When Faith Must Endure

A Pastoral Journey Through the Revelation of St. John

Volume 4C

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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.

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version (KJV). Explanations and paraphrases in the commentary are the author's own.

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.

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Revelation 9:1–6 — The Fifth Trumpet: The Abyss Is Opened

Revelation 9:1–6

“And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.”
— Revelation 9:1–6, KJV

The warning has been:
Given.
The angel has flown through:
The midst of heaven.
And its cry still hangs over the closing words of the previous chapter:
Woe.
Woe.
Woe.
Four trumpets have already sounded.
The earth has been struck.
The sea has been struck.
Fresh water has been struck.
The lights of heaven have been darkened.
But those first four trumpets primarily touched the created order.
Now something changes.
The fifth angel blows his trumpet, and with that sound the first of the three announced woes begins.
What John sees next is among the strangest and most disturbing imagery anywhere in Revelation.
A fallen star.

A key.
An abyss.
Smoke rising like the smoke of a great furnace.
Locusts emerging from the darkness.
Scorpion-like power.
Human beings suffering terrible torment.
And death itself seeming to flee.
We should admit immediately that this is difficult imagery.
It is supposed to be.
Yet before we become fascinated with the creatures emerging from the abyss, we should notice something far more important:
They are not free.
Again and again, their authority is described as:
Given.
The star is given the key.
The locusts are given authority.
They are told what they may not harm.
They are allowed to torment.
Their activity is restricted to five months.
They may torment.
But they may not kill.
That language matters.
Revelation has brought us into a terrifying scene without surrendering the truth established before any seal was opened or trumpet sounded:
The throne is still occupied.
The darkness may be deep.
The abyss may be open.
But evil has not become sovereign.

1. The Fifth Trumpet Sounds

The first four trumpets moved with remarkable rhythm.
One angel sounded.
Then another.
Then another.
Then another.
But between the fourth and fifth trumpets came the angel's warning:
Woe.
That announcement prepared us for a change.
The remaining trumpets take us deeper.
The first four primarily affected the world surrounding human life.
The fifth brings judgment directly upon people.
Something has shifted from creation under judgment to humanity experiencing the torment of forces released from the abyss.

2. A Fallen Star and a Given Key

John sees a star fall from heaven unto the earth.
But this is more than an astronomical object falling through the sky.
The star receives something:
A key.
Whatever else the star represents within John's vision, it functions as an agent.
And the agent does not possess the key by right.
It is:
Given.
Readers naturally want to ask:
Who is the star?
Many answers have been offered throughout Christian history.
But perhaps John wants us to notice something more important than the star's exact identity:
Someone else controls access to the abyss.
The star does not create the abyss.
The star does not own the abyss.
The star does not manufacture the key.
Permission to open it must be granted.
Even before the abyss opens, Revelation reminds us:
Darkness operates beneath limits.

3. The Abyss Opens

The language is frightening.
The abyss.
The bottomless pit.
Within biblical imagery, the abyss belongs to the language of chaos, darkness, confinement, and powers opposed to God.
And now its shaft is opened.
Something previously restrained is about to be released.
That should disturb us.
But we should notice the difference between:
Released
and:
Uncontrolled.
The key itself tells us that the abyss has been locked.
And something that can be locked—
and unlocked—
has boundaries.
Revelation never asks us to believe that opening the abyss means God has lost control of creation.
Quite the opposite.

4. Smoke From Below

When the shaft opens, smoke pours out like the smoke of a great furnace.
It rises until the sun and the air themselves become darkened.
Again we encounter darkness.
But this darkness comes from:
Below.
Throughout Revelation, John has repeatedly directed our attention upward—
toward the throne,
toward the Lamb,
toward worship,
toward heaven.
Here something rises from below.
Smoke.
Darkness.
And eventually:
Locusts.
The contrast could hardly be more striking.

5. The Locusts

From the smoke come locusts.
Anyone familiar with the biblical story should hear echoes of Egypt.
Locusts were among the plagues that confronted Pharaoh. They represented devastation and the stripping away of what human beings depended upon for life.
But these locusts are different.
They are specifically commanded not to consume what ordinary locusts consume.
Not the grass.
Not the green growth.
Not the trees.
Their target is:
Human.
John's vision has moved beyond natural disaster into something far more symbolic—and far more terrifying.

6. The Seal Still Matters

Even then, the locusts are not permitted to harm everyone.
Their torment is directed toward those who do not have the seal of God upon their foreheads.
That takes us back to Chapter 7.
There we said that the seal should not necessarily be understood as a promise that God's people would never suffer. Revelation has already shown faithful people suffering terribly.
The seal speaks more deeply of:
Belonging.

Ownership.
Identity.
God knows those who belong to Him.
Several chapters have passed since God's servants were sealed.
Revelation has not forgotten them.
Neither has God.
Sometimes the promises of God are spoken long before the moment when we discover how desperately we need to remember them.
Chapter 7 told us:
God knows His people.
Chapter 9 says:
He still does.

7. Torment Has a Boundary

The locusts may torment.
But they may not:
Kill.
Their sting brings severe suffering.
Yet once again:
A boundary.
They may go this far.
But not further.
And even their torment has a duration:
Five months.
We need not immediately turn that number into an elaborate prophetic calculation to recognize its most obvious theological significance:
The suffering has a limit.
There is a beginning.
And there is an end.
That matters enormously in a book written to people learning how to:
Endure.
Suffering can feel endless.
Grief can make a day feel like forever.
Fear can make a season seem as though it will never end.
Yet Revelation repeatedly tells suffering believers something they desperately need to hear:
Evil has limits.
Empire has limits.
The beast will have limits.
Babylon will have limits.
Even death itself will eventually reach its limit.
Only God is eternal.

8. When Death Flees

Then John gives us an image perhaps more disturbing than the locusts themselves.
People will seek death.
But they will not find it.
They will long to die.
But death will flee.
The language communicates suffering so intense that people desire the very thing human beings ordinarily struggle desperately to avoid.
There is nothing here for the Church to celebrate cruelly.
John is not giving Christians monsters to enjoy.
He is showing us the terrible seriousness of evil, rebellion, judgment, and separation from God.
The proper response is not delight.
It is sobriety.
Self-examination.
Compassion.
And repentance.

9. The Greater Tragedy

Before Chapter 9 ends, John will reveal something perhaps even more frightening.
After the terror of the fifth trumpet—
and after the destruction associated with the sixth—
those who remain still do not:
Repent.
That takes us once more to Egypt.
Pharaoh witnessed plague after plague.
Again and again he experienced the consequences of resisting God.
Yet his heart remained hard.
Revelation places that ancient pattern upon a much larger stage.
Judgment reveals something about God.
But it also reveals something about the human heart.
We can become so committed to our idols that even when they fail us, we continue worshiping them.

10. Do Not Let the Locusts Become the Center

The locusts are visually spectacular.
Verses 7–11 will describe them in extraordinary detail.
But they are not the theological center of Revelation.
The Lamb is.
The throne is.
God's kingdom is.
Faithful witness is.
Repentance is.

Endurance is.
If we finish Revelation 9 knowing everything imaginable about the locusts but nothing more about faithful Christian endurance, we have probably missed John's point.
Nor do we need to turn John's creatures into a modern weapons-identification manual.
John repeatedly tells us that things are:
Like
other things.
The imagery communicates terror, violence, chaos, power, and torment.
We should respect John's:
Like.

11. The Throne Has Not Moved

The abyss is terrifying.
The locusts are terrifying.
The suffering is terrifying.
But throughout the passage we encounter words that place fences around the darkness:
Given.
Told.
Allowed.
Five months.
Do not kill.
John does not need to return to the throne room every time the vision becomes dark.
We have already seen the throne.
We have already seen the One seated upon it.
We have already seen the Lamb.
We have already heard heaven declare Him worthy.
Those truths remain true when the scenery changes.
The throne was occupied when heaven sang.
The throne was occupied when the seals were opened.
The throne was occupied when the trumpets began to sound.
And the throne remains occupied when smoke rises from the abyss.

12. Endurance Remembers

Perhaps this is where the passage speaks most directly to us.
Faith is easy to describe when the sky is clear.
When prayers seem answered.
When life feels ordered.
When God's presence seems near.
But Revelation was written for believers who knew that faith sometimes has to survive when the world looks nothing like that.
Sometimes smoke fills the air.

Sometimes light seems dim.
Sometimes evil appears to have been released.
Sometimes suffering seems impossible to understand.
And in those moments faith remembers what it saw before the darkness came.
The throne.
The Lamb.
The promise.
Endurance does not always receive a new explanation for every new suffering.
Sometimes endurance remembers what God has already revealed.
When the abyss opens—
remember the throne.
When smoke darkens the sky—
remember the Lamb.
When evil seems powerful—
remember that its authority is given.
When suffering seems endless—
remember:
Five months.
A limit.
A boundary.
An end.
The abyss may open.
But the throne does not fall.
Darkness may rise.
But darkness does not reign.
Evil may be permitted to act.
But evil does not write the final chapter.
And so even here—
perhaps especially here—
the Church is called to:
Endure.
Not because the darkness is imaginary.
But because the darkness is not ultimate.

Pastoral Reflection

There are seasons in life when it seems as though someone has opened the abyss.
Everything that once seemed stable becomes uncertain.
The light seems dimmer.
The air itself feels heavy with smoke.
Most of us will never experience anything resembling John's vision literally.

But many of us know what it means to live through a season when darkness seems frighteningly real.
A diagnosis we never expected.
A relationship that breaks.
A person we love who suffers.
A job that disappears.
A prayer that seems unanswered.
A grief that refuses to leave.
And sometimes the hardest part is not simply what has happened.
It is wondering whether anything is still:
In control.
Revelation does not answer that question by pretending the darkness is small.
The suffering is real.
The fear is real.
Faith does not require us to call darkness light.
Instead, Revelation asks us to remember something while standing inside the darkness:
The throne has not moved.
We may not understand why certain things have been allowed.
We may not know when the smoke will clear.
But we can remember what John has already seen.
There is a throne.
There is a Lamb.
And history has not slipped from God's hands.
Sometimes faith endures because God changes the circumstances.
Sometimes faith endures while the circumstances remain unchanged.
And sometimes faith simply whispers into the darkness:
I still believe the throne is occupied.
That is not denial.
That is endurance.
The Christian does not endure because suffering is insignificant.
The Christian endures because suffering is not ultimate.
The Christian does not endure because evil has no power.
The Christian endures because evil does not have all power.
So when the smoke rises—
remember the throne.
When the darkness deepens—
remember the Lamb.
And when fear whispers that everything is out of control—
remember the key.
Faith sometimes means standing in the darkness and remembering what we saw when there was light.
We remember.

And because we remember—
we remain faithful.

Something Worth Pondering

Perhaps the most frightening thing about Revelation 9:1–6 is not that the abyss can be opened.
Perhaps it is how easily we assume that darkness means God has left.
John never makes that assumption.
The smoke rises.
The sun is darkened.
The locusts emerge.
People suffer.
And yet throughout the passage we encounter:
Given.
Told.
Allowed.
Limited.
Those words do not make suffering easy.
But they tell us that suffering has not become sovereign.
There is an enormous difference between saying:
I understand why this is happening.
and saying:
I believe God remains God while it is happening.
Sometimes faith cannot see through the smoke.
But it can still remember who sits upon the throne.

Ask Yourself This:

When darkness enters my life, can I distinguish between something being **terrible** and something being **ultimate**?
What truths about God do I need to remember when circumstances make those truths difficult to see?
And when I cannot understand what God is doing, can I still trust **who God is**?

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:1

“And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.”
— Revelation 9:1, KJV

The fifth angel:
Sounds.
And immediately the vision changes.
The first four trumpets struck the created:
Order.
Earth.
Sea.
Fresh water.
Sun.
Moon.
Stars.
But now John's attention moves toward something considerably more:
Personal.
He sees a star that has fallen from heaven to:
Earth.
And then John tells us something that changes how we should understand everything that follows.
The star is given:
A key.

1. The First Woe Begins

We have been expecting this moment since the angel cried across the midst of heaven:
Woe.
Woe.
Woe.
Three trumpets remained.
Now the first of those three:
Sounds.
The warning of Revelation 8:13 has become the reality of Revelation:
9:1.
John sees:
A star.
We have encountered stars before in Revelation.
Some appear within cosmic imagery.
Others carry symbolic or personal significance.
So we should not assume every star means precisely the same:
Thing.

Context matters.
And here the context quickly tells us this is no ordinary astronomical:
Object.

2. The Star Becomes Personal

John refers to the star as:
He.
The star receives a:
Key.
And the star will use that key to open the shaft of the:
Abyss.
Whatever precise identity we assign to this figure, John presents the star as a personal:
Agent.
The wording also deserves attention.
In the KJV, John says:
“I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth.”
The figure is associated with a:
Fall.
The KJV does not use the phrase “had fallen” here.
The imagery has naturally caused interpreters to wonder whether John is describing a fallen spiritual being, perhaps even:
Satan.
There are biblical connections that make the question understandable.
But John does not explicitly identify the star.
And when John does not identify someone precisely, we should be cautious about doing it for:
Him.
We do not need the star's name to understand the theological point.
The star has fallen.
The star acts.
The star receives a key.
The star opens the abyss.
Those things John gives:
Us.
The exact identity?
John leaves considerably more:
Open.

3. The Most Important Words May Be “Was Given”

Here is where our attention belongs.
The star does not possess the key by inherent:
Authority.
The star does not forge the:
Key.

Does not seize the:
Key.
Does not break into the:
Abyss.
The key **was given** to:
Him.
Those words may be among the most important guardrails in the entire chapter.
Someone who is given a key exercises:
Delegated authority.
Think about being given the key to another person's house.
You may possess the key.
You may open the door.
But possessing the key does not make the house:
Yours.
Your authority comes from someone:
Else.
The star can open the abyss.
But the star does not ultimately own the:
Abyss.

4. The Abyss Has a Lock

That sounds almost too obvious to mention.
But think about it.
If there is a:
Key—
then there is something that can be:
Locked.
The abyss is not an uncontrolled opening from which evil emerges whenever it:
Chooses.
Access is:
Restricted.
Something has been:
Contained.
Opening it requires:
Permission.
We should not make the abyss less frightening than John does.
The next verse will show smoke pouring from it like smoke from a great furnace.
From that smoke will emerge creatures of:
Torment.
The abyss belongs to the dark side of John's visionary world.
But Revelation does something remarkable while showing us that darkness.

It puts a:
Lock—
on the door.

5. Evil Is Real—but It Is Not God

That may be one of the deepest theological truths in this verse.
Evil is:
Real.
Evil can be:
Terrible.
Evil causes genuine:
Suffering.
Revelation never asks Christians to pretend otherwise.
But evil is not:
God.
It does not possess unlimited freedom.
It does not determine the final course of history.
It does not write the ending of the:
Story.
Even the abyss exists beneath:
Authority.
Christian faith does not describe the universe as a struggle between two equal and opposite gods—
one good and one evil—
neither ultimately sovereign over the other.
That is not John's vision.
God is:
God.
Evil is:
Creaturely.
Rebellious.
Destructive.
Terrible.
But never:
Divine.
Satan is not the evil version of:
God.
He does not occupy an equal and opposite throne.
The abyss itself has a:
Lock.
Access requires a:
Key.
And even the key must be:
Given.

6. Darkness Operates Within Boundaries

This pattern will continue throughout Chapter 9.
The star acts.
But the key was:
Given.
The locusts will act.
But authority will be:
Given.
They will torment.
But only because they are:
Allowed.
They will operate for a period of time.
But that time will be:
Limited.
Again and again Revelation refuses to allow evil to become:
Ultimate.
That does not make the problem of evil:
Easy.
Knowing that evil is limited does not answer every question about why God permits suffering.
Why does God allow the abyss to open?
Why does God permit destructive powers to operate?
Why does suffering sometimes touch human lives with devastating force?
Those are not small:
Questions.
And Revelation does not give us a philosophical explanation for every instance of suffering.
What it gives us is:
A boundary.
Whatever evil may do—
it cannot become:
God.
Whatever suffering may come—
it cannot become:
Eternal.
Whatever darkness may rise—
it cannot extinguish the:
Throne.
Whatever power evil may exercise—
it remains:
Limited.
That does not answer every:
Why.

But it tells us something about the:
End.

7. Faith Is Allowed to Ask Why

Sometimes faith must live without knowing:
Why.
That is difficult.
We want:
Answers.
Cause and effect.
Explanations.
We want to understand why something happened and what God intends to accomplish through:
It.
Sometimes we receive those answers.
Sometimes we:
Do not.
And faith must continue:
Anyway.
But faith does not mean we stop asking questions.
The martyrs themselves asked:
How long?
Faithful people are allowed to ask:
Why?
How long?
What does this mean?
Where are You in:
This?
Faith does not require silence in the presence of:
Mystery.
But faith refuses one conclusion.
God has lost:
Control.
John will show us:
Beasts.
Dragons.
Babylon.
War.
Persecution.
Martyrdom.
Death.
And now:
The abyss.
But nowhere does John tell the Church:

God has lost control of the story.

8. Carry the Throne Into Chapter 9

Remember where we saw the throne.
Chapter: 4
That was not accidental.
Before the seals.
Before the horsemen.
Before the martyrs.
Before the earthquake.
Before the trumpets.
Before the abyss.
John was shown:
The throne.
The order matters.
God showed John who governs reality before showing him how chaotic reality can:
Appear.
And now we need to carry that throne into:
Chapter 9.
If we enter Chapter 9 seeing only the abyss, we may become overwhelmed by:
Darkness.
But if we enter remembering the throne, we see the darkness:
Differently.
The abyss is real.
But it is not:
Sovereign.
Faith does not mean refusing to look at the abyss.
It means refusing to forget the throne while we:
Do.

9. The Key Becomes an Unexpected Symbol of Hope

A key that opens the abyss hardly sounds:
Comforting.
But the existence of the key tells us something.
The abyss has a:
Door.
The door has a:
Lock.
The lock has a:
Key.
And the key must be:
Given.
The abyss does not open:

Itself.
There are boundaries we cannot see.
Limits we may not understand.
Restraints known only to:
God.
We see what evil:
Does.
We do not always see what evil has been prevented from:
Doing.
We know the suffering that came.
We do not know every suffering that was:
Prevented.
We know the door that opened.
We do not know how long it remained:
Locked.
That does not make suffering:
Easy.
It reminds us that our perspective is:
Limited.
The person standing in the smoke sees:
Chaos.
John sees:
A key.
The person experiencing torment sees:
Disaster.
John sees:
Limits.
The person beneath the darkness may believe everything has become:
Uncontrolled.
John sees authority that had to be:
Given.
That is what Revelation does.
It pulls back the:
Curtain.
It teaches suffering churches to:
Look again.
The abyss says:
Darkness rules.
Revelation says:
Look again.
There is a:
Throne.

10. The Abyss May Be Deep, but It Is Not Sovereign

Perhaps that is the sentence we should carry into the remainder of this chapter.
The abyss may be:
Deep.
The darkness may be:
Terrible.
The suffering may be:
Real.
The questions may remain:
Difficult.
But the abyss is not:
Sovereign.
It has a:
Lock.
It has a:
Key.
And even the key must be:
Given.
The throne remains:
Occupied.
The Lamb remains:
Worthy.
And faith can:
Endure.
Even when the door to the abyss appears to:
Open.

Pastoral Reflection

There are moments when life seems to open a door we desperately wish had remained:
Closed.
Something happens that changes everything.
The telephone:
Rings.
The doctor walks into the:
Room.
Someone says:
We need to talk.
A relationship changes.
A job disappears.
Someone we love is:
Gone.

And in a matter of moments, the world we thought we understood becomes a world we barely:
Recognize.
Those moments can feel very much like the opening of an:
Abyss.
Not because we literally experience what John sees in Revelation 9.
But because we understand what it means for darkness to enter a place where we once believed there was:
Light.
And one of the first questions we ask is:
Where is God in:
This?
Sometimes we ask the harder question:
Why did God allow:
This?
Revelation 9:1 does not give us an easy answer to every question about suffering.
It does not tell us why every painful door is opened.
It does not explain why some prayers appear to be answered immediately while others seem to disappear into:
Silence.
Those questions remain painfully:
Real.
But John gives us something else to hold onto.
The:
Key.
The star does not possess it independently.
The key is:
Given.
And sometimes that small detail is exactly what faith needs.
Not a complete explanation.
Not a diagram showing why everything happened.
Not an answer to every:
Question.
Just enough light to remind us that the darkness has not become:
God.
We may not understand why a particular door was allowed to open.
But we can know that the door is not beyond God's:
Authority.
We may not understand why suffering has entered our lives.
But we can know that suffering has not become:
Sovereign.
We may not understand why God has not changed our circumstances.

But our circumstances have not changed who:
God is.
That is where endurance becomes more than:
Waiting.
Endurance becomes:
Trust.
Not blind trust.
Not thoughtless trust.
Not trust that refuses difficult questions.
But trust that says:
I do not understand what God is doing—
but I remember who God is.
I remember the:
Throne.
I remember the:
Lamb.
I remember the:
Scroll.
I remember the:
Key.
And sometimes remembering is enough to take one more:
Step.
Then another.
Then:
Another.
Until eventually we discover that faith has carried us through something we once believed we could never:
Endure.
Perhaps that is why Revelation shows us the throne before showing us the:
Abyss.
God gives John something to remember before showing him something difficult to:
Understand.
The truths we learn in peaceful seasons become the truths we cling to in:
Storms.
The faith formed in the light becomes the faith that carries us through the:
Darkness.
So when the abyss seems to open—
remember the:
Key.
And when you cannot understand why the door opened at all—
remember the:
Throne.

Something Worth Pondering

We spend much of our lives asking God to explain what we do not:
Understand.
Why did this happen?
Why was this allowed?
Why didn't You stop:
It?
Why haven't You changed:
It?
Those are honest questions.
Scripture gives us permission to:
Ask.
But perhaps Revelation 9:1 invites another question:
What can I know even when I do not know why?
John may not tell us precisely who the fallen star:
Is.
He may not explain every reason the abyss is allowed to:
Open.
But he tells us something.
The key was:
Given.
There is authority beyond the:
Star.
Authority beyond the:
Abyss.
Authority beyond the:
Darkness.
Sometimes faith does not receive an:
Explanation.
Sometimes faith receives an:
Anchor.
And perhaps one of the great lessons of Christian endurance is learning the difference.
We stand before something we cannot explain.
We cannot see through the:
Smoke.
We cannot understand why the door has:
Opened.
But we remember whose hand holds the:
Key.
And that may be enough for:
Today.

Ask Yourself This:

When I cannot answer **why**, can I still remember what I know about: God?
What truths learned in peaceful seasons do I need to carry with me when the darkness: Comes?
And when I cannot see through the smoke—can I remember who holds the: Key?

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:2

“And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.”
— Revelation 9:2, KJV

The key has been:
Given.
Now the shaft is:
Opened.
And immediately something begins to:
Rise.
Smoke.
Not a little smoke.
Not the faint trace of something burning somewhere far:
Away.
John describes smoke rising like the smoke of a great:
Furnace.
And the result is:
Darkness.
The sun is darkened.
The air is darkened.
The abyss has been opened—
and what comes from below begins to obscure the light from:
Above.
That may be one of the most important images in this entire:
Verse.

1. The Abyss Opens

Verse 1 ended with the:
Key.
Verse 2 begins with the:
Door.
The star uses the authority that has been given and opens the shaft of the:
Abyss.
Something previously:
Closed—
is now:
Opened.
Something previously:
Contained—
is now permitted to:

Emerge.
But notice what John does not do.
He does not take us into the:
Abyss.
He does not give us a guided tour.
He does not describe its geography.
He simply tells us what comes:
Out.
Smoke.
Perhaps that is another reminder that Revelation gives us what we need without satisfying every possible:
Curiosity.
What exactly is the abyss?
John does not stop to explain.
His concern is what happens when it is:
Opened.

2. The First Thing to Rise Is Smoke

Before the locusts appear—
smoke:
Rises.
Before the torment begins—
smoke:
Rises.
Before John describes the frightening creatures—
smoke:
Rises.
The first consequence of opening the abyss is not immediately:
Violence.
It is:
Obscurity.
The world becomes harder to:
See.
Anyone who has been surrounded by heavy smoke understands the image.
Smoke obscures.
Distorts.
Irritates.
Familiar surroundings become difficult to:
Recognize.
Distances become difficult to:
Judge.
Directions become difficult to:
Determine.
Smoke does not have to destroy something in order to make it difficult to:

See.

3. Like the Smoke of a Great Furnace

Again John uses the language of:
Comparison.
Like.
The smoke is *like* the smoke of a great:
Furnace.
That little word matters.
John reaches for an image his readers could understand.
Heat.
Fire.
Smoke.
Something intense enough to fill the atmosphere with:
Darkness.
We should respect John's:
Like.
The smoke does not need to become the exhaust of some modern machine.
The furnace does not need to become a particular industrial or military process.
John has already told us what the image communicates.
Enormous.
Dense.
Overwhelming:
Smoke.
And the source matters.
This smoke comes from:
Below.
From the:
Abyss.
Its effect is:
Darkness.

4. The Smoke Spreads

The shaft opens:
Below.
The smoke rises:
Upward.
What had been contained begins affecting what lies beyond its previous:
Boundary.
The abyss does not remain:
Private.
Its smoke:
Spreads.
There is a pastoral truth within that image.

