unchanging:
Culture.
Not even upon an unchanging:
Sky.
Faith stands upon the faithfulness of:
God.
The earth may:
Burn.
The sea may:
Change.
The waters may become:
Bitter.
The heavens may become:
Dark.
But the throne remains:
Occupied.

37. Warning and Hope Stand Together

The warning is:
Real.
Woe.

Woe.
Woe.
But hope remains because the One warning the world has not abandoned the:
World.
The story:
Continues.
The Lamb:
Remains.
The throne:
Remains.
And God's final word has not yet been:
Spoken.

Pastoral Reflection

There are times when love:
Whispers.
And there are times when love:
Shouts.
Revelation 8 ends with a:
Shout.
An angel crosses the heavens crying:
Woe.
Woe.
Woe.
Those are not comfortable:
Words.
But perhaps not every word God gives us is intended to make us:
Comfortable.
Some words are intended to make us:
Awake.
We live much of our lives surrounded by things that appear:
Permanent.
The ground beneath our:
Feet.
The water we:
Drink.
The sun that:
Rises.
The moon that:
Appears.
The stars:
Overhead.
Because they are so consistent, we can begin to assume they simply:
Are.

Chapter 8 has systematically challenged that:
Assumption.
Earth.
Sea.
Water.
Sky.
All:
Created.
All:
Dependent.
All beneath the authority of:
God.
And perhaps the question beneath every trumpet is:
What are you:
Trusting?
Because when everything around us begins to shake, what we truly trust becomes remarkably:
Visible.
It is easy to say:
I trust God—
when everything else is:
Stable.
It is another thing to say it when the:
Earth burns—
the sea changes—
the water becomes bitter—
the sky grows dark—
and an angel cries:
Woe.
That is when faith must:
Endure.
Not because faith understands every:
Symbol.
Not because faith has solved every prophetic:
Puzzle.
Not because faith knows exactly what happens:
Next.
Faith endures because it knows who remains when everything else:
Changes.
The throne:
Remains.
The Lamb:
Remains.

And perhaps that is enough to carry us into the next:
Chapter.

Something Worth Pondering

Chapter 8 began with:
Silence.
It ends with:
Woe.
Between those two moments:
The saints:
Prayed.
Their prayers rose before:
God.
Fire came from the:
Altar.
Thunder:
Sounded.
Lightning:
Flashed.
The earth:
Shook.
Four trumpets:
Sounded.
Creation itself was:
Struck.
And now the warning becomes even more:
Urgent.
What a journey thirteen verses have taken us:
On.
But perhaps the most important thing in the chapter is not what:
Changed.
Perhaps it is what did:
Not.
God did not leave His:
Throne.
The Lamb did not cease to be:
Worthy.
The prayers of the saints were not:
Forgotten.
The promises of God were not:
Cancelled.
The world:
Changed.
Heaven did:

Not.
Sometimes endurance depends upon learning to distinguish between what
can:
Change—
and what:
Cannot.
The earth can:
Shake.
The sea can:
Change.
The waters can become:
Bitter.
The lights can become:
Dark.
But God remains:
God.
And when faith knows that—
even woe does not get the final:
Word.

Ask Yourself This:

What have the first four trumpets revealed about the things I am tempted to:
Trust?
What happens to my faith when something I thought was stable begins to:
Shake?
Do I read Revelation primarily to discover what will happen to:
Others—
or am I willing to let its warnings examine:
Me?
When Scripture says:
Woe—
do I immediately think about who else deserves to hear:
It?
Or do I ask:
Lord, what do I need to:
Hear?