Sin rarely affects only the person who commits:
It.
Hatred spreads.
Fear spreads.
Deception spreads.
Violence spreads.
Bitterness spreads.
Corruption spreads.
One person's rebellion can cast a shadow across a:
Family.
One person's dishonesty can damage an:
Organization.
A culture's idolatry can shape generations that:
Follow.
The smoke:
Spreads.

5. Smoke Can Hide What It Cannot Destroy

Then John gives us an especially powerful image.
The sun is:
Darkened.
But notice what John does not say.
The sun has not ceased to:
Exist.
The sun has not been:
Destroyed.
Something has come between the light and those trying to:
See it.
That distinction is enormously important.
Smoke can hide what it cannot destroy.
The smoke darkens the:
Sun.
But the smoke does not extinguish the:
Sun.
The difference is:
Everything.
There are moments in life when God seems very:
Far away.
Prayer feels:
Empty.
Scripture seems:
Distant.
Hope becomes difficult to:
Find.

Things once believed with confidence become harder to:
Feel.
And we may conclude:
The light is gone.
But sometimes the light has not disappeared.
Sometimes we are standing in the:
Smoke.
There will be seasons when we cannot see God's presence as clearly as we once:
Did.
That does not mean God has:
Left.
There will be seasons when hope becomes difficult to:
See.
That does not mean hope has:
Died.
There will be seasons when God's promises seem obscured by circumstances.
That does not mean God's promises have:
Changed.
The smoke affects our:
Vision.
It does not alter God's:
Character.

6. Sometimes Darkness Becomes an Atmosphere

John says the air itself becomes:
Darkened.
The atmosphere changes.
Everything is now experienced through the:
Smoke.
Sometimes difficulty is one isolated:
Problem.
Something happens.
We deal with it.
We move:
Forward.
But sometimes one problem follows:
Another.
Then another.
Then:
Another.
Eventually it feels as though we are no longer dealing with a difficult event.
We are living inside a difficult:
Season.

And prolonged suffering can change how we see:
Everything.
We look at the past through the:
Smoke.
The future through the:
Smoke.
Ourselves through the:
Smoke.
We may even begin looking at God through the:
Smoke.
Things that once seemed clear become:
Distorted.
That is why memory matters.
Before the smoke—
there was the:
Throne.
Before the smoke—
there was the:
Lamb.
Before the smoke—
there was:
Worship.
Before the smoke—
there was the sealed people of:
God.
The smoke does not erase what John has already:
Seen.

7. Faith Remembers What the Smoke Hides

Revelation gives us memory before:
Darkness.
John does not begin with Chapter: 9
He begins with Christ among His:
Churches.
Then the throne.
Then the Lamb.
Then the scroll.
By the time the abyss opens, we have already been given something to:
Remember.
There are moments when we cannot see enough to move confidently forward.
So we remember what we saw when the air was:
Clear.
We remember who God has shown Himself to:

Be.
We remember what Christ has:
Done.
The cross.
The empty tomb.
Grace.
Mercy.
Promises.
Jesus.
This is not pretending the smoke is not:
There.
Christian faith does not require:
Denial.
John sees the smoke.
He acknowledges the darkness.
Faith does not say:
There is no smoke.
Faith says:
The smoke is not the whole story.

8. Permission Is Not Approval

The source of the smoke matters.
It rises from:
Below.
That should keep us from confusing darkness with God's moral:
Character.
God's sovereignty does not require us to rename evil:
Good.
Betrayal remains:
Wrong.
Cruelty remains:
Wrong.
Violence remains:
Wrong.
Deception remains:
Wrong.
Death remains an:
Enemy.
God may govern circumstances without morally approving everything that happens within:
Them.
And that distinction matters enormously when we speak to people who are:
Suffering.
We do not need to stand beside someone's tragedy and casually declare:

God did this to you for a reason.
Sometimes we simply do not know:
Why.
But we can say:
God has not:
Left you.
This darkness does not have the final:
Word.
Christ remains:
Present.
The throne remains:
Occupied.
And even here, God can still:
Redeem.
That is more faithful than pretending we understand every reason suffering was:
Allowed.

9. Fear Thrives in Smoke

The smoke comes before the:
Locusts.
There is something psychologically true about that sequence.
Sometimes fear arrives before the thing we:
Fear.
The atmosphere changes.
Something seems:
Wrong.
But we cannot yet identify:
What.
And uncertainty itself becomes a kind of:
Torment.
When we cannot see clearly, imagination begins filling the:
Gaps.
Fear whispers:
Everything is lost.
Nothing will ever change.
God has abandoned you.
There is no:
Hope.
Those statements can feel convincing when the air is:
Dark.
Our feelings matter.
Fear matters.
Grief matters.

Pain matters.
We should never shame someone for experiencing:
Them.
But feelings do not always tell us the entire:
Truth.
Sometimes our hearts say:
God is gone.
Faith answers:
I cannot presently see Him clearly.
Those are not the same:
Statement.
Darkness changes our:
Perception.
It does not necessarily change:
Reality.
The sun is still:
There.

10. Sometimes Someone Else Must Remember for Us

Dark seasons are poor times for making sweeping conclusions about:
God.
When we cannot see clearly, we need:
Discernment.
And sometimes we need someone standing outside our:
Smoke.
When I cannot see—
someone else may:
See.
When my faith becomes weak—
someone else can:
Remember.
When I cannot pray—
someone else can pray for:
Me.
When the smoke convinces me there is no light—
someone beside me can say:
Brother—
look:
Again.
That is one reason the Church matters.
The churches receiving Revelation were:
Communities.
These words were heard:
Together.

They worshiped:
Together.
They suffered:
Together.
They remembered:
Together.
We were never meant to endure:
Alone.
Sometimes faith endures because someone else helps us:
Remember.

11. Do Not Mistake the Present Chapter for the Final Chapter

Smoke does not last:
Forever.
Even the thickest smoke eventually:
Clears.
Revelation moves beyond:
Chapter 9.
That matters.
Never build your entire theology from the darkest:
Chapter.
Revelation contains an:
Abyss.
But Revelation also contains a:
Throne.
It contains:
Judgment.
But also:
Worship.
It contains:
Babylon.
But also the New:
Jerusalem.
It contains:
Death.
But it ends with the river of:
Life.
Chapter 9 is not Chapter: 22
That may sound obvious.
But spiritually we forget it all the:
Time.
When we are living through our own Chapter 9—
we begin believing Chapter 9 is how the story:

Ends.
It is:
Not.
There are chapters we have not yet:
Read.
There are things God has not yet:
Done.
There are mercies we have not yet:
Seen.
Do not mistake the present chapter for the final chapter.
You may be surrounded by:
Smoke.
You may not be able to see very:
Far.
But the page you are presently living is not necessarily the page on which the story:
Ends.

12. Hope Looks Through the Smoke

The smoke is:
Real.
The light is:
Real.
The darkness is:
Real.
The throne is:
Real.
The suffering is:
Real.
The promise is:
Real.
Christian hope does not require us to choose one reality and pretend the other does not:
Exist.
Hope does not say:
Nothing hurts.
Hope says:
Pain will not have the final word.
Hope does not say:
There is no darkness.
Hope says:
Darkness will not last forever.
Hope does not say:
I can see everything clearly.

Hope says:
I know enough to keep walking.
The abyss opens.
Smoke rises.
The sun is darkened.
The air is darkened.
Visibility becomes:
Poor.
But nothing John has previously shown us has been:
Erased.
The throne remains.
The Lamb remains.
The promises remain.
The kingdom remains.
The light:
Remains.
The smoke can obscure the:
Sun.
But it cannot extinguish:
It.
Sometimes faith must simply endure long enough for the smoke to:
Clear.

Pastoral Reflection

There are seasons in life when we cannot see God as clearly as we once:
Did.
Perhaps there was no single moment when everything:
Changed.
The smoke simply began to:
Gather.
A disappointment.
Then another.
A prayer that seemed unanswered.
A relationship that became strained.
A burden that lasted longer than we:
Expected.
A grief that did not disappear according to anyone else's:
Schedule.
And eventually we realized:
The air had become:
Dark.
Those seasons can frighten us because we begin wondering whether something has happened to our:
Faith.

I used to feel close to God.
Why don't I feel that way:
Now?
I used to pray easily.
Why is prayer difficult:
Now?
I used to read Scripture and find comfort.
Why do the words sometimes seem distant:
Now?
And perhaps the most frightening question:
Where did God:
Go?
Revelation 9:2 gives us an image worth carrying into those moments.
The smoke darkened the:
Sun.
But the sun was still:
There.
Sometimes the problem is not that the light has ceased to shine.
Sometimes we are standing where the light has become difficult to:
See.
That distinction can save us from making permanent conclusions during temporary:
Darkness.
There may be times when you cannot feel God's presence.
Do not immediately conclude He is:
Absent.
There may be times when you cannot understand God's purpose.
Do not immediately conclude there is:
None.
There may be times when you cannot imagine how anything good could emerge from what you are experiencing.
Do not confuse the limits of your vision with the limits of God's:
Power.
The smoke may be real.
Your pain may be real.
Your confusion may be real.
Your questions may be real.
Faith does not ask you to deny any of:
That.
Faith asks you to remember something the smoke cannot:
Change.
The sun is still:
There.

And more importantly—
the **Son** is still:
There.
Christ has not disappeared because we cannot presently see Him clearly.
The Lamb has not left the throne because our circumstances have become:
Dark.
There may be days when all we can do is:
Remember.
And on those days—
remember.
Remember what you knew when the sky was:
Clear.
Remember the grace you have received.
Remember the people God has placed beside:
You.
Remember the cross.
Remember the empty tomb.
Remember the:
Lamb.
Sometimes faith walks through:
Smoke.
And when it does—
we keep:
Walking.
Not because we can see everything ahead.
But because we remember who is already:
There.

Something Worth Pondering

Smoke has an interesting:
Power.
It can make something disappear from sight without actually removing:
It.
The mountain is still there.
The road is still there.
The horizon is still there.
The sun is still:
There.
We simply cannot see them as clearly as we once:
Could.
Perhaps some things in our spiritual lives work the same:
Way.
God's goodness may become difficult to:
See.

But difficult to see does not mean:
Gone.
God's presence may become difficult to:
Feel.
But difficult to feel does not mean:
Absent.
Hope may become difficult to:
Imagine.
But difficult to imagine does not mean:
Impossible.
Sometimes one of the most important distinctions faith can make is between:
What has disappeared—
and:
What has merely become difficult to see.
Revelation 9:2 does not tell us the sun went:
Out.
It tells us the sun was:
Darkened.
The smoke changed the:
View.
It did not destroy the:
Light.
So before concluding that something is gone—
ask whether you may simply be standing in the:
Smoke.
And remember:
Smoke can hide what it cannot destroy.

Ask Yourself This:

Is there an area of my life where present circumstances have begun rewriting what I already know about God's:
Character?
When I cannot see clearly, what truths—and what people—help me:
Remember?
And if the smoke can hide the light but cannot extinguish it—
can I trust the:
Light
until the smoke begins to:
Clear?

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:3

“And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.”
— Revelation 9:3, KJV

The abyss has been:
Opened.
Smoke has risen.
The sun has been:
Darkened.
The air has been:
Darkened.
And now something emerges from the:
Smoke.
Locusts.
But almost immediately John tells us these are no ordinary:
Locusts.
They are given authority like the authority of:
Scorpions.
Once again we encounter that familiar word:
Like.
And once again we encounter an even more important word:
Given.
The creatures may be terrifying.
Their power may be real.
But their power is not:
Their own.

1. Something Comes Out of the Smoke

Verse 2 left us surrounded by:
Smoke.
Now Verse 3 tells us the smoke was concealing something:
Else.
Locusts come from the smoke upon the:
Earth.
First John's vision is:
Obscured.
Then the threat becomes:
Visible.
That is often how fear works.
We sense something before we understand:
It.
We know something is wrong before we know exactly what is:

Wrong.
And sometimes the uncertainty is almost as frightening as the thing eventually:
Revealed.
Now the smoke begins to clear just enough for John to:
See.
And what he sees is: Terrifying.

2. John Calls Them Locusts

For people formed by Israel's Scriptures, locusts carried enormous biblical:
Weight.
A swarm could strip vegetation.
Destroy crops.
Threaten food supplies.
Leave once productive land:
Bare.
Locusts meant:
Loss.
And one of the great biblical stories standing behind the image is the plague upon:
Egypt.
Pharaoh repeatedly refused to:
Listen.
Judgment followed.
Locusts covered the land and consumed what remained.
Revelation has already echoed the Exodus story through:
Plagues.
Water.
Darkness.
Judgment.
Resistance.
And ultimately:
Deliverance.
John is not simply retelling Exodus.
But he draws upon imagery God's people already:
Know.
God hears the oppressed.
God confronts evil.
God judges.
And God brings His people:
Through.

3. These Are Not Ordinary Locusts

But the locusts of Revelation 9 are:
Different.

Ordinary locusts attack:
Vegetation.
These creatures will soon be specifically forbidden from harming:
Vegetation.
That should tell us immediately that John has taken us beyond an ordinary insect:
Swarm.
They emerge from the:
Abyss.
Through:
Smoke.
Their target will be:
Human beings.
And they possess a strange power of:
Torment.
The imagery has become deliberately:
Nightmarish.
We should allow it to be.
John intends us to recognize:
Danger.
These creatures are:
Terrifying.
But terror is not the same as:
Sovereignty.
Something can be terrifying without being:
Ultimate.
Something can possess power without possessing:
All power.
Something can cause suffering without determining the final:
Outcome.
Revelation continually teaches us to distinguish between what is frightening—
and what is:
Sovereign.

4. Power Was Given to Them

There it is:
Again.
Given.
Verse 1:
The key was:
Given.
Verse 3:
Authority is:

Given.
John seems determined to prevent us from misunderstanding what we are:
Seeing.
The abyss has opened.
The creatures have emerged.
But nobody has overthrown:
Heaven.
The locusts do not generate their own authority.
Their power is:
Delegated.
Permitted.
Bounded.
And the next verses will make those boundaries increasingly:
Explicit.
They will be told what they may not:
Harm.
Their targets will be:
Restricted.
Their activity will be:
Restricted.
Their duration will be:
Restricted.
Their effect will be:
Restricted.
The boundaries begin here with one small:
Word.
Given.
What looks uncontrolled from earth remains bounded from:
Heaven.
That does not make the suffering:
Unreal.
It means the suffering is not:
Ultimate.

5. Like the Power of Scorpions

Again John says:
Like.
He does not say the locusts are:
Scorpions.
Their power is *like* the power of scorpions on the:
Earth.
The comparison tells us something about their:
Threat.
Locusts suggest overwhelming:

Numbers.
Scorpions suggest painful:
Stinging.
John combines the images.
A swarm whose purpose is not merely to consume crops—
but to inflict:
Torment.
The image is meant to be:
Felt.
We are supposed to recognize the danger.
But we should respect John's:
Like.
We do not need to turn the locusts into:
Helicopters.
Aircraft.
Weapons.
Or some modern machine John was supposedly trying to describe with first-century:
Language.
Revelation was written to actual:
Churches.
Its message mattered to:
Them.
The imagery had theological meaning long before anyone invented a:
Helicopter.
The better question is not:
What modern machine is this?
The better question is:
What is John showing us?
Forces emerge from the abyss.
Their power is frightening.
Their capacity for torment is real.
But their authority is:
Given.
That is enough to keep us:
Occupied.

6. The Abyss Does Not Produce Freedom

There is something else John wants us to:
See.
Look at what comes from the:
Abyss.
Not:
Life.

Not:
Joy.
Not:
Peace.
Not:
Flourishing.
Smoke.
Darkness.
Torment.
The abyss cannot give what it does not:
Possess.
That exposes one of sin's oldest:
Lies.
Sin promises:
Freedom.
The promise is as old as:
Eden.
Take.
Eat.
Your eyes will be:
Opened.
You will become:
Wise.
You will become like:
God.
Rebellion advertises itself as:
Liberation.
And it still does.
It says:
This will make you happy.
This will make you free.
This will satisfy you.
Nobody will know.
It will not matter.
You deserve this.
Sin rarely introduces itself by saying:
I would like to destroy your life.
The advertisement is usually considerably more:
Attractive.
But the advertisement and the product are often very different:
Things.
Revelation shows us the:
Product.

The abyss opens.
And what comes out?
Not:
Freedom.
Not:
Fulfillment.
Not:
Life.
But:
Torment.
Rebellion eventually reveals what rebellion:
Is.

7. Judgment Can Reveal Where a Road Leads

We should be careful with the word:
Judgment.
Scripture certainly portrays direct divine judgment.
But Scripture also shows another pattern.
Sometimes judgment involves human beings experiencing the consequences of what they have:
Chosen.
The restraints are loosened.
The road is allowed to continue.
And rebellion reveals where it:
Leads.
Humanity says:
We do not want Your:
Rule.
We want our own:
Way.
We want independence.
We want to define good and evil for:
Ourselves.
And sometimes judgment takes the form of allowing that road to reveal its:
Destination.
But we must not turn that into a simplistic explanation for human:
Suffering.
Revelation 9 does **not** give us permission to look at every suffering person and conclude:
You must have done something to deserve this.
Faithful people suffer.
Innocent people suffer.
The martyrs suffer precisely because they remain:
Faithful.

So Revelation 9 must never become a weapon we use to explain someone else's:
Pain.
The vision is larger than individual:
Misfortune.
John is showing us:
Rebellion.
Judgment.
Spiritual evil.
A world opposed to God's good:
Rule.
We should be very careful about claiming to know why a particular person:
Suffers.
Usually—
we do:
Not.

8. What Comes From a Kingdom Reveals Its Character

The locusts move:
From the abyss.
Through the smoke.
Onto the:
Earth.
What had been hidden now enters human:
Experience.
And what comes from a source tells us something about the:
Source.
The abyss produces:
Smoke.
Darkness.
Torment.
Compare that with what Revelation has shown us around the:
Throne.
Worship.
Life.
Justice.
Mercy.
The Lamb.
Salvation.
A people gathered from every tribe and language and people and:
Nation.
Eventually—
a river of:
Life.

The contrast could hardly be greater.
From the throne:
Life.
From the abyss:
Torment.
From the Lamb:
Redemption.
From rebellion:
Destruction.
From God:
Light.
From the abyss:
Smoke.
Revelation asks us to notice what each kingdom:
Produces.
Fruit tells us something about the:
Root.

9. What We Worship Shapes What We Become

That is why Revelation is so deeply concerned with:
Allegiance.
Whom will you:
Worship?
The Lamb?
Or powers opposed to the:
Lamb?
Worship is never merely what happens during a religious:
Service.
Worship is:
Allegiance.
And allegiance eventually becomes visible in the way we:
Live.
What we worship shapes how we use:
Power.
How we treat:
People.
How we understand:
Truth.
How we value:
Life.
How we handle:
Money.
How we respond to:
Enemies.

What we worship shapes what we become.
The Lamb forms people into:
Witnesses.
The abyss forms through:
Fear.
The Lamb gives:
Life.
The abyss produces:
Torment.
Every kingdom eventually produces a family:
Resemblance.
So one way to discern allegiance is to ask:
What kind of fruit is this producing?
Love?
Truth?
Mercy?
Justice?
Faithfulness?
Peace?
Or:
Fear?
Deception?
Hatred?
Cruelty?
Bondage?
Destruction?
Fruit tells us something about the:
Root.

10. Do Not Become Fascinated With the Darkness

Revelation contains mysterious and frightening:
Things.
Demons.
The abyss.
The beast.
666
Armageddon.
Locusts.
Scorpions.
Those things attract:
Attention.
But there is a danger in becoming so fascinated with darkness that we barely notice:
God.

The locusts are not the theological center of:
Revelation.
The Lamb:
Is.
The abyss is not the center.
The throne:
Is.
Torment is not the final word.
The kingdom:
Is.
Even when evil dominates the scene—
it never dominates the:
Story.
Revelation is not fundamentally the revelation of:
Darkness.
It is the revelation of:
Jesus Christ.
Never forget the first:
Verse.
The Christian is not called to become an expert in:
Darkness.
We are called to become faithful followers of:
Christ.
We should understand evil sufficiently to resist:
It.
But we do not need to become fascinated by:
It.
Our attention forms:
Us.

11. Power Can Be Real Without Being Ultimate

The grammar of the verse gives us the theological:
Balance.
Locusts came from the:
Smoke.
Authority was given to:
Them.
The source tells us something about their:
Character.
The word *given* tells us something about their:
Limit.
They are genuinely:
Evil.
Genuinely:

Powerful.
And genuinely:
Bounded.
Christian faith avoids two opposite errors.
One says:
Evil is not really powerful.
Revelation says:
It is.
The other says:
Evil is nearly equal with God.
Revelation says:
It is:
Not.
Take the locusts seriously.
They are:
Terrifying.
Take the torment seriously.
It is:
Real.
Take the abyss seriously.
It is:
Dark.
But take the word **given** even more:
Seriously.
Because that word tells us who does **not** possess ultimate:
Authority.

12. “Given” Does Not Mean “Good”

We need one more important:
Guardrail.
The creatures receive permission to:
Act.
That does not make their nature:
Good.
God's sovereignty over evil does not transform evil into:
Righteousness.
The abyss remains the:
Abyss.
Torment remains:
Torment.
Darkness remains:
Darkness.
God can limit what God does not:
Love.

God can restrain evil.
God can redirect what evil intends.
God can redeem circumstances evil meant for:
Destruction.
And none of that requires calling evil:
Good.
The cross is the greatest example.
Betrayal was:
Evil.
False accusation was:
Evil.
Mockery was:
Evil.
The execution of the innocent Son of God was:
Evil.
And yet evil did not get to determine the final meaning of the:
Cross.
God brought salvation from what evil intended for:
Destruction.
That means evil does not get to decide what God can:
Redeem.
Evil may cause:
Wounds.
But evil cannot declare:
This can never be redeemed.
Suffering may change our lives.
But suffering cannot tell God:
You may do nothing with this.
The cross forever destroys the idea that evil gets the final interpretation of what evil has:
Done.

13. Fear Counts the Locusts

The locusts grab our:
Attention.
The scorpions grab our:
Attention.
The abyss grabs our:
Attention.
That is understandable.
Fear naturally studies the size of the:
Threat.
But faith learns to notice the size of the:
Boundary.

Fear counts the locusts.
Faith notices the limits.
Fear studies the:
Sting.
Faith remembers who sets the:
Boundary.
Fear sees what has emerged from the:
Abyss.
Faith remembers who holds the:
Key.
Neither perspective denies:
Reality.
But one sees more of:
It.
Earth sees:
Locusts.
Heaven sees:
Limits.
Earth experiences:
Torment.
Heaven knows the:
Boundary.
Earth sees:
Chaos.
Heaven remains under the rule of:
God.
That does not mean we always understand where the boundary has been:
Drawn.
Sometimes we wish suffering had stopped:
Sooner.
We wish the prayer had been answered:
Differently.
We wish the diagnosis had changed.
We wish the relationship had healed.
We wish the person we loved had:
Stayed.
Those wishes are not failures of:
Faith.
They are expressions of:
Love.
Endurance can include:
Tears.

14. Power Was Given

Perhaps we should finish where the verse places its greatest theological:
Weight.
Power was:
Given.
Not:
Owned.
Given.
Not:
Unlimited.
Given.
Not:
Ultimate.
The grammar preaches the:
Theology.
The creatures possess:
Power.
But not autonomous:
Power.
They possess:
Authority.
But not ultimate:
Authority.
They can:
Act.
But only within boundaries beyond:
Themselves.
The abyss has opened.
Its smoke has risen.
Its creatures have emerged.
Nothing about the scene is:
Comfortable.
But the abyss does not:
Reign.
The locusts do not:
Reign.
The darkness does not:
Reign.
The:
Lamb
reigns.
So as the vision becomes even more frightening—
carry one word:

Forward.
When Verse 4 restricts the swarm—
remember:
Given.
When Verse 5 limits what they can do—
remember:
Given.
When their terrifying appearance is described—
remember:
Given.
Before John tells us how frightening these creatures look, he tells us something far more important.
Their power is not:
Ultimate.
It was:
Given.

Pastoral Reflection

There are times when something enters our lives and seems to possess enormous:
Power.
Fear can feel that:
Way.
Grief can feel that:
Way.
Conflict can feel that:
Way.
Illness can feel that:
Way.
A situation may become so large in our minds that eventually it seems to possess:
Everything.
Our thoughts.
Our emotions.
Our sleep.
Our prayers.
Our attention.
Our:
Future.
And when something occupies that much of our inner world, it is easy to assume it must possess unlimited:
Power.
Revelation 9:3 tells us to look more:
Carefully.

The locusts are powerful.
John does not deny:
That.
Their sting will be terrible.
John does not minimize:
That.
But their power is:
Given.
They operate within:
Limits.
That does not mean every painful situation in our lives will end exactly when or how we:
Want.
Nor does it mean faithful people will never suffer devastating:
Loss.
Revelation itself would contradict such a:
Promise.
It means something deeper.
Nothing that enters our lives can become:
God.
Nothing we fear can claim ultimate:
Authority.
Nothing we suffer can rewrite the final promise of:
Christ.
There may be something in your life that feels larger than:
You.
Perhaps it:
Is.
But larger than you does not mean larger than:
God.
That distinction matters.
You do not have to be stronger than everything you:
Face.
You do not have to possess enough courage to overwhelm every:
Fear.
You do not have to understand everything that is:
Happening.
Christian endurance is not the declaration:
I am strong enough for this.
Sometimes Christian endurance is simply the confession:
God is still greater than this.
And perhaps that is enough for:
Today.

Tomorrow may require the same confession:
Again.
And the day after:
Again.
Faith does not endure because the world is always:
Safe.
Faith endures because God remains:
Faithful.

Something Worth Pondering

We naturally notice the frightening words in Revelation 9:3.
Locusts.
Scorpions.
Power.
Smoke.
Abyss.
But perhaps the most important word is much:
Smaller.
Given.
Fear directs our attention toward the size of the:
Threat.
Faith learns to look for the size of the:
Boundary.
That does not mean ignoring danger.
It means seeing danger within a larger:
Reality.
The locusts have power.
But they do not have:
All power.
The scorpion has a sting.
But the sting does not write the ending of the:
Story.
The abyss releases darkness.
But the abyss does not sit upon the:
Throne.
Perhaps something in your life presently feels enormously:
Powerful.
Do not pretend otherwise.
Name it.
Acknowledge it.
Pray about it.
Seek help when help is:
Needed.
But do not accidentally give it a title Scripture reserves for:

God.
Ultimate.
Your fear is not:
Ultimate.
Your suffering is not:
Ultimate.
Your failure is not:
Ultimate.
Your grief is not:
Ultimate.
Even death is not:
Ultimate.
Christ:
Is.
So when something frightening fills your vision, perhaps the question becomes:
Am I looking only at its power—
or have I remembered its:
Limits?

Ask Yourself This:

Is there something in my life that I have allowed to become larger in my mind than the God I:
Trust?
Am I more fascinated by the darkness than I am attentive to:
Christ?
And when fear directs my eyes toward the locusts—
can faith teach me to notice one quiet word:
Given?

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:4

"And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads."
— Revelation 9:4, KJV

The locusts have:
Emerged.
Their power has been:
Given.
They possess a sting like:
Scorpions.
Everything about the scene suggests:
Danger.
And then comes a:
Command.
Do not harm the grass.
Do not harm the green growth.
Do not harm the trees.
Instead, their activity is directed toward certain:
People.
But even there—
there is a:
Boundary.
They may act against those who do not have the seal of God upon their:
Foreheads.
Suddenly something John showed us two chapters earlier becomes enormously:
Important.
The seal was not forgotten.
God remembers those who belong to:
Him.

1. They Were Told

There it is:
Again.
Verse 1:
The key was:
Given.
Verse 3:
Power was:
Given.
Verse 4:

They were:
Told.
And soon:
Allowed.
These are not insignificant:
Words.
John surrounds terrifying creatures with verbs of:
Limitation.
The creatures do not emerge from the abyss and decide for themselves what they will:
Do.
They receive:
Orders.
Their activity is:
Restricted.
Their boundaries are:
Established.
They possess power.
But someone else determines how that power may be:
Used.
The grammar continues to preach the:
Theology.

2. These Locusts Are Different

The first restriction is:
Surprising.
Do not harm the grass of the:
Earth.
Do not harm any green:
Growth.
Do not harm any:
Tree.
That is precisely what ordinary locusts would be expected to:
Attack.
Locusts consume:
Vegetation.
Yet these locusts are forbidden from doing the very thing ordinary locusts naturally:
Do.
John is clearly showing us something beyond an ordinary insect:
Swarm.
And there is another important change.
The earlier trumpets affected:
Earth.

Sea.
Fresh water.
Heavenly lights.
But now the focus becomes increasingly:
Personal.
The fifth trumpet moves toward human:
Experience.
But even then—
not everyone becomes a:
Target.
Another boundary:
Appears.

3. But Not All People

The locusts are not given unrestricted access to:
Humanity.
Their activity is directed toward those who do not have the seal of God upon their:
Foreheads.
That immediately takes us back to Revelation: 7
Before the seventh seal was opened—
before the trumpets began to sound—
before the abyss opened—
before the smoke rose—
God's servants were:
Sealed.
What may once have seemed like an interruption in the story now becomes essential to understanding the:
Story.
Revelation 7 prepared us for Revelation: 9
God showed us the seal before He showed us the:
Swarm.

4. God Is Not Looking for His People in the Smoke

That may be one of the most comforting pictures in this frightening:
Chapter.
The smoke rises.
The air darkens.
The swarm emerges.
But God does not suddenly ask:
Where are My:
People?
He already:
Knows.
They are:

Known.
They are:
Claimed.
They are:
His.
God is not trying to find His people in the:
Smoke.
The darkness may affect our ability to:
See.
It does not affect:
God's.
We may cry:
God, where are:
You?
But God never needs to ask:
Where are:
You?
He knows.
He sees.
He remembers.
The smoke may obscure our:
Vision.
It does not obscure:
His.

5. The Seal Means Belonging

The seal is not merely a decorative:
Mark.
It represents:
Ownership.
Identity.
Allegiance.
God's claim upon His:
People.
The forehead makes that allegiance visible within the symbolic world of John's:
Vision.
Later Revelation will introduce another mark associated with another:
Allegiance.
The contrast will become increasingly:
Important.
Whose name do you:
Bear?
To whom do you:

Belong?
Whose kingdom defines your:
Life?
Revelation continually returns to those questions because Revelation is deeply concerned with:
Worship.
And beneath every other identity available to the Christian lies one deeper:
Truth.
I belong to:
God.
The world may call us many:
Things.
Successful.
Failure.
Important.
Insignificant.
Strong.
Weak.
Useful.
Unnecessary.
Young.
Old.
Healthy.
Sick.
But Revelation gives God's people an identity the world cannot:
Revoke.
God says:
Mine.

6. The Abyss Cannot Change Ownership

That may be one of the most beautiful truths hidden inside one of Revelation's darkest:
Passages.
The abyss can:
Open.
Smoke can:
Rise.
Darkness can:
Spread.
Locusts can:
Emerge.
But none of those things can erase the seal of:
God.
The darkness does not get to redefine who belongs to:

Him.
Fear does not get the final right to name:
You.
Failure does not get the final right to name:
You.
Your past does not get the final right to name:
You.
Other people's judgment does not get the final right to name:
You.
God has already spoken:
Mine.
The abyss cannot rewrite what heaven has:
Declared.

7. The Seal Is Not a Promise of a Pain-Free Life

We need to be very careful:
Here.
If we interpret the seal as a promise that God's people will never suffer,
Revelation itself proves us:
Wrong.
Faithful believers have already experienced:
Persecution.
Some have been:
Martyred.
Others will:
Suffer.
Jesus was perfectly:
Faithful.
Jesus still:
Suffered.
The apostles were faithful.
Many still:
Suffered.
The martyrs beneath the altar belonged to God.
They had still been:
Killed.
So biblical protection cannot simply mean:
Nothing painful will ever happen to:
Me.
The seal means something:
Deeper.
God's people are:
Known.
God's people are:

Claimed.
God's people belong to:
Him.
The powers opposed to God cannot claim ultimate ownership over those who belong to:
Christ.
Sometimes protection means there are things evil cannot ultimately:
Take.

8. Christian Security Is Deeper Than Circumstances

Circumstances:
Change.
Bodies weaken.
Jobs disappear.
Relationships change.
Nations rise and:
Fall.
Life itself eventually:
Ends.
If our security depends upon circumstances never changing, our security will always be:
Fragile.
Revelation offers something:
Deeper.
Belonging.
Christian security is not:
Nothing bad can happen to me.
Christian security is:
Nothing can finally take me from Christ.
Those are very different:
Promises.
One depends upon:
Circumstances.
The other depends upon:
God.
That does not mean Christians should become indifferent toward suffering.
We pray for:
Healing.
Deliverance.
Restoration.
Protection.
We should.
But our confidence in God's faithfulness cannot depend entirely upon receiving the outcome we:

Prefer.
Sometimes God delivers:
From.
Sometimes God carries:
Through.
Israel crossed the Red Sea and was delivered:
From.
Daniel entered the lions' den and was carried:
Through.
The three Hebrews entered the furnace and discovered God with them:
There.
The martyrs of Revelation remained faithful all the way through:
Death.
God's faithfulness takes more than one:
Form.

9. I May Not Know What Will Happen—But I Can Know Whose I Am

We usually want to know:
What happens:
Next?
Will the situation improve?
Will the prayer be answered as I:
Hope?
Will everything turn out the way I:
Want?
Often we do not:
Know.
But Revelation gives us another question.
Whose are:
You?
I may not know what tomorrow:
Holds.
I may not know how this situation will:
End.
I may not understand why something was:
Allowed.
But I can know:
Whose I am.
Sometimes people do not need another theological:
Explanation.
The person sitting beside a hospital bed may not need a lecture about divine:
Providence.
The grieving spouse may not need someone explaining why suffering:

Exists.
Sometimes the most faithful thing we can say is:
You belong to:
God.
And He has not forgotten:
You.
There are moments when explanation is less helpful than:
Presence.
And sometimes belonging is the anchor we need when answers will not:
Come.

10. The Seal Does Not Remove the Smoke

Notice something important.
The sealed still live in a world where the air has been:
Darkened.
The seal does not immediately clear the:
Sky.
It does not close the:
Abyss.
It does not remove the:
Swarm.
God's people remain within the larger:
Scene.
That matters enormously for understanding Christian:
Endurance.
The message is not:
Become faithful and God will remove you from every difficult:
Circumstance.
The message is:
Remain faithful because you belong to God even within difficult:
Circumstances.
That is:
Endurance.
Faith is not a technique for manipulating:
God.
The seal is not a magical:
Charm.
Christianity is not spiritual:
Superstition.
We do not possess the right words that force God to protect:
Us.
We do not perform the correct ritual and become immune from:
Pain.
We belong to:

Christ.
That relationship is the:
Center.

11. A Seal Does Not Merely Belong to Us—It Claims Us

Belonging brings:
Comfort.
But belonging also brings:
Responsibility.
If I bear God's:
Name—
then my life should increasingly reflect God's:
Character.
If I belong to the:
Lamb—
then I should increasingly learn the way of the:
Lamb.
Truth.
Faithfulness.
Sacrificial love.
Patient endurance.
Witness.
Holiness.
A seal is not merely something we:
Claim.
It claims:
Us.
We often speak of:
My faith.
My salvation.
My relationship with:
God.
True enough.
But Christianity also reverses the:
Possessive.
I am His.
That changes the question from merely:
What can God do for:
Me?
to:
How should someone who belongs to God:
Live?
How should I speak?
How should I treat:

People?
How should I use what I:
Possess?
How should I respond to:
Enemies?
Those who belong to the Lamb should increasingly resemble the:
Lamb.
Not the:
Dragon.
Not the:
Beast.
Not:
Babylon.
We cannot claim the Lamb's name while embracing the methods of the:
Dragon.

12. The Seal Should Produce Gratitude, Not Arrogance

There is a temptation we must:
Resist.
The language of the sealed and unsealed can become a tool for deciding who is:
In.
Who is:
Out.
Who belongs.
Who does:
Not.
But Revelation was not given to turn Christians into spiritual border:
Guards.
The question should first be directed toward:
Ourselves.
Where is my:
Allegiance?
If I belong to God, that should not make me:
Proud.
It should make me:
Grateful.
Grace does not create grounds for:
Boasting.
And when Revelation speaks of those who do not bear God's seal, the Church should not respond with:
Gloating.
Judgment should never make us enjoy the suffering of other:
People.

The Lamb was:
Slain.
Christ loved:
Enemies.
Jesus prayed for those who crucified:
Him.
Human beings:
Matter.
So the Church does not look at people outside Christ and say:
Good.
The Church says:
Come.
Turn.
There is mercy.
There is grace.
There is a:
Lamb.
The tragedy at the end of Chapter 9 will not merely be that judgment:
Comes.
It will be that people experience judgment and still refuse to:
Repent.
That should break the heart of the:
Church.
Grace received becomes grace:
Shared.
Mercy experienced becomes mercy:
Offered.
The seal should make us faithful:
Witnesses.

13. Evil Hears “No”

Return to the command.
The locusts possess destructive:
Capacity.
But ability does not equal:
Permission.
They are:
Told.
Not the:
Grass.
Not the green:
Growth.
Not the:
Trees.

Not those bearing God's:
Seal.
Power encounters:
Authority.
And authority establishes the:
Boundary.
The swarm does not:
Negotiate.
It does not exceed the:
Command.
The boundary:
Holds.
That matters because fear usually speaks in:
Absolutes.
This will destroy:
Everything.
This will never:
End.
Nothing can stop:
It.
There is no:
Hope.
Always.
Never.
Everything.
Nothing.
But Revelation interrupts fear's absolutes with:
Limits.
Evil hears:
No.
No farther.
Not there.
Not them.
Not forever.
We know what has reached:
Us.
We rarely know everything that was:
Stopped.
We know what:
Happened.
We do not know everything that was prevented from:
Happening.
That requires:

Humility.
Revelation does not give us enough information to identify every invisible boundary God has drawn around every instance of:
Suffering.
We should not pretend that it:
Does.
But Revelation does give us theological confidence:
Evil does not possess infinite:
Reach.
God remains sovereign.
We remain:
Limited.

14. Grace Came First

Perhaps the most beautiful thing about Revelation 9:4 actually happened two chapters:
Earlier.
The servants of God were sealed in Revelation: 7
The locusts appear in Revelation: 9
Think about the:
Order.
Before the smoke—
the:
Seal.
Before the locusts—
the:
Seal.
Before the torment—
the:
Seal.
Before God's people knew what was coming—
the:
Seal.
Grace:
First.
Sometimes Christian life works that:
Way.
We enter a difficult season and discover that God has already placed something in our lives that helps us:
Endure.
A Scripture learned years:
Earlier.
A truth heard in a:
Sermon.

A friendship formed during an ordinary:
Season.
A prayer someone taught:
Us.
A memory of God's past:
Faithfulness.
Something we once thought was merely:
Interesting—
suddenly becomes:
Essential.
Sometimes we discover old grace in new:
Trouble.
We look backward and realize:
Grace had gone:
Ahead.
That does not mean God explains every crisis.
It does not mean every tragedy should be described as something God deliberately arranged merely to teach us a:
Lesson.
It means that when we reach a place we never wanted to:
Go—
we may discover that God's faithfulness did not begin when we:
Arrived.
He already knew:
Us.
He already claimed:
Us.
He was already:
God.
The world says:
Be:
Afraid.
The abyss says:
Be:
Afraid.
The swarm says:
Be:
Afraid.
The seal says:
You belong to God.
And sometimes belonging is stronger than:
Fear.
The abyss cannot change:

That.
The smoke cannot change:
That.
The locusts cannot change:
That.
Suffering cannot change:
That.
Fear cannot change:
That.
And ultimately—
death cannot change:
That.
The seal still:
Matters.

Pastoral Reflection

There are moments when one of the deepest questions in the human heart is not:
What is going to:
Happen?
It is:
Am I going to be all right?
Sometimes we ask that question during:
Illness.
Sometimes during:
Grief.
Sometimes when a relationship is falling:
Apart.
Sometimes when finances become:
Uncertain.
Sometimes when someone we love is struggling and there seems to be nothing we can do to:
Help.
And sometimes we ask it quietly in the middle of the:
Night.
Am I going to be all:
Right?
Revelation does not always answer that question the way we would:
Prefer.
It does not promise that every illness will be:
Healed.
It does not promise that every relationship will be:
Restored.
It does not promise that every earthly loss will be:

Prevented.
It does not promise that faithful Christians will never:
Suffer.
But Revelation gives us another question.
Perhaps an even deeper:
One.
Whose are you?
Because if our definition of *all right* means nothing painful will ever happen,
Scripture cannot make us that:
Promise.
But if *all right* means nothing can finally separate us from the God who knows us, loves us, claims us, and holds our ultimate future—
then the answer becomes something much:
Stronger.
You belong to:
God.
That does not mean you will understand every:
Chapter.
It means the Author has not lost the:
Story.
It does not mean there will never be:
Smoke.
It means the smoke cannot erase your:
Name.
It does not mean the abyss will never:
Open.
It means the abyss cannot claim what belongs to:
God.
There may come a time when your faith feels too weak to hold onto:
Him.
When that happens, remember:
Christian hope has never depended entirely upon the strength of our:
Grip.
Sometimes we endure because we remember that even when our hands are:
Trembling—
His are:
Not.
You are:
Known.
You are:
Claimed.
You are:
His.

And sometimes that is the truth we need more than any:
Explanation.

Something Worth Pondering

The servants of God were sealed in Revelation: 7
The locusts appear in Revelation: 9
Think about that:
Order.
God marked His people before they knew why the mark would:
Matter.
Grace came before the:
Crisis.
Perhaps we have experienced that more often than we:
Realize.
Something God taught us years ago suddenly becomes important:
Today.
A Scripture stored in our heart returns when we desperately need:
It.
A friendship formed in an ordinary season becomes essential during an extraordinary:
One.
A lesson learned through an earlier difficulty becomes strength for a later:
Trial.
Sometimes we recognize God's preparation only in:
Retrospect.
We look backward and say:
Now I understand why that:
Mattered.
We worry about:
Tomorrow.
God gives grace:
Today.
And when tomorrow becomes today, perhaps we discover that grace was already waiting:
There.
Not necessarily an explanation.
Not necessarily the outcome we would have:
Chosen.
But grace enough to:
Endure.
The seal came before the:
Swarm.
And perhaps the truth worth carrying with us is simply:

God's grace often arrives before we understand why we are going to need it.

Ask Yourself This:

When circumstances become frightening, do I define God's faithfulness entirely by what happens to:
Me—
or can I begin with the deeper truth:
I belong to Him?
Does belonging to the Lamb make my life increasingly resemble the:
Lamb?
And when the smoke rises and I cannot see what tomorrow holds—
can I rest in the one thing the darkness cannot:
Change?
I belong to God.

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:5

“And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man.”
— Revelation 9:5, KJV

The locusts have been:
Released.
Their power has been:
Given.
Their targets have been:
Restricted.
And now another boundary is:
Drawn.
They may:
Torment.
But they may not:
Kill.
And even the torment itself does not continue:
Indefinitely.
Five:
Months.
Again and again the vision looks terrifying from:
Earth.
And again and again John quietly shows us the boundaries established from:
Heaven.
Given.
Told.
Allowed.
Limited.
The darkness has power.
But the darkness does not have:
Sovereignty.

1. They Were Allowed

There is that language:
Again.
They were:
Allowed.
Not:
They decided.
Not:
They acted without restraint.

Not:
They possessed unlimited authority.
They were:
Allowed.
Verse 1:
The key was:
Given.
Verse 3:
Power was:
Given.
Verse 4:
They were:
Told.
Verse 5:
They were:
Allowed.
John is building a vocabulary of divine:
Limitation.
The abyss has a:
Lock.
The lock requires a:
Key.
The key must be:
Given.
The creatures receive:
Power.
Their targets are:
Restricted.
Their actions are:
Restricted.
Their duration is:
Restricted.
The grammar continues to preach the:
Theology.
Evil is powerful.
But evil is not:
Free.

2. Another Boundary

The creatures may:
Torment.
But they may not:
Kill.
That distinction matters.

Their power is:
Real.
Their limitation is:
Real.
Both truths must remain:
Together.
Verse 4 gave us:
Not the grass.
Not the green growth.
Not the trees.
Not those bearing God's:
Seal.
Verse 5 gives us another:
No.
Not:
Death.
The darkness keeps encountering:
Boundaries.
At first glance Revelation 9 looks like:
Chaos.
But read it:
Slowly.
Look at the:
Grammar.
Look at the:
Commands.
Look at the:
Restrictions.
Look at the:
Time limit.
The darkness is almost fenced:
In.
And the creature inside the fence does not control the:
Fence.

3. Limited Does Not Mean Painless

But we need to be very careful:
Here.
The fact that the creatures cannot kill does not mean their torment is:
Insignificant.
John calls it:
Torment.
Then he tells us what that torment is:
Like.

The agony caused by a scorpion when it:
Stings.
Sharp.
Intense.
Difficult to:
Ignore.
John wants us to feel the severity of the:
Image.
We should not read:
They were not allowed to kill—
and conclude:
Then it was not very:
Bad.
That is not John's:
Point.
The suffering is:
Limited.
And the suffering is:
Real.
Both are:
True.
A dangerous animal behind a fence is still:
Dangerous.
A storm with a boundary is still a:
Storm.
Pain with an ending is still:
Pain.
Boundaries change the meaning of power.
They do not make suffering:
Pleasant.

4. Faith Does Not Minimize Pain

That becomes an important pastoral:
Truth.
Christians sometimes say things intended to comfort that actually minimize another person's:
Pain.
It could have been worse.
At least you still have...
Other people are suffering more than you.
Those statements may even be factually:
True.
They may also be profoundly:
Unhelpful.

Pain does not become painless because something worse was:
Possible.
John does not minimize the:
Torment.
Neither should:
We.
Christian hope does not require emotional:
Denial.
Job:
Laments.
The Psalms:
Lament.
Jeremiah:
Laments.
The martyrs beneath the altar cry:
Out.
Jesus:
Weeps.
Faith sometimes asks:
How long?
We do not strengthen someone's faith by telling them they should not:
Grieve.
We do not defend God's sovereignty by denying the severity of human:
Pain.
Sometimes the most faithful response to another person's suffering is not:
Explanation.
It is:
Compassion.

5. Evil Has a Clock

Then John gives us another:
Boundary.
Five:
Months.
Whatever else we may say about that period, one thing is unmistakably:
Clear.
It:
Ends.
We should be cautious about turning five months into an elaborate prophetic:
Calculation.
Readers have sometimes converted such periods into prophetic years or fitted them into complex historical:
Timelines.

But before we attempt anything like that, we should hear the obvious force of John's:
Words.
The torment has a:
Limit.
The creatures do not possess unlimited:
Time.
A period of several months also fits naturally with the world of locust:
Seasons.
But whether the number carries additional symbolic significance or not, John's immediate point remains:
Powerful.
Their season has an:
End.
The abyss has a:
Lock.
The locusts have:
Limits.
And evil has a:
Clock.
Darkness does not get:
Forever.
The beast does not get:
Forever.
Babylon does not get:
Forever.
Persecution does not get:
Forever.
Death does not get:
Forever.
The grave does not get:
Forever.
Evil gets:
A season.
God possesses:
Eternity.
Suffering gets:
A chapter.
God possesses the:
Story.
Death gets:
A moment.
Life with God receives:

Forever.
That is Christian:
Hope.

6. Five Months Feels Different From the Inside

But there is another pastoral danger:
Here.
We can read:
Five months—
and immediately think:
See?
Limited.
Someone living through five months of torment may hear:
Five months?
How will I survive:
Tomorrow?
Those are very different:
Perspectives.
An hour spent with someone we love can disappear:
Quickly.
An hour waiting for test results can feel:
Endless.
A peaceful night passes almost without:
Notice.
A sleepless night can seem to last:
Forever.
Suffering changes our experience of:
Time.
So we should never stand outside someone else's pain and say:
It is **only** five:
Months.
Never:
Only.
Not to the grieving.
Not to the frightened.
Not to the person barely holding:
On.
Christian compassion never weaponizes:
Perspective.
A limit may be real.
And today may still:
Hurt.

7. Endurance Lives in the Meanwhile

That is where the title of our journey becomes especially:

Important.
When Faith Must Endure.
Endurance exists because something has not ended:
Yet.
If every darkness disappeared immediately, endurance would not be:
Necessary.
If every prayer were answered immediately, endurance would not be:
Necessary.
If every question were resolved immediately, endurance would not be:
Necessary.
Endurance belongs to the:
Meanwhile.
Christ has:
Come.
Christ will come:
Again.
Death has been defeated.
People still:
Die.
The Kingdom has begun.
We still pray:
Your Kingdom:
Come.
We have:
Hope.
We still:
Grieve.
Christian existence lives between:
Already—
and:
Not yet.
The five months will:
End.
But not:
Yet.
The boundary exists.
But someone must live until they reach:
It.
Sometimes that is the hardest part of:
Endurance.
Knowing there is an ending—
and not being there:
Yet.

8. Grace Comes in Daily Portions

We often want enough strength today for everything we may face:
Tomorrow.
Next month.
Next year.
The rest of our:
Lives.
But Jesus taught His disciples to pray for:
Daily:
Bread.
Not lifetime:
Bread.
There is wisdom in:
That.
God often gives enough grace for:
Today.
Tomorrow receives tomorrow's:
Grace.
Sometimes endurance is one:
Day.
Sometimes one:
Hour.
Sometimes one:
Minute.
Sometimes the most faithful prayer we can manage is:
Lord, get me through:
This.
Not next year.
Not next month.
This:
Moment.
Then the next:
One.
And the next.
The five months still have a last:
Day.
There is a first:
Day.
There is a middle:
Day.
And there is a:
Last day.
We may not know when our own difficult season will:

End.
Usually there is no calendar hanging on the wall telling us:
Three weeks:
Remaining.
But Revelation gives us a larger truth even when we do not know the smaller:
Date.
Darkness is not:
Eternal.

9. When Theology Reaches the Hospital Room

John compares the torment to what happens when a scorpion:
Strikes.
The image becomes:
Personal.
There is contact.
There is pain.
Theology feels different when suffering becomes:
Ours.
We can discuss the problem of:
Evil.
We can read books about:
Providence.
We can attend classes.
Debate difficult:
Questions.
Then suffering knocks on our own:
Door.
And suddenly the questions become:
Personal.
Does God still love:
Me?
Is God still:
Here?
Can I trust Him:
Now?
The truths may be the:
Same.
But theology feels different beside a hospital:
Bed.
That does not mean theology has:
Failed.
It means theology has reached the place where it must become:
Faith.

Theology says:
God is:
Faithful.
Suffering asks:
Do you believe that:
Here?
Revelation was written for:
Here.
John's churches were not studying suffering from a safe:
Distance.
They knew:
Pressure.
Persecution.
Loss.
Temptation.
Compromise.
They needed theology capable of surviving:
Reality.
So do:
We.

10. The Sting Must Be Read in Light of the Throne

Pain is:
Loud.
Physical pain demands:
Attention.
Emotional pain demands:
Attention.
Grief does.
Fear does.
When something hurts badly enough, it can fill our entire:
Horizon.
For a moment, pain may become the only thing we can:
See.
That is:
Human.
But the thing filling our horizon is not necessarily the thing filling:
Reality.
The sting is:
Real.
But there is still a:
Throne.
The throne is not mentioned in Verse: 5
It does not need to be.

John showed it to us in Chapter: 4
A truth does not have to be repeated in every verse to remain:
True.
The throne came:
First.
The sting came:
Later.
Therefore the sting must be interpreted in light of the:
Throne—
not the other way:
Around.
Mature faith carries earlier truth into later:
Darkness.
We do not start our theology over every time our circumstances:
Change.
When the sting comes, we remember what we learned before the:
Sting.
God is:
Good.
God is:
Present.
Christ is:
Risen.
I belong to:
Him.
The story is not:
Finished.
That does not eliminate:
Questions.
It does not eliminate:
Tears.
It does not eliminate seasons of:
Silence.
Faith may wrestle.
But it refuses to allow suffering to become the final definition of:
God.

11. Sometimes Ministry Means Staying

There is another side to:
Endurance.
Sometimes the five months belong to someone:
Else.
Someone we:
Love.

Someone in our:
Church.
Someone sitting across the room from:
Us.
And we desperately want to make their suffering:
Better.
Sometimes we:
Can.
We should help whenever we:
Can.
But sometimes there is nothing we can say that will make the pain:
Disappear.
Then ministry may mean sitting through the five months with:
Them.
Not explaining:
Everything.
Not fixing:
Everything.
Not answering every:
Question.
Just:
Staying.
Praying.
Listening.
Helping.
Remembering hope when the other person cannot presently:
Feel it.
Sometimes endurance is something we do beside another:
Person.
We help carry their:
Burden.
We say:
I am not leaving you alone in:
This.
Perhaps that is one of the most Christlike things the Church can:
Do.

12. God Entered Our Suffering

Christian faith does not proclaim a God who watches suffering only from a safe:
Distance.
The Word became:
Flesh.
Jesus knew:

Hunger.
Exhaustion.
Grief.
Rejection.
Betrayal.
Physical pain.
Death.
God entered the human:
Story.
The cross means God knows:
Suffering.
Not the literal sting of Revelation's locusts.
But:
Pain.
Rejection.
Abandonment.
Death.
Our hope is not merely that God explains suffering from a safe:
Distance.
Our hope is that God entered:
It.
And resurrection declares that suffering does not possess ultimate:
Power.
Resurrection does not pretend Good Friday never:
Happened.
It declares that Good Friday did not get the final:
Word.
In that sense, Revelation 9:5 is a Good Friday kind of:
Verse.
Pain.
Torment.
Darkness.
Waiting.
Not yet the:
Ending.
But Christians know there is another:
Morning.
Even when the present verse has not reached it:
Yet.

13. Permission Is Not Sovereignty

The powers of darkness in this verse are:
Terrifying.
Yet notice how often someone else defines what they may:

Do.
They may:
Torment.
They may not:
Kill.
They may act for:
Five months.
Imagine boasting about your power while someone else defines every boundary of your:
Authority.
That is not:
Sovereignty.
That is:
Permission.
What is given can be:
Limited.
What is allowed can be:
Stopped.
What begins can be:
Ended.
The one who sets the boundary possesses greater authority than the one who operates within:
It.
That does not mean we can identify every boundary God has drawn around every painful circumstance in our:
Lives.
We cannot.
And we should never pretend that we:
Can.
We see terrible things:
War.
Cruelty.
Abuse.
Injustice.
Disease.
Death.
And sometimes we ask:
Where are the:
Limits?
Revelation does not show us the location of every:
Boundary.
It tells us that evil is not:
Sovereign.

Nor should God's sovereignty be twisted into the claim that God delights in human:
Torment.
The God Revelation reveals is the God whose Lamb was:
Slain.
The God who will wipe tears from human:
Eyes.
The God who makes all things:
New.
Judgment is serious because rebellion is:
Serious.
But destruction is not God's final:
Word.
The story moves toward:
Restoration.
Life.
New creation.
God dwelling with His:
People.
The throne still comes:
First.
Even here.
Even during the five:
Months.
Even when relief seems unbearably:
Far away.
The throne has not:
Moved.
The Lamb has not surrendered the:
Scroll.
God has not lost the:
Story.

14. The Scorpion Gets Five Months; the Lamb Gets Forever

And so we return to the:
Clock.
Five:
Months.
The torment has a:
Season.
The Kingdom has no:
End.
Put those beside one:

Another.
Five months.
Eternity.
The contrast is almost overwhelming.
The scorpion gets:
Five months.
The Lamb gets:
Forever.
The verse is frightening.
But hidden inside the frightening language is:
Hope.
Not sentimental:
Hope.
Not easy:
Hope.
Not the promise that nothing will:
Hurt.
Something stronger.
The promise of:
Limits.
Sometimes a limit is:
Grace.
When suffering cannot immediately be:
Removed—
a boundary can still be:
Mercy.
No farther.
No more.
Not:
Forever.
Those may not be the words of deliverance we wanted to:
Hear.
But they are not:
Nothing.
Sometimes faith lives between:
Allowed—
and:
Ended.
Something has begun.
It has not yet:
Finished.
We stand in the:
Middle.

And we ask:
How long?
Revelation does not give us a date for every personal:
Trial.
But it gives us a truth about the final destiny of every form of:
Suffering.
Not:
Forever.
So we carry four words from these opening verses of Revelation 9:
Given.
Told.
Allowed.
Limited.
Those words form a fence around the:
Darkness.
The abyss may open.
The smoke may rise.
The locusts may sting.
The torment may be severe.
But evil does not possess:
Forever.
Forever belongs to:
God.
And because darkness does not possess forever—
faith can:
Endure.

Pastoral Reflection

There are seasons when the hardest question is not:
Why?
It is:
How long?
How long will I feel like:
This?
How long will the uncertainty:
Continue?
How long before I know:
Something?
How long before grief becomes easier to:
Carry?
How long before the relationship:
Heals?
How long before I can sleep through the:
Night?

How long:
Lord?
That is a deeply biblical:
Prayer.
Faithful people have prayed it for thousands of:
Years.
And Revelation does not shame us for:
Asking.
Verse 5 gives the torment a:
Limit.
Five:
Months.
But for the person inside the vision, five months may still feel unbearably:
Long.
A limit does not make waiting:
Easy.
That may be where this verse meets us most:
Honestly.
Sometimes we know:
This will not last forever.
But we still do not know how we are going to make it through:
Today.
That is where grace becomes:
Daily.
We do not endure five months all at:
Once.
We endure:
Today.
Then tomorrow becomes:
Today.
And grace meets us:
Again.
Sometimes we imagine endurance as heroic:
Strength.
Someone standing confidently against the storm declaring:
Nothing can move:
Me.
But endurance often looks considerably less:
Dramatic.
Sometimes endurance is getting out of:
Bed.
Sometimes it is praying when we do not feel like:
Praying.

Sometimes it is allowing someone else to:
Help.
Sometimes it is crying and still:
Believing.
Sometimes it is saying:
Lord, I do not know how much longer I can do:
This.
And then somehow—
we make it through another:
Day.
That is not weak:
Faith.
That may be endurance in its purest:
Form.
And when someone else is living through their five:
Months—
perhaps our calling is not to explain the clock.
Perhaps it is to sit beside them while it:
Ticks.
To pray.
To listen.
To help.
To stay.
To remember hope when they cannot presently:
Remember.
Your particular suffering may not come with a date you can circle on a:
Calendar.
We should never promise which form of deliverance someone will:
Receive.
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.
Revelation leaves room for all:
Three.
But the Christian promise is larger than any individual:
Calendar.
There is coming a day when suffering itself reaches its final:
Boundary.
Pain:
No more.

Death:
No more.
Mourning:
No more.
Crying:
No more.
Until then—
we:
Walk.
Sometimes confidently.
Sometimes slowly.
Sometimes with someone holding us:
Up.
But we keep moving toward the day when God Himself says to every form of suffering:
No farther.

Something Worth Pondering

We often ask God to remove difficult things from our:
Lives.
And sometimes He:
Does.
Immediately.
Unexpectedly.
Beautifully.
But sometimes what we encounter instead is a:
Boundary.
Not gone—
but:
Limited.
Not removed—
but:
Restrained.
Not finished—
but:
Temporary.
We may overlook those forms of grace because they are not the answer we were:
Seeking.
We asked:
Take it:
Away.
And sometimes the answer may be:
It will not take:

You.
We asked:
End it:
Now.
And sometimes we discover grace sufficient to carry us:
Through.
We asked:
Why is this:
Happening?
And sometimes we receive not an:
Explanation—
but a:
Promise.
Not:
Forever.
We should be careful here.
We cannot look at every tragedy and confidently announce where God has placed its boundary or why He has permitted it.
There are mysteries we simply do not:
Know.
But Revelation does teach us that evil does not possess:
Forever.
The locusts may torment.
But not:
Kill.
They may act.
But only for:
Five months.
Given.
Told.
Allowed.
Limited.
The darkness is surrounded by words it did not get to:
Choose.
And perhaps faith sometimes means trusting the One who draws the boundaries even when we cannot presently:
See them.
Because ultimately the Christian hope is not that suffering will always be:
Short.
It is that suffering will never be:
Eternal.
The scorpion gets:
Five months.

The Lamb gets:
Forever.

Ask Yourself This:

When suffering hurts, can I resist both pretending it does not hurt and believing it will have the final:
Word?
Am I trying to carry tomorrow's burden with today's grace—or can I receive enough grace for:
Today?
And when suffering whispers:
Forever—
can I answer with the promise Revelation places around the darkness:
No.
Not forever.

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:6

“And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.”
— Revelation 9:6, KJV

The torment continues.
The five months have been:
Established.
The locusts cannot:
Kill.
And now John shows us just how severe their torment:
Becomes.
People will seek:
Death.
But they will not:
Find it.
They will long to:
Die.
But death will:
Flee.
It is one of the darkest sentences we have encountered in:
Revelation.
And perhaps that is exactly why we should read it:
Slowly.
Not sensationally.
Not casually.
Not as spectators watching someone else's:
Pain.
But as people listening carefully to what John is showing us about judgment, despair, and a world separated from the source of:
Life.

1. In Those Days

John begins with another boundary:
In those days.
Not:
Forever.
We have already been told:
Five months.
The suffering has a:
Beginning.
The suffering has a:
Duration.

And therefore the suffering has an:
End.
But we should not rush too quickly toward the:
Ending.
Because there is a terrible tension in this:
Verse.
From heaven's perspective:
Limited.
From the sufferer's perspective:
Unbearable.
Those two truths can exist at the same:
Time.
Five months may be a boundary.
But one day inside those five months may feel like:
Forever.
Knowing something will eventually end does not automatically make the present moment:
Easy.
Sometimes today is still:
Today.
And today:
Hurts.

2. John's Words Are Enough

John describes the torment as so severe that the normal human instinct is:
Reversed.
Human beings ordinarily flee:
Death.
We resist it.
Fear it.
Seek treatment to delay:
It.
Protect ourselves from:
Danger.
But here people seek what they would ordinarily:
Avoid.
They seek:
Death.
They long to:
Die.
That is how John communicates the intensity of the:
Torment.
This is not mild:
Discomfort.

This is not ordinary:
Difficulty.
This is:
Horrifying.
And it is meant to:
Be.
We should not soften John's:
Language.
Judgment is:
Serious.
Rebellion is:
Serious.
The abyss produces consequences that are genuinely:
Terrible.
But neither should we exploit John's:
Language.
We do not need to embellish the:
Horror.
We do not need to speculate about additional:
Torments.
We do not need to turn judgment into:
Spectacle.
Revelation does not need our help becoming:
Dramatic.
People seek:
Death.
Death:
Flees.
John's words are:
Enough.

3. Death Flees

That phrase is almost poetic in its:
Horror.
Normally people flee:
Death.
Here death flees from:
People.
Human beings pursue.
Death:
Retreats.
They seek an:
Escape.
The escape remains beyond their:

Reach.
And that reveals something about human:
Control.
We plan.
Schedule.
Prepare.
Save.
Insure.
Predict.
Manage.
There is wisdom in many of those:
Things.
But beneath them can hide an assumption:
I control my:
Life.
Revelation repeatedly challenges that:
Illusion.
We are creatures.
Not:
God.
We did not choose to:
Exist.
We cannot guarantee:
Tomorrow.
We cannot prevent every:
Suffering.
And ultimately life and death do not answer to our:
Command.
People in this vision say to death:
Come.
Death does:
Not.
Even death is not:
Sovereign.

4. Rebellion Promised Control

That makes the verse even more:
Tragic.
Rebellion continually promises:
Autonomy.
I will determine my own:
Way.
I will define my own:
Good.

I will decide what gives life:
Meaning.
I will answer to:
Myself.
That promise is as old as:
Eden.
The serpent promised:
Knowledge.
Freedom.
Elevation.
You will be like:
God.
But rebellion did not make humanity:
Divine.
It made humanity:
Broken.
Sin always:
Overpromises.
It promises:
Freedom.
Then produces:
Bondage.
It promises:
Pleasure.
Then produces:
Hunger.
It promises:
Control.
Then produces:
Slavery.
It promises:
Life.
And eventually produces:
Death.
Revelation exposes the false advertising of:
Sin.
And here the irony becomes almost unbearable.
People who sought life apart from God now seek:
Death.
And cannot control even:
That.

5. The Abyss Has No Gospel

Look again at what has emerged from the:

Abyss.
Smoke.
Darkness.
Torment.
Despair.
The abyss cannot give:
Life.
But neither can it offer genuine:
Deliverance.
It produces suffering without:
Salvation.
The abyss has no:
Gospel.
It can:
Torment.
It cannot:
Redeem.
It can produce:
Darkness.
It cannot produce:
Light.
It can create:
Despair.
It cannot offer:
Hope.
It can:
Wound.
It cannot:
Heal.
That is the contrast beneath the entire:
Vision.
God is the source of:
Life.
The abyss can distort what God has:
Made.
It cannot create the life only God can:
Give.
A branch separated from its source does not become more:
Alive.
A stream separated from its source does not become more:
Abundant.
Creation separated from its Creator does not become more:
Whole.

Rebellion contains within itself the seeds of:
Death.

6. Never Let Chapter 9 Pretend to Be Chapter 22

That is why we must remember where Revelation:
Ends.
The Bible begins with:
Life.
And Revelation ends with:
Life.
A river of:
Life.
A tree of:
Life.
The water of:
Life.
God dwelling with His:
People.
Revelation 9:6 is not the Bible's final picture of human:
Existence.
Thank:
God.
Chapter 9 shows us people seeking:
Death.
Chapter 22 offers the water of:
Life.
Those are profoundly different:
Destinations.
Judgment exposes what destroys:
Life.
The gospel invites us toward the One who gives:
Life.
Christ does not merely save us:
From something.
Christ saves us:
For something.
Life with:
God.
So never let Chapter 9 pretend to be Chapter: 22
The darkest chapter is not the final:
Chapter.
The present is:
Real.
But it is not:

Final.

7. The Church Must Never Make Despair More Lonely

This verse requires extraordinary pastoral:
Care.
There are people who, in moments of profound emotional or physical suffering, have wished they could:
Die.
There are faithful Christians who have experienced that kind of:
Despair.
Grief.
Trauma.
Illness.
Depression.
Pain.
Sometimes suffering becomes so overwhelming that a person thinks:
I cannot continue like:
This.
We must never use Revelation 9:6 to condemn:
Them.
Despair is not proof that someone has rejected:
God.
Some of Scripture's faithful servants reached places of extraordinary:
Darkness.
Elijah became:
Overwhelmed.
Job cursed the day of his:
Birth.
Jeremiah lamented his:
Birth.
The Psalms contain cries from places of profound:
Despair.
Faithful people can become:
Desperate.
So we must distinguish John's apocalyptic vision from every individual's:
Experience.
Revelation 9:6 describes judgment within this particular:
Vision.
It does not give us a formula for diagnosing someone who wishes their suffering would:
End.
When someone says:
I do not want to live like this—
our first responsibility is not theological:

Judgment.
It is compassionate:
Presence.
Take their pain:
Seriously.
Help them find:
Help.
Remind them they are not:
Alone.
Refuse to:
Shame them.
Carry hope when they cannot presently carry it for:
Themselves.
The Church must never make despair more lonely.

8. Sometimes Presence Is the Better Theology

Jesus was repeatedly drawn toward suffering:
People.
The sick.
The grieving.
The rejected.
The frightened.
The desperate.
The broken.
Again and again Christ moved:
Toward.
That should shape the:
Church.
We do not need to explain someone's pain before we:
Love them.
Sometimes Christians become so eager to explain suffering that we forget to:
Minister.
We want to answer:
Why?
The suffering person may simply need someone to say:
I am:
Here.
Job's friends understood that better before they began:
Talking.
They sat with:
Him.
They saw his:
Grief.
They shared his:

Silence.
Then they began constructing explanations.
And much of the trouble began:
There.
Sometimes presence is the better:
Theology.
Not because words never:
Matter.
They do.
But truth can sometimes be communicated by:
Staying.
Listening.
Weeping.
Refusing to leave someone alone in their:
Pain.
Christian endurance was never intended to be purely:
Individual.
The churches heard Revelation:
Together.
They worshiped:
Together.
They suffered:
Together.
They encouraged one:
Another.
Sometimes someone else must carry hope when we cannot presently carry it:
Ourselves.
Sometimes someone else:
Prays.
Sometimes someone else remembers the:
Promise.
Sometimes someone else says:
I will stay with you while we:
Wait.
That is not failed:
Faith.
Sometimes faith survives through borrowed:
Strength.

9. Resurrection Is Better Than Escape

Verse 6 portrays people desperately seeking an:
End.
But the gospel offers something greater than an:
End.

It offers a new:
Beginning.
The Christian answer to broken existence is ultimately not:
Nonexistence.
It is:
Resurrection.
Christianity does not finally promise escape from:
Existence.
It promises redeemed:
Existence.
New creation.
Resurrection.
Restored bodies.
Restored community.
God dwelling with:
Humanity.
The answer to broken life is not ultimately:
No life.
It is:
New life.
That makes Revelation 9:6 especially:
Tragic.
People seek:
Death—
while the larger story is moving toward:
Life.
They pursue an ending—
while God ultimately offers:
Renewal.
They cannot imagine another:
Future.
But God:
Can.
Escape says:
Get me:
Out.
Resurrection says:
God makes:
New.
Escape says:
End the:
Story.
Resurrection says:

Redeem the:
Story.
Escape says:
No more:
Life.
Resurrection says:
Life as God intended:
It.
God's answer is greater than the escape humanity:
Imagines.

10. Despair Shrinks the Future

That helps us understand something about:
Despair.
When suffering becomes intense enough, tomorrow can become impossible to:
Imagine.
Pain says:
This is all there will ever:
Be.
The future collapses into the present:
Moment.
Despair says:
There is no other:
Chapter.
Hope says:
The story is not:
Finished.
Hope does **not** say:
This does not:
Hurt.
Hope does **not** say:
Everything will change:
Tomorrow.
Hope says:
This moment is not the whole story.
That is an enormously important:
Difference.
The people in the vision may not be able to see beyond their:
Torment.
But the reader:
Can.
We can turn the:
Page.

We know Revelation:
Continues.
That literary reality becomes theological:
Hope.
God can see beyond the page we are presently:
Living.
We cannot always:
Do that.
And we should remain:
Humble.
The next page may not contain the outcome we:
Want.
Faith is not:
Prediction.
Faith is:
Trust.
We do not know the next:
Chapter.
We know the:
Author.
Sometimes that is enough light for a very dark:
Place.

11. Faithfulness and Anguish Can Occupy the Same Heart

The existence of hope does not mean faithful people enjoy:
Suffering.
Job did:
Not.
Jeremiah did:
Not.
The Psalmists often did:
Not.
Jesus in Gethsemane did not pretend suffering was emotionally:
Pleasant.
Let this cup pass.
That prayer came from:
Jesus.
And yet:
Not my will but:
Yours.
There is no shallow triumphalism:
There.
There is honest desire for suffering to:

Pass—
and faithful surrender to:
God.
Faithfulness and anguish can occupy the same:
Heart.
Perhaps endurance sometimes sounds like:
Lord, I want this to:
End.
Lord, I do not want to walk through:
This.
Lord, if there is another way—
Please.
And yet:
Do not let me lose You in the:
Darkness.
Pretending says:
This does not:
Hurt.
Faith says:
This hurts terribly, and I am still speaking to:
God.
Pretending says:
I am not:
Afraid.
Faith says:
I am afraid, and I am still holding onto:
Christ.
Pretending says:
I have no:
Questions.
Faith says:
I have many questions, and I am bringing them to:
God.
That is not weak:
Faith.
That is faith refusing to:
Leave.

12. Repentance Wants More Than Relief

There is another important distinction in this:
Verse.
The people want the torment to:
Stop.
But there is no indication here that they are seeking:

God.
They seek:
Relief.
Relief and repentance are not always the same:
Thing.
That becomes important because of where Chapter 9 is:
Going.
At the end of the chapter, humanity still refuses to:
Repent.
We can want consequences removed without wanting our hearts:
Changed.
Lord, fix the:
Problem.
But do not touch my:
Priorities.
Remove the consequences.
But leave my idols:
Alone.
Take away the pain.
But do not ask me to:
Change.
Repentance asks for something:
Deeper.
Change:
Me.
Not merely:
Change my circumstances.
Forgive:
Me.
Redirect:
Me.
Restore:
Me.
Teach me to want what gives:
Life.
Pain does not automatically produce:
Repentance.
Sometimes suffering softens.
Sometimes it:
Hardens.
Sometimes it produces humility.
Sometimes:
Bitterness.

The spiritual question is not merely:
What happened to:
Me?
It is also:
What will I do with what happened to:
Me?
Endurance sometimes stands at that:
Crossroads.
One road says:
Harden.
The other says:
Turn.
One says:
God has abandoned:
Me.
The other says:
God, I do not understand You—
but I will keep calling Your:
Name.

13. Christ Holds the Keys

Now return to John's frightening:
Image.
People seek:
Death.
Death:
Flees.
And something from the beginning of Revelation suddenly becomes enormously:
Important.
Christ has already declared that He holds the keys of:
Death and Hades.
Before the abyss ever:
Opened—
before the locusts ever:
Appeared—
before people ever sought death—
John had already shown us who possesses ultimate:
Authority.
Christ.
The star of Revelation 9 must be **given** the key to the:
Abyss.
Christ possesses the keys of Death and:
Hades.

Keys signify:
Authority.
And the highest authority does not belong to:
Death.
Death does not possess its own:
Keys.
Christ:
Does.
John does not explain why death flees in Verse: 6
We should not invent an:
Explanation.
But the larger book has already taught us something:
Death is not:
Sovereign.
Death still:
Operates.
Death still:
Wounds.
Death still:
Separates.
Death still causes:
Grief.
But death is an enemy already under:
Sentence.
Its final verdict has been:
Announced.
Death will:
Die.
The One who judges death has Himself tasted:
Death.
Christ did not confront death from a safe:
Distance.
He entered the:
Grave.
And came out the other:
Side.
The cross looked like an:
Ending.
The tomb looked:
Final.
The stone was:
Rolled.
The disciples:

Scattered.
Hope appeared:
Dead.
Then came:
Sunday.
Christianity was born from God's refusal to let death have the final:
Word.
That is why Revelation 9:6 cannot become our final:
Theology.
People seek:
Death.
But Christians know something about:
Death.
We know an empty:
Tomb.

14. Do Not Declare the Story Finished

Perhaps that is the hidden theology inside this terrible:
Verse.
At first glance it appears entirely about:
Despair.
And it certainly depicts:
Despair.
But even here—
death does not become:
God.
The throne still governs the:
Story.
The people in the vision may not be able to see:
It.
The smoke has darkened the:
Air.
The torment dominates their:
Experience.
But the reader has been given a larger:
View.
We have seen the:
Throne.
We have seen the:
Lamb.
We know who holds the:
Keys.
We know there is an empty:
Tomb.

We know Chapter 9 is not Chapter: 22
Sometimes faith feels that truth only:
Weakly.
Sometimes we repeat it through:
Tears.
Sometimes someone else has to repeat it:
For us.
That still counts as:
Endurance.
Perhaps endurance sometimes means refusing to declare the story:
Finished.
I do not understand this:
Chapter.
But I will not call it the final:
Chapter.
I cannot see the:
Ending.
But I will not assume there is no:
Ending.
I cannot see the:
Light.
But I remember:
Smoke can hide what it cannot destroy.
And I remember who holds the:
Keys.
Not the:
Abyss.
Not the:
Locusts.
Not the:
Dragon.
Not:
Death.
Christ.
The risen:
One.
The:
Lamb.
The One who was dead and is alive:
Forevermore.
Death may:
Come.
Death may:

Frighten.
Death may wound those left:
Behind.
But death never becomes:
Lord.
That title belongs to:
Christ.
So even this verse cannot end with:
Death.
Because Revelation does:
Not.
The Bible does:
Not.
The gospel does:
Not.
The story of Jesus does:
Not.
Death appears.
But resurrection:
Follows.
When suffering says:
There is no future—
faith may only be able to whisper:
I cannot see it:
Yet.
When despair says:
There is no other chapter—
faith answers:
God has not finished the:
Story.
When death claims:
I have the final word—
the Church remembers an empty:
Tomb.
Revelation 9:6 is terribly:
Dark.
People seek:
Death.
Death flees from:
Them.
But even here—
death is not:
King.

The abyss is not:
King.
Despair is not:
King.
Jesus Christ is:
Lord.
And because Christ:
Lives—
the darkest verse still cannot become the final:
Verse.

Pastoral Reflection

There are times when suffering becomes so heavy that a person can no longer imagine life being:
Different.
Tomorrow looks exactly like:
Today.
And today already feels like too:
Much.
Those moments require extraordinary:
Compassion.
Not:
Lectures.
Not easy:
Answers.
Not:
You should have more faith.
Certainly not:
Other people have it worse.
Sometimes the person before us does not need us to explain:
God.
They need us to represent something of God's:
Presence.
Sit:
Down.
Listen.
Stay.
Pray when they cannot:
Pray.
Hope when they cannot:
Hope.
Help them find the support they:
Need.
Remind them that needing help is not a spiritual:

Failure.
And when someone expresses a desire to die or seems in immediate danger, compassionate presence also means taking that seriously and helping them reach immediate, qualified:
Help.
We do not leave them alone with:
That.
There are faithful people in Scripture who reached places of profound:
Despair.
Their darkness did not cause God to abandon:
Them.
And our darkness does not make us invisible to:
God.
Perhaps there are moments when faith is not the ability to see the road:
Ahead.
Perhaps faith is simply refusing to walk the road:
Alone.
Sometimes someone else carries the:
Lantern.
Sometimes someone else remembers the:
Promise.
Sometimes someone else says:
There is still another:
Chapter.
And when we cannot say that for ourselves—
we allow them to say it beside:
Us.
Because the gospel does not promise that Christians will never experience:
Darkness.
It proclaims that darkness does not have the final:
Word.
The cross was:
Dark.
The tomb was:
Dark.
Saturday was:
Dark.
And then came:
Morning.
So when someone is living through a:
Saturday—
we do not shame them because they cannot yet see:
Sunday.

We sit beside:
Them.
We remain with:
Them.
And we wait for morning:
Together.

Something Worth Pondering

There is a terrible sentence in Revelation 9:6:
People seek:
Death.
But there is another sentence standing over the whole Christian:
Story.
Christ is risen.
One describes the depth of human:
Despair.
The other declares the depth of Christian:
Hope.
And perhaps the difference between despair and hope is not always whether we can see another:
Chapter.
Sometimes the difference is whether we trust that God can see:
One.
The people in this verse cannot imagine an answer beyond:
Death.
But God ultimately answers death with:
Resurrection.
That is God's:
Way.
Humanity sees an:
Ending.
God creates a:
Beginning.
Humanity sees a:
Tomb.
God sees an empty:
Tomb.
Humanity says:
There is no way:
Forward.
God says:
Behold, I make all things:
New.

There may be seasons when we cannot imagine how God could possibly redeem what has:
Happened.
Faith does not require us to invent the:
Answer.
It simply asks us not to mistake the limits of our imagination for the limits of:
God.
The fact that I cannot see another chapter does not mean God has finished the:
Story.

Ask Yourself This:

When life becomes dark, can I bring God the honest prayer:
How long?
without believing that my anguish means I have lost my:
Faith?
When someone else is suffering deeply, am I more interested in explaining their pain—
or staying beside them in:
It?
And when despair whispers:
There is no other chapter—
can I remember the empty tomb and answer:
God has not finished the story.

Revelation 9:7–12 — The Locust Army and the First Woe

Revelation 9:7–12

“And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months. And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.
One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.”
— Revelation 9:7–12, KJV

The smoke has risen.
The locusts have emerged.
Their power has been:
Given.
Their targets have been:
Restricted.
Their torment has been:
Limited.
And now John tells us what these creatures look like.
They resemble horses prepared for battle.
Something like golden crowns rests upon their heads.
Their faces resemble human faces.
Their hair resembles women's hair.
Their teeth resemble lions' teeth.
They wear something like iron breastplates.
Their wings sound like an army of chariots rushing into battle.
Their tails sting like scorpions.
And over this terrible swarm stands a king:
The angel of the abyss.
His name means:
Destroyer.
The description is among the strangest in Revelation.

But before we begin trying to identify every feature, perhaps we should ask a more important question:
What is John trying to show us?

1. These Are Not Ordinary Locusts

That much is clear.
Ordinary locusts attack vegetation.
These are forbidden from doing so.
Ordinary locusts do not possess scorpion tails.
Human faces.
Lions' teeth.
Iron breastplates.
Nor do ordinary locusts have a king called the angel of the abyss.
Whatever John is describing, ordinary insects are no longer an adequate category.
But neither should we rush toward another mistake.
These are not necessarily helicopters.
Aircraft.
Tanks.
Missiles.
Armored vehicles.
Or some weapon not invented until centuries after John wrote.
Revelation was written to first-century Christians.
It was meant to speak to them.
John is describing an:
Apocalyptic vision.
And one little word helps us enormously:
Like.
Like horses.
Like crowns.
Like human faces.
Like women's hair.
Like lions' teeth.
Like iron breastplates.
Like chariots.
Like scorpions.
John is not giving us an encrypted military identification manual.
He is stacking images to create an impression.
And the impression is terrifyingly clear.
These creatures appear:
Organized.
Prepared.
Powerful.
Intelligent.

Protected.
Aggressive.
And capable of inflicting extraordinary pain.
That is enough.

2. An Army From the Abyss

The dominant impression is:
War.
Horses prepared for battle.
Breastplates.
Chariots.
The roar of an approaching force.
This swarm is not wandering aimlessly.
It has the character of an advancing army.
And perhaps that is more disturbing than simple chaos.
Because evil can:
Organize.
Human history gives us little reason to doubt that.
Cruelty can become institutional.
Deception can become systematic.
Oppression can become efficient.
Violence can become organized.
Sin does not always remain an individual act.
Sometimes it builds:
Systems.
That would have mattered to Christians living within the Roman world.
Imperial power was not merely the personality of one emperor.
It involved institutions.
Economics.
Military force.
Religious expectations.
Social pressure.
Systems of allegiance.
Revelation takes organized evil seriously.
But organized evil is still not:
Sovereign evil.

3. Never Confuse Appearance With Authority

The creatures look overwhelming.
But we have already been told something more important than how they look.
Their power was:
Given.
They were:
Told.

They were:
Allowed.
Their time was:
Limited.
Their impressive appearance does not erase those boundaries.
That is one of Revelation's recurring lessons.
Things are not always what they appear to be.
The Lamb looks slain—
yet stands.
The martyrs appear defeated—
yet worship before God.
The beast appears powerful—
yet is doomed.
Babylon appears magnificent—
yet falls.
And now the locust army appears overwhelming—
yet heaven has already drawn the lines within which it may operate.
Fear looks at appearance.
Faith remembers:
Authority.
Faith does not deny what it sees.
It simply refuses to believe that what it sees is the whole truth.

4. A Human Face With Lions' Teeth

John's imagery is deliberately unsettling.
There is something almost recognizable about these creatures.
Human faces.
Yet behind those faces are:
Lions' teeth.
Familiarity joined to ferocity.
That combination reminds us that evil does not always announce itself honestly.
Destructive things can appear:
Reasonable.
Attractive.
Sophisticated.
Normal.
Even:
Human.
That is why discernment requires more than appearance.
We must also ask:
What does it produce?
The creatures emerge from the abyss.
And wherever they go we find:

Smoke.
Darkness.
Torment.
Destruction.
The appearance may confuse us.
The fruit reveals the character.

5. John Wants Us to Hear Them Coming

Then the vision becomes auditory.
John does not merely tell us what he:
Sees.
He tells us what he:
Hears.
Their wings sound like many chariots with horses rushing into battle.
Imagine hearing Revelation read aloud in a first-century congregation.
Horses.
Battle.
Chariots.
Wings.
The language itself begins to move.
The army seems to approach.
Revelation engages the imagination.
Sight.
Sound.
Movement.
Fear.
Pain.
John does not merely give his churches information about evil.
He makes them feel something of its:
Terror.
And perhaps that is one reason reducing Revelation to a prophetic timetable makes the book smaller than John intended.
Revelation is not merely asking us to calculate.
It is teaching us how to:
See.

6. The Destroyer

Then John reveals their king.
The swarm is not leaderless.
Over them stands the angel of the abyss.
John gives his name in two languages:
Abaddon.
Apollyon.
Different languages.
The same terrible meaning:

Destroyer.
John does not leave us wondering about the fundamental character of this ruler.
His name tells the story.
His kingdom produces according to his character.
The Destroyer:
Destroys.
That is enough.
We should be cautious about going beyond what John tells us.
Is this Satan?
A particular demonic ruler?
Another angelic figure associated with the abyss?
John does not give us enough information to answer every question with certainty.
And perhaps we do not need to.
We do not need a demonic organizational chart.
Revelation does not invite us to map the bureaucracy of hell.
The name tells us what we need to know:
Destroyer.

7. A King—but Not the King

There is something else we must notice.
The Destroyer is king over the:
Locusts.
He is not King over:
Creation.
He is not King over:
Heaven.
He is not King over:
The Church.
And he is certainly not:
King of kings.
That title belongs to Someone else.
The Destroyer has a kingdom.
But not:
The Kingdom.
He has subjects.
He has power.
He exercises authority.
But he does not possess:
Sovereignty.
His creatures have already been restricted.
He does not determine their targets.
He does not determine their duration.

He does not determine whether they may kill.
Even the king of the abyss operates within boundaries.
This is not a universe divided between two equal powers.
God on one side.
Evil on the other.
Each struggling to determine who will finally prevail.
Revelation gives evil terrifying power without ever granting evil:
Equality.
The abyss itself proves the point.
It has a lock.
It has a key.
The key must be given.
Its creatures receive permission.
Their targets are restricted.
Their time is limited.
The throne remains somewhere:
Else.

8. Do Not Become Fascinated With the Wrong Kingdom

There is a danger in passages like this.
We can become so fascinated with darkness that we spend more time staring into the abyss than looking toward the throne.
Study every theory about the beast.
Decode every number.
Construct elaborate charts of demonic powers.
Identify every possible Antichrist.
And somehow neglect becoming more like:
Christ.
That would be a tragic reading of Revelation.
The Church is called to know enough about evil to recognize and resist it.
But our deepest attention belongs elsewhere.
God.
The Lamb.
The gospel.
The Kingdom.
John gives us enough darkness to recognize it.
Then he calls us toward:
Faithfulness.
We acknowledge the abyss.
We do not live staring into it.

9. The First Woe Passes

Then Verse 12 suddenly pulls the camera back.
After all that frightening detail, John says:
The first woe has passed.

Notice that word.
Passed.
The swarm appeared.
The torment came.
The allotted time ran its course.
And then:
It passed.
There is hope even in that small word.
This does not mean every earthly sorrow passes quickly.
Some losses remain with us throughout life.
Some wounds leave scars.
Some grief becomes part of who we are.
But within Revelation's final horizon:
Woe does not receive forever.
The first woe passes.
The story continues.

10. And Two More Are Coming

John does not allow us to become comfortable for long.
Two more woes are still to come.
That is painfully realistic.
Sometimes we survive one trial—
take a breath—
and another arrives.
We think:
Surely that was enough.
Life sometimes answers:
Not yet.
Faith can become tired.
Scripture makes room for tired saints.
Weariness is not necessarily a failure of faith.
Sometimes it simply means we have been carrying something:
Heavy.
And Revelation is not sentimental enough to promise that once one difficulty passes, everything will immediately become wonderful.
Instead, it gives us something more durable than optimism.
Optimism says:
Things will probably get better soon.
Christian hope says:
Whatever comes, God will remain faithful.
Optimism depends upon circumstances improving.
Hope depends upon:
God.
The first woe passes.

Two remain.
And the Lamb is still:
Worthy.

11. Two Kings and Two Ways

The locust army has a king.
His name means:
Destroyer.
But Revelation has already shown us another:
King.
The Lamb.
One kingdom produces destruction.
The other brings life.
One torments.
The other redeems.
One rises from the abyss.
The other stands before the throne.
And Revelation will eventually force us to consider not merely which kingdom appears stronger—
but which kingdom will shape the way we:
Live.
The Lamb's way may appear weaker.
That is the scandal.
The Destroyer has an army.
The Lamb was:
Slain.
The Destroyer appears ferocious.
The Lamb appears vulnerable.
At the cross, Rome looked strong.
Jesus looked weak.
Rome had soldiers.
Jesus had nails.
Rome possessed political authority.
Jesus had a cross.
If the story ended Friday evening—
Rome won.
But the story did not end:
Friday evening.
Sunday changes the meaning of Friday.
Resurrection changes the meaning of the cross.
The Lamb who was slain:
Stands.
And that changes how Christians understand:
Power.

12. We Do Not Defeat the Destroyer by Becoming Destroyers

The Church must be careful not to become what it opposes.
It is possible to oppose cruelty while becoming:
Cruel.
To oppose deception while becoming:
Dishonest.
To oppose domination while craving:
Power.
But Lamb-shaped power looks different.
Truth without deception.
Courage without cruelty.
Authority without domination.
Strength without hatred.
Faithfulness without compromise.
Love even when love costs.
That is the way of Christ.
And so this deserves to stand by itself:
We do not defeat the Destroyer by becoming destroyers ourselves.
The Church conquers through:
Faithfulness.
Witness.
Truth.
Endurance.
The testimony of Jesus.
Endurance is not merely:
Surviving.
It is remaining faithful while we survive.
Anyone can answer hatred with hatred.
The difficult thing is refusing to let the darkness remake us.

13. The Darkness Wants More Than Our Discomfort

Perhaps that is one of the greatest dangers of the abyss.
Not merely that it can cause pain.
But that pain can tempt us to become something we were never called to be.
Fear can make us cruel.
Suffering can make us bitter.
Anger can make us vindictive.
Hatred can teach us to hate.
The darkness wants more than our discomfort.
It wants our:
Allegiance.
That is why the seal matters again.
We belong to:

God.
The seal is not merely about protection.
It is about:
Identity.
We do not belong to the abyss.
Therefore we should not adopt the abyss's ways.
The Church must look like its King.
And our King is:
The Lamb.
Perhaps the more important question in Revelation is not:
Can you identify the beast?
But:
Can anyone identify the Lamb in you?

14. When the Woe Has Passed

The first woe passes.
And when it does, the Church must still be:
The Church.
Still faithful.
Still worshiping.
Still witnessing.
Still loving.
Still enduring.
The goal is not merely to reach the other side.
It is to reach the other side without surrendering our allegiance.
That is biblical endurance.
Not simply:
I survived.
But:
I remained His.
The darkness came.
I remained His.
The pressure increased.
I remained His.
I did not understand.
I remained His.
The woe does not get to define us.
The seal does.
The Destroyer does not name us.
God does.
The abyss does not determine our identity.
The Lamb does.
Woes pass.
Empires pass.

Suffering passes.
But faithfulness remains.
And so the deeper question is not merely:
Will the woe end?
It will.
The deeper question is:
Who will we be when it does?
Will the darkness have made us:
Dark?
Will hatred have made us:
Hateful?
Will fear have made us:
Faithless?
Or will we still bear the character of:
The Lamb?
That is the call to endurance.
When the roar of the abyss becomes loud—
remember the song of heaven.
When the Destroyer appears powerful—
remember the Lamb who conquers.
When the woe seems endless—
remember:
It passes.
And when the darkness tries to make us resemble the darkness—
remember whose name we bear.
Because Christian endurance is not merely surviving the woe.
It is remaining faithful to the Lamb—
until the woe has:
Passed.

Pastoral Reflection

Some seasons of life do not merely:
Hurt.
They try to change:
Us.
Betrayal can tempt us to become suspicious.
Cruelty can tempt us to become cruel.
Injustice can tempt us to become bitter.
Fear can tempt us to become controlling.
Hatred can tempt us to hate.
Sometimes we become so focused upon surviving what someone has done to us that we fail to notice what the experience is beginning to do:
Within us.
Revelation gives us a frightening picture of a kingdom ruled by the:

Destroyer.
But Christians belong to another King.
The:
Lamb.
And perhaps one of the most difficult forms of endurance is refusing to allow the Destroyer to teach us how to:
Live.
We do not overcome hatred by becoming better at hating.
We do not overcome cruelty by becoming more cruel.
We do not overcome deception by becoming more skillful at deceiving.
We do not defeat the Destroyer by becoming destroyers ourselves.
That does not mean passivity.
The Lamb is not weak.
Jesus confronted hypocrisy.
Spoke truth.
Defended the vulnerable.
Challenged oppressive power.
Turned over tables.
Endured the cross.
But He never surrendered His character to the character of those who opposed Him.
That is our challenge.
When the woe has passed—
who will we be?
Still capable of love?
Still committed to truth?
Still able to forgive?
Still willing to serve?
Still bearing the character of Christ?
Perhaps survival is not the only measure of endurance.
Perhaps the deeper measure is:
Did I remain His?

Something Worth Pondering

The locust army has a king.
His name means:
Destroyer.
But the Church has a King too.
The:
Lamb.
And every day, in ways large and small, we reveal which kingdom is shaping the way we live.
By how we treat people.
How we use power.

How we respond when wronged.
How we speak about enemies.
How we behave when afraid.
The most dangerous thing about darkness may not be that it surrounds us.
It may be that, given enough time, we begin to resemble it.
So perhaps one of the great prayers of endurance should be:
Lord, do not merely bring me through the darkness. Keep the darkness from getting into me.
Because the goal is not merely to survive the woe.
The goal is to emerge still looking like:
The Lamb.

Ask Yourself This:

When I encounter evil, am I tempted to respond using the same methods I condemn?
Has fear, betrayal, or suffering begun shaping my character more than Christ?
And when this particular woe has finally passed, will I simply have survived it—
or will I still look like:
Jesus?

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:7

"And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men."
— Revelation 9:7, KJV

John has told us where the locusts came:
From the smoke rising out of the:
Abyss.
He has told us what they were given:
Power.
He has told us whom they may:
Harm.
He has told us what they may not:
Do.
He has told us how long their torment may:
Last.
Now John finally begins to tell us what they look:
Like.
And perhaps the most important word in the verse is exactly that:
Like.
The locusts are **like** horses prepared for:
Battle.
On their heads are objects **like** crowns of:
Gold.
Their faces are **like** human:
Faces.
John is not giving us a:
Photograph.
He is giving us a:
Vision.

1. The Most Important Word May Be "Like"

John describes something difficult to put into ordinary:
Language.
So he reaches for:
Comparisons.
Like:
Horses.
Like:
Crowns.
Like:
Human faces.

The unfamiliar is described through the:
Familiar.
That is one of the characteristics of apocalyptic:
Imagery.
John sees something extraordinary and communicates it through images his readers already:
Understand.
That means we should resist immediately asking:
What exactly is:
This?
Perhaps the better first question is:
What is this:
Like?
Those are different:
Questions.
One immediately demands an:
Identification.
The other allows the vision to create an:
Impression.
And perhaps John wants us to experience the impression before we begin attempting to explain every:
Detail.
Prepared.
Powerful.
Threatening.
Crowned.
Disturbingly:
Familiar.
The images accumulate.
And the vision begins to:
Speak.

2. Revelation Is Not a Parts Catalog

There is a temptation when reading passages like this to turn John's vision into a prophetic:
Catalog.
Head:
This.
Face:
That.
Hair:
Something else.
Teeth:
Another thing.

Wings:
Something.
Tail:
Something else.
Then we assemble all the pieces and announce that we have finally discovered exactly what John:
Saw.
But John does not write that:
Way.
He repeatedly says:
Like.
That matters.
The imagery is:
Comparative.
John is not telling us:
I saw a machine I could not understand.
He tells us what the creatures were:
Like.
And Revelation was written first to Christians who had never seen modern military:
Technology.
Yet they were expected to:
Hear.
Understand.
Respond.
Remain:
Faithful.
Endure.
Whatever the vision means, its fundamental message could not depend upon technology unavailable to its original hearers for nearly two thousand:
Years.
So we should resist the temptation to turn John's creatures into some particular modern:
Weapon.
We should also resist the opposite mistake of forcing them into some exact first-century military:
Unit.
The imagery may resonate with earthly military power.
But these creatures emerge from the:
Abyss.
Their significance reaches beyond one human:
Army.
John's comparisons are meant to reveal something about their:

Character.
Not provide us with a technical identification:
Manual.

3. Prepared for Battle

The first comparison is unmistakably:
Military.
The locusts resemble horses prepared for:
Battle.
Not horses grazing peacefully in a:
Field.
Not horses resting quietly in a:
Stable.
Horses prepared for:
War.
For John's first hearers, the image would communicate:
Strength.
Speed.
Readiness.
Military:
Power.
An approaching cavalry force could produce:
Fear.
And John combines that image with another frightening biblical image:
A locust:
Swarm.
The prophet Joel had also used imagery in which invading locusts and horses overlap:
Poetically.
A swarm could resemble an:
Army.
An army could move like a:
Swarm.
John does not simply reproduce Joel.
But he draws from a biblical world in which those images could naturally:
Overlap.
Numbers plus:
Power.
Swarm plus:
Army.
The creatures do not appear:
Aimless.
They appear:
Prepared.

Intentional.
Ready to:
Act.
Everything about the first comparison says:
Threat.

4. Prepared Does Not Mean Sovereign

But before the image becomes larger than the:
Text—
remember what John has already told:
Us.
Their power was:
Given.
Their targets were:
Specified.
Their activity was:
Limited.
Their duration was:
Measured.
They may be prepared for:
Battle.
But they do not write the rules of the:
Battle.
That is an enormously important:
Difference.
Preparation does not equal:
Sovereignty.
Strength does not equal:
Sovereignty.
Numbers do not equal:
Sovereignty.
Appearance does not equal:
Sovereignty.
Fear often confuses those:
Categories.
Something is:
Large.
Therefore:
Unstoppable.
Something is:
Powerful.
Therefore:
Ultimate.
Something is:

Threatening.
Therefore:
Sovereign.
Revelation refuses those:
Equations.
Something can be powerful without being:
Ultimate.
Something can be frightening without being:
God.
The locusts look ready.
Heaven has already established their:
Boundaries.

5. Never Let the Description Erase the Restrictions

That becomes increasingly important as John continues:
Describing.
Horses.
Crowns.
Faces.
Soon:
Hair.
Teeth.
Breastplates.
Wings.
Tails.
A:
King.
The imagery becomes louder and more:
Terrifying.
And that creates a danger for the:
Reader.
We can become so overwhelmed by the description that we forget everything John has already:
Told us.
Given.
Told.
Allowed.
Limited.
Four quiet:
Words.
Against an army of terrifying:
Images.
And those quiet words tell us something the appearance of the locusts cannot:

Tell us.
Their:
Limits.
John is going to make these creatures look increasingly:
Terrible.
Nothing he adds in Verses 7–10 cancels what heaven established in Verses: 3–5.
Fear looks at the:
Horse.
Faith remembers the:
Throne.
Fear sees preparation for:
Battle.
Faith remembers who established the:
Boundaries.
The description matters.
But so does the:
Grammar.

6. They Look Crowned

Then John notices something upon their:
Heads.
Something **like** crowns of:
Gold.
Again:
Like.
John does not simply say:
They wore golden:
Crowns.
He sees something resembling:
Them.
Crowns can suggest:
Honor.
Authority.
Victory.
Status.
Conquest.
The creatures appear:
Crowned.
They look:
Victorious.
But Revelation has already taught us to be suspicious of:
Appearances.
The Lamb looks:

Slain.
Yet He:
Stands.
The martyrs appear:
Defeated.
Yet heaven calls them:
Faithful.
Babylon appears:
Glorious.
Yet Babylon:
Falls.
The beast appears:
Invincible.
Yet his destruction is:
Certain.
Revelation continually asks us to look:
Again.
What appears victorious from earth may not be victorious from:
Heaven.
The crown-like objects may therefore carry a certain:
Irony.
The creatures appear to possess:
Victory.
Yet their authority is:
Borrowed.
Their activity:
Restricted.
Their time:
Limited.
Their king will not be the final:
King.
Whatever the crown-like appearance communicates, it cannot mean ultimate:
Triumph.

7. There Are Crowns—and Then There Is the Throne

That distinction is:
Everything.
Revelation contains many:
Crowns.
But there is only one ultimate:
Throne.
Symbols of authority do not make every authority:
Equal.
The locusts may appear:

Crowned.
They still operate within boundaries established from:
Above.
Delegated authority remains:
Delegated.
That principle reaches far beyond the:
Locusts.
Human beings receive:
Authority.
Position.
Influence.
Responsibility.
Leadership.
For a:
Season.
And authority can begin to feel very:
Permanent.
Very:
Personal.
Very:
Powerful.
But every human crown is:
Temporary.
No earthly title becomes:
Eternal.
Revelation continually relativizes every earthly:
Crown.
The first Christians lived under enormous imperial:
Power.
Rome possessed:
Armies.
Wealth.
Political authority.
Social influence.
The emperor's image appeared upon:
Coins.
Imperial power shaped public:
Life.
Yet Christians gathered and confessed another:
Lord.
Jesus.
Caesar may possess a:
Crown.

There is still a:
Throne.
And Caesar is not sitting upon:
It.
The locusts may look like:
Conquerors.
The Lamb actually:
Conquers.
One possesses the appearance of:
Victory.
The other defines what victory finally:
Means.

8. Human Faces—and Interpretive Humility

Then the image becomes stranger:
Still.
Their faces are like human:
Faces.
Locusts.
Warhorses.
Crown-like objects.
Human-like:
Faces.
John refuses to let us place these creatures comfortably into any natural:
Category.
What do the human faces:
Mean?
We should answer:
Carefully.
They may suggest something more than animal:
Instinct.
Purpose.
Awareness.
Intelligence.
Intentionality.
Something almost:
Personal.
Those are reasonable:
Impressions.
But John does not tell us exactly why their faces resemble human:
Faces.
And that distinction matters.
We should distinguish between what John:
Says—

and what we:
Infer.
Especially in:
Revelation.
Because imagination can quickly outrun the:
Text.
One interpretation becomes another.
Then another.
And soon an entire theology rests upon a detail John never:
Explained.
Better to say:
This **may suggest**—
than:
This **unquestionably means**.
Humility is part of faithful:
Interpretation.
We can be confident where Scripture is:
Clear.
Cautious where Scripture is:
Suggestive.
And silent where Scripture is:
Silent.
Sometimes:
I don't know
is good:
Theology.
Revelation was not given to satisfy every human:
Curiosity.
It was given to form faithful:
Witnesses.

9. The Face May Look Familiar; the Fruit Reveals the Kingdom

Still, the human-like face creates an unsettling:
Image.
We expect monsters to look like:
Monsters.
But destructive things do not always appear obviously:
Destructive.
Deception rarely introduces itself by saying:
I have come to deceive:
You.
Temptation rarely announces:
My intention is to destroy:

You.
Idolatry rarely advertises:
I plan to enslave:
You.
What harms us often first appears:
Attractive.
Reasonable.
Useful.
Necessary.
Profitable.
Normal.
Sometimes even:
Good.
That does not mean John explicitly tells us the human faces symbolize:
Deception.
He does:
Not.
But the image can still remind us of a broader biblical principle:
Appearance is not enough.
Ask:
Where does this:
Lead?
What does it:
Produce?
What kind of person does it make:
Me?
What kind of community does it:
Create?
What kind of fruit does it:
Bear?
Jesus taught His followers to pay attention to:
Fruit.
And the fruit surrounding these creatures is unmistakable.
Where did they come:
From?
The:
Abyss.
What accompanied them?
Smoke.
Darkness.
Torment.
The face may look:
Familiar.

The fruit reveals the:
Kingdom.
Something can look respectable and still produce:
Destruction.
Something can look impressive and still lead toward:
Death.
Something can look powerful and still belong to a kingdom that will:
Fall.
Discernment looks beyond:
Presentation.

10. Revelation Teaches Us How to See

That is part of what Revelation:
Does.
The word itself carries the idea of:
Unveiling.
Disclosure.
Pulling back the:
Curtain.
Revelation teaches the Church not merely what to:
Know.
It teaches the Church how to:
See.
See power:
Differently.
See suffering:
Differently.
See victory:
Differently.
See faithfulness:
Differently.
See Christ:
Clearly.
What looks glorious from earth may look grotesque from:
Heaven.
What looks weak from earth may be called faithful in:
Heaven.
Babylon looks:
Magnificent.
Heaven sees:
Corruption.
The beast looks:
Impressive.
Heaven sees:

Blasphemy.
The Lamb looks:
Weak.
Heaven says:
Worthy.
That is why Revelation begins where it:
Does.
Before the beasts.
Before the locusts.
Before Babylon.
Before Armageddon.
Before final judgment.
Jesus Christ.
The book is not primarily the revelation of:
Antichrist.
It is the revelation of:
Jesus Christ.
That must govern every strange image we:
Encounter.
Including:
This one.
If our interpretation of the locusts leaves us fascinated with the locusts and barely thinking about:
Christ—
something has gone:
Wrong.
John shows us the darkness so we can recognize and resist:
Darkness.
Not so we can become fascinated with:
It.
The locusts belong inside the larger revelation of the:
Lamb.

11. The Cross Warns Us Not to Trust Appearances

Perhaps no event teaches us this more clearly than the:
Cross.
What did the cross look like on:
Friday?
Failure.
Humiliation.
Defeat.
Death.
What does heaven reveal it to:
Be?

Victory.
Redemption.
Reconciliation.
Love.
The apparent defeat becomes God's means of:
Triumph.
If we misread the Cross by:
Appearance—
we can misread almost:
Anything.
Visible power and true power are not always the same:
Thing.
The locusts appear:
Crowned.
The Lamb appears:
Slain.
Which one is truly:
Victorious?
The answer depends upon whether we see only from:
Earth—
or whether Revelation teaches us to see from:
Heaven.
Earth may be impressed by:
Crowns.
Heaven is impressed by:
Faithfulness.
Earth notices:
Size.
Influence.
Money.
Access.
Power.
Prestige.
The Lamb defines victory through:
Faithfulness.
Witness.
Truth.
Love.
Endurance.
Holiness.
Those things do not always produce earthly:
Crowns.
Sometimes faithful people look like they are:

Losing.
The first Christians knew that:
Experience.
Rome was:
Powerful.
The churches were:
Small.
Rome had:
Armies.
The Christians had:
Congregations.
Rome had:
Wealth.
The Christians knew:
Persecution.
Rome had:
Caesar.
The Church had a crucified:
Messiah.
Revelation says:
Look:
Again.
Your Messiah is not merely:
Crucified.
He is:
Risen.
The Lamb who was slain:
Stands.
That changes:
Everything.
The Lamb bears the marks of:
Death.
But death did not keep Him:
Down.
He stands.
Therefore the Church can:
Stand.
Not because the Church possesses greater earthly:
Power.
But because Christ is stronger than:
Death.

12. Faith Refuses to Look Only at the Threat

That gives us the perspective necessary for Verse: 7

Look at the:
Locusts.
Yes.
Do not pretend they are:
Harmless.
But then look:
Higher.
They are prepared for:
Battle.
Higher.
They appear:
Crowned.
Higher.
They look:
Terrifying.
Higher.
There is still a:
Throne.
Faith does not refuse to look at the:
Threat.
Faith refuses to look **only** at the:
Threat.
That distinction is:
Essential.
Denial says:
There are no:
Locusts.
Faith says:
There are locusts—
and there is still a:
Lamb.
Denial says:
There is no:
Danger.
Faith says:
The danger is real—
but the danger is not:
God.
Mature faith can hold two truths at the same:
Time.
This is:
Terrible.
And:

God is faithful.
I am:
Afraid.
And:
God is present.
I do not know what happens:
Next.
And:
Christ is Lord.
The locusts are:
Frightening.
And:
They are limited.
We do not need to choose between honesty and:
Hope.
Honesty without hope becomes:
Despair.
Hope without honesty becomes:
Pretending.
Biblical faith gives us:
Both.
This:
Hurts.
And:
God remains:
Faithful.
That is:
Endurance.
Not smiling through:
Pain.
Not pretending the locusts look:
Friendly.
Not denying that horses prepared for battle are:
Frightening.
Endurance sees all of that and still refuses to surrender the:
Throne.

13. Terrifying Does Not Mean Sovereign

That distinction matters far beyond Revelation: 9
There are things in life that are genuinely:
Terrifying.
A diagnosis can be:
Terrifying.
War can be:

Terrifying.
Grief can be:
Terrifying.
Uncertainty can be:
Terrifying.
Loss can be:
Terrifying.
We should never tell someone those things are not:
Frightening.
That is not:
Faith.
That is:
Denial.
The Christian confession is something:
Deeper.
What I fear is not God.
Fear can be real without becoming:
Lord.
I am:
Afraid.
But fear does not own:
Me.
I am:
Uncertain.
But uncertainty does not define:
Me.
I am:
Suffering.
But suffering does not name:
Me.
I am:
Surrounded.
But I still belong to:
God.
The threat may be larger than:
Me.
That does not make it larger than:
God.
Verse 7 does not mention the seal.
But Verse 4:
Did.
And what John has already shown us remains:
True.

The locusts may look ready for:
Battle.
But their appearance does not override God's:
Word.
Fear says:
Nothing can stop:
This.
Revelation has already said:
There are:
Limits.
Fear says:
This controls:
Everything.
Heaven says:
No.
The loudest voice is not necessarily the truest:
Voice.
Fear is:
Loud.
Anger can be:
Loud.
Outrage can be:
Loud.
Anxiety can be:
Loud.
Truth is not always the loudest voice in the:
Room.
Sometimes truth speaks quietly:
Given.
Told.
Allowed.
Limited.

14. Fear Sees the Horses; Faith Remembers the Throne

Perhaps that is the best way to hold the entire verse:
Together.
Appearance tells us what earth:
Sees.
Grammar tells us what heaven:
Knows.
Earth sees:
Horses.
Crowns.
Faces.

Heaven sees:
Boundaries.
Fear counts the:
Horses.
Faith remembers the:
Limits.
Fear studies the:
Crowns.
Faith remembers the:
Throne.
Fear sees the:
Faces.
Faith remembers the:
Lamb.
Neither perspective requires us to deny what John:
Sees.
The creatures are:
Terrifying.
They are:
Prepared.
They appear:
Crowned.
Their faces are disturbingly:
Familiar.
But they remain creatures whose authority has been:
Given.
Whose activity has been:
Restricted.
Whose time has been:
Measured.
Their appearance is:
Terrifying.
Their sovereignty is:
Nonexistent.
The abyss is not the:
Throne.
The abyss has:
Creatures.
The throne has the:
Creator.
The abyss has a:
King.
The throne has:

God.
The abyss produces:
Torment.
The throne leads toward:
New creation.
Every frightening detail must therefore be read beneath the:
Throne.
Not because the details are:
Unimportant.
Because they are not:
Ultimate.
Faith gives fear its proper:
Size.
Not:
Nothing.
Not:
Everything.
Fear is:
Real.
But fear is not:
Lord.
The threat is:
Real.
But the threat is not:
Sovereign.
So look carefully at the:
Locusts.
Take them:
Seriously.
But do not stare so long at the locusts that you forget the:
Lamb.
When they look like horses prepared for:
Battle—
look at:
Them.
Then look:
Higher.
When something like crowns appears upon their:
Heads—
remember the One who possesses true:
Authority.
And when their human-like faces make the darkness seem frighteningly:
Familiar—

remember that appearance is not the final measure of:
Truth.
The locusts may look:
Powerful.
They may look:
Prepared.
They may even look:
Victorious.
But faith has learned something Revelation will teach us again and:
Again.
What looks powerful from earth is not necessarily what reigns in heaven.
And the Church endures because it knows the:
Difference.

Pastoral Reflection

Some of the things that frighten us most are frightening because of how:
Large—
they appear.
A diagnosis can suddenly fill the entire:
Horizon.
A financial problem can occupy every waking:
Thought.
A broken relationship can make everything else in life seem almost:
Invisible.
A frightening telephone call can divide life into:
Before—
and:
After.
In those moments the problem does not merely become:
Real.
It becomes:
Everything.
That is what fear often:
Does.
It enlarges the threat until we can no longer see anything:
Else.
Revelation does not tell us to pretend the threat is:
Small.
John does not look at horses prepared for battle and say:
Don't worry.
They are:
Harmless.
He tells us exactly how frightening they:

Look.
But John has already told us something:
Else.
Their power was:
Given.
Their targets were:
Restricted.
Their activity was:
Limited.
Their time was:
Measured.
The threat is:
Real.
But the threat is not:
Everything.
There is still a:
Throne.
There is still a:
Lamb.
There is still a:
Seal.
There is still a:
Promise.
Perhaps faith sometimes consists of learning to say:
This is frightening—but this is not God.
This may change my:
Life.
But it does not change who Christ:
Is.
This may alter my:
Plans.
But it does not alter God's:
Faithfulness.
This may be larger than:
Me.
But it is not larger than:
God.
Fear does not disappear merely because we say those:
Words.
The diagnosis may still be:
Real.
The financial problem may still require difficult:
Decisions.

The relationship may still be:
Broken.
The telephone call may still divide life into before and:
After.
Faith does not make the horses:
Disappear.
It gives the horses their proper:
Size.
And perhaps that is one of the quiet miracles of:
Faith.
Not that the horses disappear.
But that somewhere behind:
Them—
we can still see the:
Throne.

Something Worth Pondering

John sees creatures that look:
Prepared.
Powerful.
Crowned.
Intelligent.
Everything about their appearance says:
Be afraid.
But everything we have already learned about their authority says:
They have limits.
That difference:
Matters.
We often allow the appearance of something to determine the authority we give:
It.
If it looks:
Powerful—
we assume it is:
Ultimate.
If it looks:
Permanent—
we assume it will:
Last.
If it looks:
Victorious—
we assume it has:
Won.
Revelation teaches us to:

Look again.
The Lamb looked:
Defeated.
He was:
Victorious.
The martyrs looked:
Defeated.
Heaven called them:
Faithful.
Rome looked:
Permanent.
Rome:
Passed.
The locusts look:
Crowned.
But they do not sit upon the:
Throne.
Perhaps faith is learning to ask one more question after fear has shown us everything it wants us to:
See.
What does heaven see?
Because the appearance of power and the possession of ultimate authority are not the same:
Thing.
Fear sees the horses.
Faith remembers the throne.

Ask Yourself This:

When something frightening becomes enormous in my vision, can I acknowledge that it is genuinely:
Frightening—
without granting it:
Sovereignty?
When something appears successful, powerful, or victorious, do I look beyond the appearance to the fruit it: Produces—and am I humble enough to say: **I don't know**
when Scripture does not tell me more?
And when fear shows me the horses—
the crowns—
the faces—
and everything that appears ready to overwhelm:
Me—

can I look:
Higher
and remember:
Fear sees the horses.
Faith remembers the throne.

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:8

“And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions.”
— Revelation 9:8, KJV

John continues describing the creatures from the:
Abyss.
Verse 7 gave us:
Horses prepared for battle.
Something like crowns of:
Gold.
Faces like human:
Faces.
Now:
Hair like women's:
Hair.
And teeth like lions':
Teeth.
Hair.
And:
Teeth.
One image is difficult to interpret with:
Certainty.
The other is considerably:
Clearer.
One contributes to the strange appearance of the:
Creatures.
The other tells us unmistakably:
These creatures are:
Dangerous.
And once again, John asks us not merely to examine every individual:
Piece—
but to experience the disturbing effect of the whole:
Picture.

1. Hair and Teeth

John's creatures refuse easy:
Classification.
Are they:
Locusts?
Horses?
Humans?
Lions?

Scorpions?
None of those descriptions completely:
Fits.
Something from each contributes to the:
Whole.
That appears to be part of the:
Effect.
John takes recognizable images and combines them into something profoundly:
Unfamiliar.
Horses.
Crowns.
Faces.
Hair.
Teeth.
Later:
Breastplates.
Wings.
Tails.
Nothing settles comfortably into an ordinary:
Category.
Perhaps that should tell us something about how the vision should be:
Read.
John is not describing a previously undiscovered:
Species.
He is communicating through symbolic:
Comparison.
Each image contributes something to the impression he wants his hearers to:
Receive.
Power.
Strangeness.
Threat.
Ferocity.
Something unnatural has emerged from the:
Abyss.
And John wants us to:
Notice.

2. Let “Like” Remain “Like”

Once again the small word matters:
Like.
Their hair is **like** women's:
Hair.
Their teeth are **like** lions':

Teeth.
Comparison.
Not:
Identification.
That interpretive boundary has become increasingly important as the description:
Continues.
We should resist turning John's comparisons into engineering:
Drawings.
Hair becomes one mechanical:
Feature.
Teeth become another.
Wings become another.
Tails become another.
Then the pieces are assembled until John's apocalyptic creature becomes some modern machine John supposedly could not:
Name.
But that begins with the wrong:
Question.
Our first question is not:
What modern object looks like this?
Our first question is:
What is John communicating through these images?
John's original hearers needed this vision:
Then.
They needed:
Encouragement.
Warning.
Discernment.
Courage.
Faithfulness.
Endurance.
The vision had to speak meaningfully within their:
World.
Their Scriptures.
Their symbols.
Their experiences.
Their understanding of:
Power.
Their knowledge of:
Empire.
Their familiarity with biblical:
Imagery.

So we begin:
There.
Then we allow John's world to speak into:
Ours.
We do not force our world backward into:
His.
The imagery is:
Ancient.
The truth is:
Enduring.

3. Sometimes “John Does Not Tell Us” Is the Right Answer

So what does the women's hair:
Mean?
Interpreters have offered many:
Possibilities.
Beauty.
Seduction.
Length.
Various cultural associations from John's:
World.
Some possibilities may be more plausible than:
Others.
But John himself does not explain the:
Comparison.
That matters.
We should not pretend certainty where John gives:
None.
We may explore:
Possibilities.
But possibility should not quietly become:
Certainty.
Sometimes the most faithful commentary simply says:
John does not tell us.
There is no embarrassment in:
That.
There is humility.
Revelation contains mystery because Revelation contains:
Vision.
Not every detail arrives with its own interpretive:
Key.
The hair may contribute to the creatures' unusual:
Appearance.

It creates an unexpected contrast with horses prepared for:
Battle.
It adds another familiar human feature to something profoundly:
Unhuman.
Beyond that—
humility is:
Wise.
We do not need to assign a prophetic equivalent to every:
Strand.
Faithfulness does not require us to solve every:
Symbol.
Sometimes:
I don't know
is good:
Theology.

4. The Teeth Are Clearer Than the Hair

Then John gives us an image requiring considerably less:
Speculation.
Their teeth are like those of:
Lions.
A lion's teeth communicate:
Danger.
Power.
Ferocity.
Predation.
They are not:
Decorative.
They exist to:
Tear.
Seize.
Devour.
Whatever ambiguity surrounds the:
Hair—
there is considerably less ambiguity surrounding the:
Teeth.
These creatures are:
Dangerous.
The human-like faces do not make them:
Friendly.
The crown-like objects do not make them:
Noble.
The hair does not make them:
Gentle.

Look at the:
Teeth.
The image reveals what kind of power we are looking:
At.
Predatory:
Power.
Power capable of:
Harm.
Power associated with the kingdom from which these creatures:
Came.
The:
Abyss.

5. Sometimes the Teeth Tell the Truth About the Face

Verse 7 gave them faces like:
Humans.
Verse 8 gives them teeth like:
Lions.
Familiar:
Face.
Predatory:
Mouth.
There is something deeply unsettling about that:
Combination.
Appearance can invite:
Trust.
Fruit reveals:
Character.
We encountered that principle in Verse: 7
Verse 8 sharpens:
It.
Do not determine the nature of something merely by the face it:
Presents.
Look at what it:
Does.
Look at what it:
Produces.
Look at where it:
Leads.
A familiar face does not guarantee a faithful:
Heart.
An attractive appearance does not guarantee good:
Fruit.
An impressive presentation does not guarantee a righteous:

Purpose.
Again, we should be careful.
John does not explicitly tell us:
The human faces symbolize deception.
We should not make him say what he does not:
Say.
But the combination gives us a legitimate pastoral:
Image.
The face may appear:
Familiar.
The teeth reveal what kind of power stands:
Behind it.
Sometimes the teeth tell the truth about the:
Face.

6. Temptation Shows the Face Before the Teeth

Evil rarely introduces itself:
Honestly.
It seldom says:
I intend to destroy:
You.
It says:
This will make you:
Happy.
This will make you:
Free.
This will make you:
Powerful.
This will make you:
Secure.
This will make you:
Whole.
And eventually—
the teeth:
Appear.
Temptation usually shows us the:
Face—
before it shows us the:
Teeth.
That pattern is as old as:
Eden.
The forbidden fruit appeared:
Desirable.
The serpent's words sounded:

Persuasive.
The promise sounded:
Liberating.
You will be like:
God.
The teeth were hidden inside the:
Promise.
Sin often looks better at the beginning than at the:
End.
At the beginning:
Pleasure.
At the end:
Bondage.
At the beginning:
Freedom.
At the end:
Slavery.
At the beginning:
Control.
At the end:
Addiction.
At the beginning:
Power.
At the end:
Destruction.
That does not mean every pleasurable thing is:
Sin.
Or every attractive thing is:
Dangerous.
Christian discernment is not Christian:
Paranoia.
But wisdom learns not to judge something only by how it:
Begins.
Sometimes we must ask:
Where does this:
End?
What is this slowly making me:
Become?
What kind of fruit is growing from this:
Tree?
The face matters.
Eventually—
so do the:

Teeth.

7. Revelation Shows Us the Teeth

That may be one reason Revelation's imagery is sometimes so:
Disturbing.
Revelation pulls back the:
Curtain.
The word itself carries the idea of:
Unveiling.
Something normally hidden becomes:
Visible.
Earth sees:
Glory.
Heaven may see:
Corruption.
Earth sees:
Power.
Heaven may see:
Fragility.
Earth sees:
Success.
Heaven may see:
Compromise.
Earth sees an attractive:
Face.
Revelation shows the:
Teeth.
That is one of the great gifts of this strange:
Book.
It teaches the Church to:
See.
Not merely what something claims to:
Be—
but what kind of kingdom it:
Serves.
Not merely what something:
Promises—
but what it:
Produces.
Not merely how something:
Begins—
but where it:
Leads.
That is:

Discernment.
And the Church needs:
It.

8. Discernment, Not Cynicism

Discernment is not:
Cynicism.
It does not mean assuming everything attractive is:
Evil.
It does not mean distrusting every:
Person.
It does not mean approaching life with constant:
Suspicion.
Discernment asks better:
Questions.
Where does this:
Lead?
What does this:
Produce?
Whom does this:
Serve?
What does this ask me to:
Worship?
What kind of person is this making me:
Become?
Those questions mattered enormously for John's:
Churches.
Rome possessed extraordinary:
Splendor.
Architecture.
Military strength.
Political order.
Commerce.
Roads.
Culture.
Public spectacle.
Imperial power could look enormously:
Impressive.
But Revelation says:
Look again.
Behind impressive power may stand demands for:
Allegiance.
Behind prosperity may stand:
Exploitation.

Behind public glory may stand:
Violence.
Behind claims of peace may stand:
Coercion.
Revelation unveils what propaganda may:
Conceal.
But we should not reduce every image simply to:
Rome.
Rome participates in a larger biblical:
Pattern.
Babylon before:
It.
Other powers after:
It.
Human systems repeatedly become tempted by:
Domination.
Idolatry.
Violence.
Self-glorification.
So the question remains for every:
Generation.
What kind of power are we looking:
At?
What kind of fruit does it: Produce?

9. Categories for Discernment, Not a Newspaper Codebook

Revelation gives the Church categories for:
Discernment.
Not a newspaper:
Codebook.
That difference is enormously:
Important.
A codebook asks:
Which current event fulfills this?
Discernment asks:
What kind of power am I looking at?
What kind of allegiance is being:
Demanded?
What kind of fruit is being:
Produced?
What does this ask me to:
Worship?
Does this resemble the:

Lamb—
or the:
Dragon?
That makes Revelation relevant in every:
Generation.
Technology:
Changes.
Nations:
Change.
Borders:
Change.
Governments:
Change.
Weapons:
Change.
But the spiritual struggle surrounding worship, allegiance, truth, power, compromise, and faithfulness:
Remains.
We do not need to modernize John's locusts to make them:
Relevant.
Their theological message already:
Is.
We can live faithfully without solving every:
Symbol.
Thank:
God.
The first-century Christian hearing Revelation read aloud did not have twenty commentaries open upon a:
Desk.
They:
Heard.
Remembered.
Worshiped.
Endured.
And the central message was clear enough:
Jesus is:
Lord.
The Lamb is:
Worthy.
Evil is:
Real.
Evil is:
Limited.

Faithfulness may:
Cost.
God will:
Judge.
Christ will:
Conquer.
New creation will:
Come.
Therefore:
Endure.
No updating:
Required.

10. The Church Is Not Called to Grow Fangs

Lion imagery appears throughout:
Scripture.
Sometimes positively.
Sometimes:
Negatively.
Context determines how the image:
Functions.
Here the context is unmistakably:
Threatening.
These are not the Lion of:
Judah.
Revelation has already introduced that:
Title.
John heard:
The Lion of the tribe of Judah.
Then he looked—
and saw a:
Lamb.
That was one of Revelation's great:
Surprises.
Here we encounter lion-like teeth without the Lamb's:
Character.
Ferocity without:
Sacrifice.
Power without:
Redemption.
Strength without:
Love.
The contrast matters.
The abyss understands power through:

Torment.
The beast will understand power through:
Domination.
Babylon will understand power through wealth and:
Seduction.
The Lamb reveals power through:
Faithfulness.
Sacrifice.
Truth.
Love.
The Church must decide which definition of power it will:
Adopt.
Will we believe power means making others:
Fear us?
Or can power look like:
Service?
Will we conquer through:
Domination?
Or through faithful:
Witness?
Lions' teeth may look:
Impressive.
But they are not the kind of power Revelation asks Christians to:
Imitate.
The Church is not called to grow:
Fangs.
It is called to follow the:
Lamb.
We do not defeat the Destroyer by becoming:
Destroyers.
We do not resist cruelty by perfecting:
Cruelty.
We do not overcome hatred by becoming better at:
Hating.
Because darkness would love to reproduce itself in:
Us.
Its victory would not merely be making us:
Suffer.
Its deeper victory would be making our suffering transform us into something less like:
Christ.
The teeth can grow inside the:
Victim.

Someone hurts:
Us.
We become:
Hard.
Someone deceives:
Us.
We decide never to trust:
Again.
Someone hates:
Us.
We learn to:
Hate.
And suddenly the darkness has moved from around:
Us—
to within:
Us.
That is why endurance must include:
Character.
Christian endurance is not merely lasting:
Longer.
It is remaining:
Faithful.
Still:
Truthful.
Still:
Loving.
Still:
Merciful.
Still:
Courageous.
Still belonging to the:
Lamb.
Survival alone is not the:
Goal.
When the woe finally passes, the question is not merely:
Did I:
Survive?
The deeper question is:
Do I still look like Jesus?

11. The Cross Is the Opposite of Predatory Power

That requires a different kind of:
Strength.
Anyone can:

Bite.
Anyone can:
Strike back.
Anyone can answer insult with:
Insult.
But refusing to allow hatred to determine what we become requires another kind of:
Strength.
The strength of the:
Lamb.
Jesus possessed:
Power.
But His power was not:
Predatory.
He could:
Confront.
Rebuke.
Speak hard:
Truth.
Yet He did not use people for His own:
Advantage.
He gave Himself:
For them.
The Cross is the opposite of predatory:
Power.
Predatory power says:
You will suffer so that I may:
Live.
The Cross says:
I will suffer so that you may:
Live.
One:
Devours.
The other:
Gives.
One:
Consumes.
The other:
Serves.
One takes:
Life.
The other lays life:
Down.

One has lions':
Teeth.
The other is the slain:
Lamb.
And yet—
the Lamb:
Wins.
That is Revelation's scandalous:
Claim.
The world expects the strongest teeth to:
Win.
The largest:
Army.
The greatest:
Wealth.
The most intimidating:
Power.
Revelation points toward a slaughtered Lamb and says:
There is the:
Victor.
That means Christian victory will sometimes look very:
Strange.
Faithfulness may look like:
Weakness.
Forgiveness may look like:
Surrender.
Service may look:
Unimportant.
Truth may be:
Costly.
Martyrdom may look like:
Defeat.
But heaven evaluates differently.
If winning becomes more important than:
Faithfulness—
we are already in:
Danger.
If power becomes more important than:
Character—
we are already:
Drifting.
The locusts have:
Teeth.

The Church has:
Testimony.
That may appear unequal from:
Earth.
Heaven sees:
Differently.
Truth does not need teeth to become:
True.
The gospel does not become more powerful because Christians become more:
Aggressive.
Christ does not need His followers to become:
Predators.
He asks us to become faithful:
Witnesses.
Gentleness is not:
Cowardice.
Love is not:
Weakness.
Mercy is not:
Compromise.
There are moments to:
Speak.
Confront.
Resist.
Protect.
Stand.
But how we stand:
Matters.
We stand as people of the:
Lamb.
Not people of the:
Abyss.
Our methods should reveal our:
King.
Our speech should reveal our:
King.
Our treatment of enemies should reveal our:
King.
Our use of power should reveal our:
King.
The world should be able to tell which kingdom formed:
Us.

12. Every Kingdom Produces a Resemblance

The creatures reflect the character of where they came:
From.
The abyss produces creatures that:
Harm.
Later we learn their king's name:
Destroyer.
The subjects resemble the:
Kingdom.
The same principle should be true of heaven's:
People.
If our King is:
Merciful—
mercy should increasingly appear in:
Us.
If our King is:
Truthful—
truth should appear in:
Us.
If our King is:
Holy—
holiness should increasingly appear in:
Us.
If our King:
Loves—
we should:
Love.
Every kingdom produces a:
Resemblance.
What we worship gradually shapes what we:
Become.
What we admire shapes our:
Desires.
What we repeatedly behold shapes our:
Imagination.
Allegiance eventually becomes:
Character.
That is why worship matters so much throughout:
Revelation.
Worship is not merely:
Music.
It is:
Allegiance.

Orientation.
Identity.
Formation.
We become people shaped by the one we call:
Worthy.
The locusts belong to the:
Abyss.
They look like:
It.
The saints belong to:
God.
They should increasingly look like:
Him.
We become like what we worship.
That means Revelation is about:
Formation.
Not merely:
Information.
If we finish Revelation knowing more prophetic theories but looking less like:
Jesus—
we have missed the:
Point.
If we can identify every beast but cannot love our:
Neighbor—
we have missed the:
Point.
If we can argue every timeline but cannot remain faithful when faithfulness becomes:
Costly—
we have missed the:
Point.
Knowledge must eventually produce:
Faithfulness.
Otherwise it becomes:
Trivia.
History:
Matters.
Language:
Matters.
Context:
Matters.
Symbolism:

Matters.
Scholarship:
Matters.
But all of them should eventually serve:
Discipleship.
We do the:
Homework.
The reader receives the:
Fruit.
Perhaps the better question in Verse 8 is therefore not:
What exactly does the hair:
Symbolize?
But:
What kind of kingdom produces these creatures?
Not:
What modern object resembles lions':
Teeth?
But:
What does predatory power look like?
Not:
Can I decode every:
Detail?
But:
Can I discern the difference between the abyss and the Lamb?
That is pastoral:
Interpretation.

13. The Teeth Do Not Cancel the Limits

Now return to the:
Teeth.
They look capable of terrible:
Harm.
But capability is not the same as:
Permission.
We learned that already.
Power does not determine its own:
Jurisdiction.
The teeth do not cancel the:
Limits.
Again:
The boundary.
Again:
The restraint.
Again:

God's sovereignty standing quietly behind the frightening:
Image.
Sometimes God's sovereignty appears as a:
Boundary.
Not necessarily removing the:
Threat.
But saying:
Here.
And no:
Farther.
That does not answer every question about:
Suffering.
And Revelation does not give us enough information to identify every invisible boundary surrounding every painful circumstance in our own:
Lives.
We should not pretend that it:
Does.
But within John's vision, one thing is:
Clear.
The creatures do not possess unlimited:
Authority.
The lion's teeth are not:
God.
That sounds almost too obvious to:
Say.
Yet fear sometimes receives divine attributes in our:
Imagination.
Fear becomes:
Omnipresent.
It occupies every:
Thought.
Fear becomes:
Omnipotent.
Nothing can stop:
It.
Fear becomes:
Omniscient.
It seems to know every possible way to hurt:
Us.
Fear becomes a false:
God.
Revelation dethrones:
Fear.

Not by pretending frightening things do not:
Exist.
But by placing them beneath the authority of:
God.
The creatures have:
Teeth.
God has the:
Throne.
Those are not equivalent forms of:
Power.
One can:
Hurt.
The Other:
Reigns.
Pain is:
Powerful.
But pain does not:
Reign.
Death is:
Powerful.
But death does not:
Reign.
Evil is:
Powerful.
But evil does not:
Reign.
The:
Lamb reigns.
And that is why faith must:
Remember.
Today's verse may be:
Dark.
So we carry yesterday's light into:
It.
The:
Throne.
The:
Lamb.
The:
Scroll.
The:
Worship.
The:

Seal.
The:
Multitude.
Those truths interpret the:
Teeth.
The teeth do not redefine:
God.
We allow what God has already revealed to interpret what we cannot presently:
Understand.
Never build your theology of God entirely from the darkest:
Verse.
Read the difficult verses within the whole revelation of:
God.
And ultimately—
read them through:
Christ.
The One who:
Heals.
Forgives.
Welcomes.
Confronts evil.
Touches the unclean.
Receives sinners.
Weeps with mourners.
Gives Himself upon the:
Cross.
That is the One Revelation calls:
Lamb.

14. The Kingdom That Devours and the Lamb Who Gives Life

A God who loves must oppose what:
Devours.
If God loves:
People—
then exploitation:
Matters.
If God loves:
Truth—
then deception:
Matters.
If God loves:
Justice—

then oppression:
Matters.
If God loves:
Life—
then destruction:
Matters.
Judgment is not the opposite of:
Love.
Indifference:
Is.
A God who watched creation being devoured and simply said:
It does not:
Matter—
would not be:
Loving.
The lion's teeth matter because what they tear matters to:
God.
And that brings us back to:
Hope.
The creatures have:
Teeth.
But they will not devour God's:
Future.
They cannot consume the:
Kingdom.
They cannot chew through the promises of:
God.
They cannot tear the Lamb from the:
Throne.
Their ferocity has a:
Boundary.
The abyss has a:
Key.
The locusts have:
Limits.
The torment has a:
Clock.
The people of God have a:
Seal.
The darkness is surrounded by words it did not get to:
Choose.
So let the teeth be:
Teeth.

Do not turn them into:
Missiles.
Do not turn them into:
Machinery.
Do not force them onto tomorrow's:
Headline.
Let John:
Speak.
Let the image remain:
Ancient.
Let the truth remain:
Timeless.
The forces emerging from the abyss are:
Dangerous.
Predatory.
Destructive.
Their appearance may be strange, impressive, or deceptively:
Familiar.
But their fruit reveals their:
Character.
And their limits reveal their:
Status.
They are not:
Sovereign.
Not the:
Horses.
Not the:
Crowns.
Not the:
Faces.
Not the:
Hair.
Not the:
Teeth.
Not the:
Swarm.
Not the:
Abyss.
Not even the king we will soon:
Meet.
Only God is:
God.
Perhaps that is the simplest truth beneath all this complicated:

Imagery.
The creatures may look:
Strange.
Terrifying.
Powerful.
But they remain:
Creatures.
The abyss may produce monsters.
It cannot produce:
God.
So when the familiar face hides the lion's:
Teeth—
discern:
Carefully.
When destructive power presents itself attractively—
look at its:
Fruit.
When something frightening appears larger than life—
remember its:
Limits.
And when the imagery becomes so strange that we are tempted to search tomorrow's headlines for the:
Answer—
return to John's:
World.
Listen to the vision as his churches first heard:
It.
Then carry its truth into:
Ours.
Because the question is not whether we can identify every hair and every:
Tooth.
The question is whether we can recognize the difference between the kingdom that:
Devours—
and the Lamb who gives Himself so that others may:
Live.

Pastoral Reflection

Some things do not show us their teeth at:
First.
A destructive relationship may begin with:
Charm.
An addiction may begin with:
Pleasure.

Bitterness may begin with a legitimate:
Wound.
Compromise may begin with something that seems:
Small.
Pride may begin as:
Confidence.
Control may disguise itself as:
Concern.
And sometimes we do not recognize what something is becoming until the teeth finally:
Appear.
That does not mean Christians should live suspicious of:
Everything.
It means we should learn:
Discernment.
Jesus taught us to notice:
Fruit.
So perhaps one of the most important questions we can ask is:
What is this producing in me?
Am I becoming more:
Loving?
More:
Truthful?
More:
Patient?
More:
Merciful?
More:
Faithful?
More like:
Christ?
Or am I becoming:
Angry?
Bitter?
Controlling?
Fearful?
Cruel?
Less capable of:
Love?
Sometimes the clearest evidence of what we have allowed into our lives is what it is slowly making us:
Become.
And there is another side to that question.

Sometimes the thing changing us is not something we:
Chose.
Someone wounded:
Us.
Someone betrayed:
Us.
Someone lied to:
Us.
Someone treated us:
Cruelly.
The wound was:
Real.
The injustice was:
Real.
The pain was:
Real.
But even a legitimate wound can eventually grow:
Teeth.
Pain can become:
Bitterness.
Fear can become:
Hatred.
Injury can become:
Vengeance.
Someone else's darkness can begin reproducing itself inside:
Us.
That is why Christian endurance must be more than:
Survival.
The question is not merely:
Did I make it through?
But:
Who am I becoming as I go through it?
We do not want merely to emerge from the darkness:
Alive.
We want to emerge still belonging to the:
Lamb.
Still able to:
Love.
Still able to:
Forgive.
Still able to tell the:
Truth.
Still able to recognize mercy as:

Strength.
Still able to look like:
Jesus.
So ask God for:
Discernment.
Not:
Suspicion.
Not:
Paranoia.
Discernment.
The ability to see beneath:
Appearance.
The wisdom to recognize:
Fruit.
And the courage to walk away from whatever is slowly teaching us to resemble something other than:
Christ.
Because the greatest danger is not merely that darkness may surround:
Us.
It is that darkness may begin shaping:
Us.
Lord, do not merely bring me through the darkness.
Keep the darkness from getting into me.

Something Worth Pondering

The creatures have human-like:
Faces.
And lions':
Teeth.
There is something worth pondering in that:
Combination.
The face is what we first:
See.
The teeth reveal what the creature can:
Do.
Life sometimes works that:
Way.
Not everything destructive initially looks:
Destructive.
Not everything enslaving initially feels like:
Slavery.
Not everything that pulls us away from God announces where it intends to:
Take us.
Sometimes the beginning is:

Attractive.
The ending reveals the:
Truth.
Perhaps that is why spiritual discernment requires more than asking:
How does this look?
We must also ask:
What is this producing?
Because appearance may tell us what something wants us to:
Believe.
Fruit tells us what it actually:
Is.
And Revelation repeatedly teaches us to look beyond:
Appearance.
The face may attract our:
Attention.
The fruit reveals the kingdom.

Ask Yourself This:

What kind of fruit are the people, habits, influences, ambitions, and allegiances in my life actually:
Producing?
Has something that legitimately wounded me begun growing:
Teeth
inside me through bitterness, resentment, hatred, or the desire to:
Hurt?
And when I examine my speech, my use of power, my disagreements, and the way I treat other people—
do I increasingly resemble the kingdom that:
Devours—
or the Lamb who gives Himself so others may:
Live?

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:9

“And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.”
— Revelation 9:9, KJV

John continues building the:
Picture.
The creatures have already been described through a strange collection of:
Images.
Horses prepared for:
Battle.
Something like crowns of:
Gold.
Faces like human:
Faces.
Hair like women's:
Hair.
Teeth like lions':
Teeth.
Now John adds:
Armor.
And:
Sound.
Something like iron:
Breastplates.
And wings sounding like many horse-drawn chariots rushing into:
Battle.
The vision is becoming:
Louder.
What John has been showing us—
he now makes us:
Hear.

1. Armor and Sound

Two images dominate this:
Verse.
Armor.
And:
Sound.
The first tells us something about how the creatures:
Appear.
The second tells us something about how their approach:

Feels.
They appear:
Protected.
They sound:
Overwhelming.
Together the images communicate:
Strength.
Threat.
Momentum.
Military:
Power.
The creatures do not merely look capable of:
Attacking.
They appear difficult to attack in:
Return.
And they do not approach:
Quietly.
Their wings create the sound of an army rushing into:
Battle.
Everything about the verse says:
Formidable.
But we have learned something important during our journey through Revelation:
Appearance does not equal:
Sovereignty.
And noise does not equal:
Authority.
Those truths will matter before we leave this:
Verse.

2. The Creatures Appear Protected

John says their breastplates are like breastplates of:
Iron.
Again:
Like.
Comparison.
Not:
Identification.
John does not tell us these creatures are literally wearing manufactured iron:
Armor.
Their breastplates are **like** iron breastplates.
The image communicates:
Protection.
Strength.

Resistance.
Something difficult to:
Penetrate.
In John's world, iron naturally suggested:
Strength.
Durability.
Military:
Power.
An armored soldier was more difficult to:
Defeat.
So John adds another feature to the creatures' already intimidating:
Appearance.
They do not merely look prepared to:
Attack.
They look prepared to withstand:
Attack.
That makes the imbalance appear even more:
Severe.
Their victims are already experiencing:
Torment.
Escape seems:
Impossible.
And now the creatures themselves appear:
Protected.
Armored.
Formidable.
From beneath the swarm, the situation looks almost:
Hopeless.
But remember:
Looks are not the final measure of:
Reality.

3. The Breastplate Is Not the Throne

The creatures may appear:
Armored.
Their armor does not remove their:
Limits.
Nothing in Verse 9 cancels what John has already:
Told us.
Their authority was:
Given.
Their targets were:
Restricted.
Their activity was:

Allowed.
Their duration was:
Limited.
Those words still:
Stand.
The description gets:
Bigger.
The authority does:
Not.
That distinction is enormously:
Important.
Fear often gives frightening things more authority than they actually:
Possess.
If something appears:
Invulnerable—
we assume it cannot be:
Defeated.
If something appears:
Permanent—
we assume it cannot:
End.
If something appears:
Overwhelming—
we assume nothing exists beyond:
It.
Revelation teaches us not to make that:
Leap.
Armor represents:
Protection.
The throne represents:
Sovereignty.
Those are not the same:
Thing.
The creatures may possess something resembling iron:
Armor.
They do not possess the:
Throne.
The breastplate is not the:
Throne.

4. Then John Makes Us Hear Them

Until now John's description has largely been:
Visual.
We have seen:

Horses.
Crowns.
Faces.
Hair.
Teeth.
Armor.
Now suddenly—
we:
Hear.
And what we hear is:
Overwhelming.
The sound of their wings is like the sound of many chariots with horses rushing into:
Battle.
Not one:
Chariot.
Many.
Not moving peacefully along a:
Road.
Rushing into:
Battle.
The verse begins to:
Move.
And we should allow ourselves to:
Hear it.
Revelation was originally intended to be heard by gathered:
Christians.
Someone stood before the congregation and read John's words:
Aloud.
Imagine hearing the description:
Horses.
Crowns.
Faces.
Hair.
Teeth.
Armor.
And then—
the roar of approaching:
Battle.
John is not merely giving information to be:
Analyzed.
He is engaging the:
Imagination.

See.
Hear.
Feel.
Remember.
Worship.
Fear.
Hope.
Endure.
The sound is part of the:
Vision.

5. Sometimes We Hear the Chariots Before They Arrive

There is something particularly frightening about an approaching:
Army.
You may hear it before you can:
See it.
The sound reaches you before the army:
Does.
And fear begins before the:
Encounter.
There is a pastoral analogy here we should use:
Carefully.
Ordinary anxiety is not spiritually equivalent to the creatures in John's:
Vision.
But the human experience is:
Recognizable.
Sometimes we hear the chariots before they:
Arrive.
The test result that has not yet:
Come.
The meeting scheduled for:
Tomorrow.
The conversation we know we must:
Have.
The doctor's:
Appointment.
The uncertain:
Future.
Something is:
Coming.
We do not yet know exactly what it will:
Bring.
And our imagination supplies the:
Noise.

What if:
This?
What if:
That?
What if everything goes:
Wrong?
With every possibility, the chariots become:
Louder.
Until something remarkable has:
Happened.
Before anything has actually occurred—
we are already living inside the:
Battle.
We have suffered tomorrow a dozen times before tomorrow ever:
Arrived.
Anticipation has turned possibility into present:
Pain.
Sometimes the chariots are real.
Sometimes what frightens us most is the sound of something that has not yet:
Come.
Wisdom learns to distinguish between the:
Two.

6. Faith Does Not Pretend the Noise Is Not Real

John hears the:
Noise.
He does not say:
There is no:
Sound.
He does not say:
Nothing frightening is:
Happening.
He describes the sound in enormous:
Terms.
Many chariots.
Horses.
Rushing.
Battle.
Biblical faith is not:
Denial.
Faith does not require us to say:
I am not:
Afraid—
when we:

Are.
Faith does not require us to call frightening things:
Harmless.
Faith does not require us to pretend painful things do not:
Hurt.
John hears the:
Chariots.
Faith allows us to say:
I hear them too.
But then faith remembers something:
Else.
Because the chariots are not the only sound in:
Revelation.

7. There Is Another Sound in Revelation

Revelation is filled with:
Sound.
Thunder.
Trumpets.
Voices.
Songs.
Worship.
Multitudes.
Heaven is not:
Silent.
And before we heard the wings of the creatures—
we heard heaven:
Worship.
That order:
Matters.
Before the:
Abyss—
the:
Throne.
Before the:
Locusts—
the:
Lamb.
Before the sound of the:
Chariots—
the songs of:
Heaven.
John has already given us something to remember before the frightening noise:

Begins.
Faith remembers which sound came:
First.
The darkness may become:
Loud.
But darkness was not the first:
Word.
Nor will darkness receive the:
Last.
That is one reason memory matters so much in:
Revelation.
When the present becomes overwhelming, faith carries earlier truth into the present:
Moment.
I have heard another:
Sound.
I have seen another:
Reality.
I remember the:
Throne.
I remember the:
Lamb.
I remember the worship of:
Heaven.
And those things were true before the chariots began to:
Roar.

8. Noise Is Not Authority

That deserves to stand almost by:
Itself.
Noise is not authority.
The loudest voice is not necessarily the:
Truest.
The most frightening sound is not necessarily the most:
Powerful.
The greatest commotion does not necessarily tell us who ultimately:
Reigns.
We understand that distinction poorly in a world that constantly rewards:
Volume.
The loudest argument receives:
Attention.
The angriest voice dominates the:
Conversation.
The most alarming headline attracts the:

Eye.
The most dramatic prediction gets:
Repeated.
Volume begins to create the appearance of:
Authority.
But volume and truth are not the same:
Thing.
Revelation trains us to listen:
Differently.
Do not merely ask:
What is:
Loudest?
Ask:
What is:
True?
Do not merely ask:
What is everyone:
Saying?
Ask:
What has God:
Said?
Do not merely ask:
What frightens:
Me?
Ask:
What remains:
Faithful?
The wings are:
Loud.
The throne has not:
Moved.
Nothing about the volume of the swarm changes the location of:
God.
Nothing about the roar of approaching battle removes the Lamb from the:
Throne.
The creatures sound overwhelming.
To human ears?
Certainly.
To frightened people?
Absolutely.
To:
God?
No.

Heaven is not:
Panicking.
There is no emergency meeting around the:
Throne.
No angel rushes in saying:
We did not expect:
This.
No one tells God:
The situation has gotten out of:
Control.
The creatures themselves operate within authority that was:
Given.
From earth:
Thunderous:
Chariots.
From heaven:
Boundaries.
The difference is:
Perspective.
Standing beneath the swarm, all you may hear is:
Noise.
Scripture reminds us that there is a perspective from the:
Throne.
Faith may not immediately make us **feel** that perspective.
The fear may remain:
Real.
The sound may remain:
Loud.
But Scripture tells us the other perspective:
Exists.
And sometimes that is enough to:
Endure.

9. The Chariots May Roar; the Promise Can Whisper

Sometimes life becomes unbearably:
Loud.
News.
Conflict.
Work.
Family.
Health.
Finances.
Fear.
Our own:

Thoughts.
Everything seems to demand our attention at the same:
Time.
And sometimes the soul does not need another elaborate:
Explanation.
Sometimes the soul needs quiet:
Truth.
God is still:
Here.
Christ is still:
Lord.
You still belong to:
Him.
The story is not:
Finished.
Those sentences may not be:
Loud.
But they are:
True.
Truth does not need to shout in order to remain:
Truth.
The chariots may:
Roar.
The promise can:
Whisper.
The promise still:
Stands.
That matters when something appears impossible to:
Change.
Iron-like breastplates can create the appearance of:
Invulnerability.
Why:
Try?
Why:
Pray?
Why remain:
Faithful?
Nothing will ever:
Change.
Scripture knows that:
Feeling.
Again and again God's people have stood before powers that appeared enormously larger than:

They were.
Pharaoh.
Goliath.
Babylon.
Rome.
Pilate.
Each could appear to possess the final:
Word.
None:
Did.
Neither do the creatures from the:
Abyss.
Their armor may appear:
Impenetrable.
It is still not the:
Throne.

10. Christian Hope Is Larger Than Circumstances

That does not mean everything in this life turns out exactly as we:
Want.
That needs to be said:
Clearly.
Sometimes illness does not:
Disappear.
Sometimes relationships are not:
Restored.
Sometimes injustice is not corrected within our:
Lifetime.
Sometimes faithful people:
Die.
Revelation was written to Christians who knew that:
Reality.
So Christian hope must be larger than favorable:
Circumstances.
If hope means:
Everything will work out exactly the way I want—
then suffering can destroy:
Hope.
But Christian hope says:
Whatever happens, Christ remains:
Lord.
Whatever happens, death will not have the final:
Word.
Whatever happens, God's future remains:

Secure.
That is why resurrection:
Matters.
Christian hope is not merely optimism about:
Tomorrow.
It is confidence in God's ultimate:
Future.
The resurrection of Jesus declares that even death does not possess final:
Authority.
So let the chariots rush into:
Battle.
They cannot reverse the:
Resurrection.
That is the kind of statement Revelation teaches the Church to:
Make.
Not:
Nothing bad can:
Happen.
But:
Nothing can undo what God has accomplished in Christ.
Those are profoundly different:
Claims.
One is:
Denial.
The other is:
Hope.
Denial says:
There is no:
Battle.
Hope says:
The battle is not the end of the:
Story.

11. The Sound of Battle Can Change Us

John does not romanticize:
Evil.
The chariots rush into:
Battle.
There is aggression in the:
Image.
And there are destructive realities in human life that must be recognized for what they:
Are.
Violence.

Oppression.
Abuse.
Exploitation.
Hatred.
The Church is not called to be:
Naive.
Gentleness is not:
Naivety.
Love is not:
Blindness.
Faith is not:
Passivity.
There are times to:
Confront.
Protect.
Resist.
Stand.
But we resist as followers of the:
Lamb.
We do not resist the abyss by becoming:
Abyssal.
We do not resist hatred by perfecting:
Hatred.
We do not resist cruelty by becoming more:
Cruel.
We do not defeat the Destroyer by becoming:
Destroyers.
Verse 8 warned us that the teeth can grow inside the:
Victim.
Verse 9 gives us another way that can:
Happen.
Live around battle long enough—
and everything can begin to look like a:
Battle.
Every disagreement becomes an:
Enemy.
Every conversation becomes something to:
Win.
Every person becomes:
Ally—
or:
Opponent.
The sound of battle can change the way we:

See.
The Lamb offers another:
Way.
Truth without:
Hatred.
Courage without:
Cruelty.
Strength without:
Domination.
Conviction without:
Dehumanization.
Faithfulness without surrendering:
Love.
That kind of strength is harder than:
Iron.
Christian endurance therefore asks more than:
Will I:
Survive?
It asks:
Who will I become while I endure?
Will suffering make me more:
Compassionate—
or more:
Bitter?
Will opposition deepen my:
Faithfulness—
or deepen my:
Hatred?
Will fear drive me toward:
Christ—
or toward:
Control?
Courage is not the absence of:
Fear.
It is faithfulness in the presence of:
Fear.
The saints endure not because nothing frightens:
Them.
They endure because fear does not determine their:
Allegiance.
The creatures have:
Armor.
The saints have:

Faithfulness.
Which looks stronger?
From earth:
Armor.
From heaven:
Faithfulness.

12. Faith Creates Space Between Fear and Response

The sound of many chariots can produce:
Panic.
Panic shortens our:
Vision.
Everything becomes:
Immediate.
Do:
Something.
Anything.
Now.
But panic rarely produces:
Wisdom.
Faith creates space between fear and:
Response.
Enough space to:
Pray.
Remember.
Discern.
Listen.
Choose:
Faithfulness.
Sometimes that space is only a:
Moment.
A pause before we:
Speak.
A prayer before we:
Respond.
A breath before we:
Act.
But that small space can keep fear from deciding who we will:
Become.
Revelation continually turns the mirror back toward the:
Church.
It is easy to identify evil somewhere:
Else.
Harder to ask:

Whose methods am I:
Using?
Whose character am I:
Displaying?
Whose definition of power have I:
Accepted?
What kingdom does my behavior:
Resemble?
It is easier to find the beast in our:
Opponent—
than the beastly temptation in:
Ourselves.
That is uncomfortable.
But Revelation was never given merely to make us comfortable.
It calls us to:
Faithfulness.
And faithfulness requires honest:
Self-examination.
Before fear determines our response—
faith creates room to:
Remember.

13. Christian Memory Is an Act of Resistance

Remember what came before the:
Chariots.
The:
Throne.
The:
Lamb.
The:
Scroll.
The:
Worship.
The:
Seal.
Those are not decorative background:
Details.
They are the theological foundation beneath everything happening:
Now.
The sound cannot erase what we have already:
Seen.
Sometimes we must live from what we:
Remember.
Because what we presently see may be:

Confusing.
What we presently hear may be:
Frightening.
What we presently feel may be:
Uncertain.
And in those moments faith says:
I remember.
I remember the:
Throne—
even when life feels:
Chaotic.
I remember the:
Lamb—
even when evil looks:
Powerful.
I remember the:
Seal—
even when I feel:
Vulnerable.
I remember the:
Resurrection—
even when death seems:
Near.
Christian memory is an act of:
Resistance.
We refuse to let the present moment erase everything God has already:
Shown us.
That is why worship:
Remembers.
Communion:
Remembers.
Scripture:
Remembers.
Testimony:
Remembers.
The Church:
Remembers.
"Do this in remembrance of:
Me."
Christian faith is built around holy:
Memory.
Remember:
Christ.

Remember the:
Cross.
Remember the empty:
Tomb.
Remember the:
Promises.
Remember whose you:
Are.
Then let the chariots make their:
Noise.
Not because the noise does not:
Matter.
But because the noise cannot rewrite the:
Gospel.
The wings may sound like armies rushing into:
Battle.
Christ is still:
Risen.
The Gospel is not:
Fragile.
It does not collapse when circumstances become:
Loud.
And Christ's faithfulness has never depended upon the Church living in easy:
Times.
The reader who begins at Chapter 9 hears:
Chaos.
The reader who has traveled from Chapter 1 hears:
Chaos beneath the authority of Christ.
Context changes what we:
Hear.
And sometimes it changes what we can:
Endure.

14. The Wings May Roar; the Throne Does Not Tremble

Chapter 9 is not Chapter: 22
We have said that:
Before.
We may need to say it:
Again.
Because when we are living inside Chapter 9, Chapter 9 can feel like the whole:
Book.
It:
Isn't.

The sound of the chariots is not the sound that ends the:
Story.
The final sound is not the roar of:
War.
God's story moves toward:
Restoration.
Justice.
Healing.
Life.
The creatures may be:
Armored.
They are not:
Eternal.
Their wings may be:
Loud.
They are not:
Ultimate.
The chariots may rush into:
Battle.
They do not determine the final:
Victory.
The:
Lamb does.
So listen to the:
Chariots.
John wants us to:
Hear them.
Do not minimize their:
Noise.
Do not pretend they are:
Harmless.
And do not turn them into some modern machine John and his churches could never have:
Known.
Hear them as John's first hearers could:
Hear them.
The sound of overwhelming:
War.
The approach of frightening:
Power.
The roar of something apparently:
Unstoppable.
And then:

Remember.
What looks unstoppable from earth is still bounded from:
Heaven.
The breastplate is not the:
Throne.
The noise is not:
Authority.
The battle is not the end of the:
Story.
And the loudest thing in your life today does not necessarily possess the final word over your:
Tomorrow.
The creatures may wear something like:
Iron.
Their wings may sound like:
Armies.
But above the noise—
beyond the battle—
untouched by the chaos—
there remains the:
Throne.
And upon that throne remains the One whose purposes no army of earth—
and no creature from the abyss—
can finally:
Defeat.
The wings may:
Roar.
The throne does not:
Tremble.

Pastoral Reflection

Sometimes life gets:
Loud.
Not literally.
Although sometimes that happens:
Too.
But there are seasons when every part of life seems to demand our attention at the same:
Time.
A medical:
Concern.
A family:
Problem.
A financial:

Question.
A difficult decision at:
Work.
Someone we love who is:
Struggling.
Something unresolved that keeps returning to our:
Thoughts.
One problem might be:
Manageable.
But together they begin sounding like many chariots rushing into:
Battle.
And eventually the noise becomes:
Exhausting.
We may find ourselves lying awake listening to battles that have not even:
Happened.
What if?
What if?
What if?
Faith does not require us to pretend we cannot hear the:
Noise.
John heard:
It.
He described:
It.
But John also remembered what he had already:
Seen.
The:
Throne.
The:
Lamb.
The:
Worship.
The:
Seal.
And sometimes that is what we must:
Do.
Remember.
Not solve everything:
Tonight.
Not predict:
Tomorrow.
Not answer every:
Question.

Remember.
God has been:
Faithful.
Christ is still:
Lord.
I still belong to:
Him.
Tomorrow remains in hands larger than:
Mine.
Perhaps the chariots will still sound:
Loud.
Perhaps the problem will still be there in the:
Morning.
Perhaps the answer will not arrive as quickly as we:
Want.
But another voice begins to rise beneath the:
Noise.
Not necessarily:
Louder.
Simply:
Truer.
The noise is:
Real.
But the noise is not:
God.
The fear is:
Real.
But fear cannot see:
Tomorrow.
The uncertainty is:
Real.
But uncertainty does not sit upon the:
Throne.
And sometimes endurance begins when we stop demanding that every frightening sound disappear—
and remember whose voice we have chosen to:
Follow.

Something Worth Pondering

John hears something:
Overwhelming.
Many chariots with horses rushing into:
Battle.
Everything about the sound suggests:

Power.
Urgency.
Danger.
Approaching:
Conflict.
But there is something the sound cannot tell:
Us.
Who ultimately:
Reigns.
Noise can tell us something is:
Happening.
Noise cannot tell us what the final outcome will:
Be.
Fear can tell us something:
Matters.
Fear cannot tell us the:
Future.
Anxiety can imagine:
Possibilities.
Anxiety cannot see:
Tomorrow.
And perhaps we sometimes give frightening sounds authority they never actually:
Possessed.
We hear the:
Chariots—
and assume they have already:
Won.
Revelation teaches us to listen more:
Carefully.
Because the loudest sound is not necessarily the final:
Word.
The wings may:
Roar.
The throne does not:
Tremble.

Ask Yourself This:

What is the loudest thing in my life right now—and have I confused its:
Volume
with:
Authority?

What truths about God did I know before my circumstances became:
Loud—
and can I carry those truths into this:
Moment?
And when the wings roar loudly enough to seem as though they fill the entire:
Sky—
can I remember one quiet truth the noise cannot:
Change?
The wings may roar.
The throne does not tremble.

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:10

“And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.”
— Revelation 9:10, KJV

John returns to something he introduced near the beginning of the:
Vision.
The:
Scorpion.
After describing:
Horses.
Crowns.
Faces.
Hair.
Teeth.
Breastplates.
Wings.
And the sound of:
Chariots—
John returns to the:
Tail.
The creatures have tails like:
Scorpions.
Those tails contain:
Stingers.
And in those tails is their power to:
Harm.
But John does something extraordinarily important in the same:
Sentence.
He reminds us how long that authority:
Lasts.
Five:
Months.
The sting is:
Real.
The suffering is:
Real.
The power is:
Real.
And the limit is:
Real.

1. The Tail and the Clock

Verse 10 brings us back to Verse: 3
When the locusts first emerged from the smoke, John told us they had been given power like the power of:
Scorpions.
Now that earlier comparison becomes visually:
Specific.
Tails.
Stingers.
Power to:
Harm.
The image tells us something about the nature of their:
Threat.
Not primarily:
Death.
Torment.
That agrees with what John has already told:
Us.
They were not permitted to:
Kill.
They were permitted to:
Torment.
The sting is therefore not merely another frightening feature added to an already frightening:
Creature.
It tells us what their power:
Does.
It:
Hurts.
But John refuses to give us the sting without also giving us the:
Clock.
Five:
Months.
Pain.
And:
Boundary.
Torment.
And:
Limit.
The:
Tail.
And the:
Clock.

We need:
Both.

2. Let the Scorpion Remain a Scorpion

Again John says:
Like.
Tails **like**:
Scorpions.
Comparison.
Not:
Identification.
His first hearers did not need a modern technological equivalent for a:
Scorpion.
A scorpion was:
Enough.
Small enough to be:
Overlooked.
Dangerous enough to be:
Feared.
Its sting produced immediate:
Pain.
The image already communicated perfectly well in John's:
World.
We do not need to improve John's:
Imagery.
It does not need:
Rotors.
It does not need:
Missiles.
It does not need:
Chemical weapons.
It does not need a modern military:
Vehicle.
It needs a:
Sting.
Because the theological point is not the:
Mechanism.
The theological point is the:
Harm.
So let the ancient image remain:
Ancient.
And let the truth remain:
Timeless.
The enduring truth concerns:

Destructive power.
Torment.
Judgment.
Human helplessness.
Divine limits.
And eventually:
Repentance.
Those realities require no engine to remain:
Relevant.

3. The Sting Matters Because the Person Matters

The scorpion image makes the suffering:
Experiential.
A sting is something a person can:
Feel.
Pain.
Torment.
Distress.
Revelation 9 does not treat suffering merely as an abstract theological:
Concept.
People are:
Hurting.
That should keep our commentary:
Pastoral.
We can analyze:
Symbols.
Discuss:
Background.
Examine:
Structure.
Explore:
Interpretation.
But we should never become so fascinated with interpreting the vision that the people suffering inside it disappear from:
View.
Theology must never become indifferent to:
Pain.
It is possible to explain suffering so intellectually that the sufferer becomes little more than an illustration for our:
Argument.
We answer:
Why.
We explain:
How.

We defend a:
Doctrine.
Meanwhile someone is:
Hurting.
Sometimes the first response to pain should not be:
Explanation.
Sometimes it should be:
Presence.
Compassion.
Listening.
Prayer.
Help.
Love.
The sting matters because the person:
Matters.
Christian theology should never make suffering:
Smaller.
It should make compassion:
Larger.
Jesus did not encounter hurting people merely as theological:
Problems.
He encountered them as:
People.
And perhaps that helps us understand something about:
Judgment.
Why oppose what:
Harms?
Because those being harmed:
Matter.
Why judge destructive:
Power?
Because destruction:
Matters.
If exploitation harms people—
it:
Matters.
If violence harms people—
it:
Matters.
If deception destroys lives—
it:
Matters.
If idolatry enslaves—

it:
Matters.
Love does not shrug at:
Destruction.
A loving God cannot be indifferent to what:
Devours.

4. The Fruit Reveals the Kingdom

The tail tells us something about the kingdom from which these creatures:
Come.
What comes from the abyss does not:
Heal.
It:
Harms.
It does not give:
Life.
It produces:
Torment.
It does not restore:
Wholeness.
It inflicts:
Pain.
The fruit reveals the:
Kingdom.
We have seen this principle:
Before.
The face may appear:
Familiar.
The crown may appear:
Impressive.
The armor may appear:
Strong.
But look at the:
Fruit.
What does this kingdom:
Produce?
Torment.
That tells us something about its:
Character.
Jesus taught us to recognize trees by their:
Fruit.
Revelation teaches similar:
Discernment.
Do not become dazzled by:

Appearance.
Ask what something:
Produces.
Life?
Truth?
Justice?
Mercy?
Faithfulness?
Or:
Fear?
Bondage?
Deception?
Destruction?
The tail reveals what the creature:
Does.
And character eventually reveals itself through:
Fruit.
But then—
John brings us back to something we desperately need to:
Remember.
The:
Boundary.

5. Fear Remembers the Sting and Forgets the Clock

The creatures possess power to harm people for:
Five months.
There it is:
Again.
John already gave us this temporal boundary in Verse: 5
Now he repeats:
It.
Why?
Perhaps because frightened people need to hear limits more than:
Once.
We certainly:
Do.
Fear has a terrible:
Memory.
Fear remembers:
Threat.
It forgets:
Boundaries.
Fear remembers:
Pain.

It forgets:
Promise.
Fear remembers the:
Sting.
It forgets the:
Clock.
So John makes us remember:
Both.
The tail.
And the:
Five months.
The sting.
And the:
Limit.
The pain.
And the:
Boundary.
He refuses to let either truth erase the:
Other.
That is theological:
Balance.
Speak only about the sting—
and we may produce:
Despair.
Speak only about the limit—
and we may minimize:
Suffering.
John does:
Neither.
The sting hurts.
The sting ends.
The suffering is:
Real.
The suffering is:
Limited.
Not necessarily limited according to the timetable we would:
Choose.
Not necessarily brief according to the experience of the person who:
Suffers.
But never:
Ultimate.

6. Never Weaponize the Limit

Five months can feel like:

Forever.
When someone is hurting, theological statements about temporary suffering can sound terribly:
Hollow.
A night of pain can feel:
Endless.
A month of grief can feel like a:
Lifetime.
Years of struggle can reshape an entire:
Life.
So we should never weaponize the:
Limit.
We should never tell someone:
It is only temporary.
as though temporary suffering does not:
Hurt.
Jesus never asks us to become emotionally indifferent because eternity is:
Long.
He wept at Lazarus's:
Tomb.
He knew the ending.
And still:
Wept.
That tells us something beautiful about:
God.
Knowing that suffering will end does not make compassion:
Unnecessary.
Hope and grief can exist:
Together.
Christians are allowed to cry while believing in:
Resurrection.
We can say:
This:
Hurts.
And:
This will not have the final:
Word.
We can say:
I am:
Grieving.
And:
I still:
Believe.

We can say:
How long, O:
Lord?
And still call Him:
Lord.
Hope does not require us to lie about the:
Present.
It gives us reason not to surrender the:
Future.

7. Endurance Is Not Emotional Numbness

Endurance does not mean becoming incapable of:
Feeling.
It means remaining faithful while:
Feeling.
Pain does not disqualify:
Faith.
Tears do not disqualify:
Hope.
Weariness does not disqualify:
Endurance.
Sometimes endurance:
Cries.
Sometimes endurance:
Questions.
Sometimes endurance needs:
Help.
Sometimes endurance can barely:
Pray.
Sometimes endurance simply refuses to:
Leave.
That still counts.
There is no requirement that endurance always look:
Heroic.
Sometimes endurance looks like:
Getting out of bed.
Showing up.
Praying one:
Sentence.
Allowing someone else to:
Help.
Saying:
I don't understand.
But I am still:

Here.
Faith may tremble without ceasing to be:
Faith.
The important question is not whether the hand ever:
Trembles.
It is where the trembling hand continues to:
Reach.

8. Evil Has a Clock

The five months remind us of something we discovered earlier:
Evil has a:
Clock.
It does not possess:
Eternity.
God:
Does.
Evil gets a season.
God possesses:
Eternity.
Suffering gets a chapter.
God possesses the:
Story.
Pain gets a moment.
God possesses the:
Future.
That does not mean the moment is:
Insignificant.
Some wounds leave:
Scars.
Some losses permanently alter earthly:
Life.
Some experiences cannot simply be:
Undone.
Christian hope should never pretend:
Otherwise.
The sting may write something into our:
Story.
But the sting does not write the:
Ending.
That distinction leads us somewhere profoundly:
Christian.

9. Resurrection Is Greater Than Reversal

Christian hope is not merely the hope that God will rewind history until nothing painful ever:

Happened.
The risen Jesus still bore:
Scars.
Think about:
That.
The wounds were:
Real.
The crucifixion really:
Happened.
The suffering was not:
Imaginary.
But the wounds were no longer:
Victorious.
The scar is not the same as the:
Wound.
A wound says:
I am still being:
Hurt.
A scar says:
Something happened:
Here.
But it did not finish me.
That becomes a powerful image of:
Redemption.
Resurrection does not deny Good:
Friday.
It transforms what Good Friday ultimately:
Means.
The Cross remains:
Real.
The wounds remain:
Visible.
But death no longer defines the:
Outcome.
That is Christian:
Hope.
Not:
Nothing painful:
Happened.
But:
Pain did not receive the final word.
Not:
There was no:

Sting.
But:
The sting was not eternal.
Christian faith looks toward the resurrection of Jesus and declares that death itself does not possess ultimate:
Authority.
Death remains an:
Enemy.
But its present reality is not its final:
Destiny.
Revelation itself is moving toward the death of:
Death.
The last enemy does not possess God's:
Future.
That means every lesser sting exists inside a story moving toward:
Life.
We read the tail from the:
Ending.
Not to minimize the:
Tail.
But to locate it:
Correctly.
The tail belongs to Chapter: 9
It does not belong to Chapter: 22
There are no scorpion tails in the New:
Jerusalem.

10. Do Not Put "The End" on the Wrong Page

There is our refrain:
Again.
Chapter 9 is not Chapter 22.
We need to keep remembering:
That.
Because suffering has a way of convincing us that the present chapter is the entire:
Book.
Pain narrows our:
Vision.
When something hurts badly enough, it becomes difficult to imagine anything beyond:
It.
The future collapses into the:
Present.
This is how things:

Are.
Therefore:
This is how things will always:
Be.
That is the logic of:
Despair.
Hope reopens the:
Future.
Hope says:
There is another:
Chapter.
Not because I can see:
It.
Not because I know when it:
Begins.
Not because I know exactly what it will:
Contain.
But because God has not finished the:
Story.
Sometimes hope is simply refusing to put:
“The End”
on the wrong:
Page.
The current page may be:
Terrible.
But it is still a:
Page.
Not the whole:
Book.
The five months function like a boundary around the:
Darkness.
You may go this:
Far.
Not:
Farther.
The creatures do not determine their own:
Schedule.
Their authority is:
Measured.
Their time is:
Measured.
Their reach is:
Measured.

But that still leaves difficult:
Questions.
Why this:
Pain?
Why this:
Long?
Why this:
Person?
Why this degree of:
Suffering?
And here faithful commentary must resist the temptation to provide easy answers to hard:
Questions.

11. “I Do Not Know Why” Does Not Mean “I Know Nothing”

Revelation does not answer every question raised by human:
Suffering.
We should not pretend that it:
Does.
Sometimes the most truthful answer is:
I do not know why.
That is not a failure of:
Faith.
It is an acknowledgment of our:
Limits.
But:
“I do not know why”
is not the same as:
“I know nothing.”
I may not know:
Why.
But I know:
Who.
I may not understand the:
Permission.
I may not understand the:
Timing.
I may not understand why a boundary stands where it:
Does.
But I know the character of the One who sits upon the:
Throne.
And once again we return to the:
Lamb.

Because the Lamb tells us what God is:
Like.
The God whose permission we cannot always understand is also the God who enters suffering:
Himself.
That does not solve every philosophical problem surrounding:
Suffering.
But it changes the:
Conversation.
Christianity does not give us a God watching human pain from a safe:
Distance.
It gives us:
Jesus.
Rejected.
Beaten.
Mocked.
Crucified.
Dead.
The Christian response to suffering begins not merely with an:
Explanation—
but with a God who bears:
Wounds.
God knows the:
Sting.
Not this particular symbolic scorpion:
Sting.
But human:
Pain.
Rejection.
Loss.
Grief.
Death.
The Cross means God is not a stranger to human:
Suffering.
That makes the throne:
Different.
The One who reigns is not indifferent to:
Pain.
The throne belongs to the God revealed in the:
Lamb.
Authority and compassion meet:
There.
Power and self-giving love meet:

There.
So when we say evil is:
Limited—
we are not talking about cold celestial:
Mathematics.
We are talking about limits established beneath the sovereignty of the God revealed in:
Christ.
And even then—
humility remains:
Necessary.
We cannot identify every invisible boundary around every painful circumstance.
We cannot tell the sufferer precisely why God permitted:
This.
We cannot confidently explain why something lasted this:
Long.
We know enough to:
Trust.
We do not know enough to:
Pretend.

12. The Tail and the Cross Point in Opposite Directions

The creatures possess power to:
Harm.
But earlier John told us that power was:
Given.
They possess power.
They do not possess ultimate:
Authority.
That distinction also raises a question for:
Us.
Whatever authority we possess—
however large or:
Small—
is temporary.
Influence.
Position.
Opportunity.
Responsibility.
Leadership.
All of it eventually:
Ends.
We are:

Stewards.
Not:
Sovereigns.
And borrowed power becomes dangerous when it forgets that it was:
Borrowed.
The Lamb shows us what authority is:
For.
Not:
Self-exaltation.
Service.
Not:
Exploitation.
Love.
Not:
Domination.
Faithful:
Stewardship.
Jesus possesses all authority—
and still washes:
Feet.
That overturns many human assumptions about:
Power.
The world's power often maintains itself by making others:
Bleed.
The Lamb's power is revealed through His willingness to:
Bleed.
The abyss wounds:
Others.
The Lamb bears wounds for:
Others.
There is the difference between the:
Kingdoms.
The tail and the Cross point in opposite:
Directions.
The tail says:
I will hurt you.
The Cross says:
I will give Myself for you.
The tail:
Takes.
The Cross:
Gives.
The tail:

Torments.
The Cross:
Redeems.
Which kingdom shapes:
Us?
When we possess the power to hurt—
what do we:
Do?
Do we:
Sting?
Or:
Serve?
Do we use another person's vulnerability for our:
Advantage?
Or do we protect the:
Vulnerable?
Christian character often becomes clearest when we possess the power to:
Retaliate.
Humiliate.
Control.
Exploit.
Punish.
And choose another:
Way.
Mercy does not mean ignoring:
Justice.
Forgiveness does not mean refusing healthy:
Boundaries.
Love does not mean permitting:
Abuse.
But Christian power should never delight in another person's:
Pain.
We follow the:
Lamb.

13. The Church Should Remove Stings, Not Add Them

That becomes especially important when reading passages of:
Judgment.
We should be careful that biblical judgment never makes us enthusiastic about human:
Suffering.
As though pain itself were something to:
Celebrate.
Chapter 9 is moving toward a great:

Tragedy.
After all of this—
people still do not:
Repent.
The chapter is not merely moving toward more:
Pain.
It is moving toward the tragedy of hearts remaining:
Unchanged.
Pain alone cannot transform the human:
Heart.
Suffering can:
Awaken.
Suffering can also:
Harden.
Pain can make someone seek:
God.
Pain can make someone rage against:
God.
The experience itself does not mechanically produce:
Faith.
Repentance requires:
Turning.
Reorientation.
A change of:
Allegiance.
And we must make another important pastoral:
Distinction.
Revelation 9 is a particular vision of:
Judgment.
It is not a universal formula for explaining every instance of human:
Suffering.
Someone becomes:
Ill.
That does not give us authority to declare:
God is punishing:
Them.
Someone loses a:
Job.
That does not give us authority to declare:
God is judging:
Them.
Someone experiences:
Tragedy.

That does not give us authority to say:
They must have:
Sinned.
Jesus repeatedly challenges simplistic equations between personal suffering and personal:
Guilt.
We must distinguish the:
Text—
from careless:
Application.
Otherwise we can wound people in God's:
Name.
Sometimes Christians add a second:
Sting.
The first sting is the:
Suffering.
The second is someone telling the sufferer:
God did this because you deserved it.
We should be very careful before speaking for God where God has not:
Spoken.
Compassion is safer than:
Speculation.
When someone suffers:
Love them.
Sit with:
Them.
Pray with:
Them.
Help:
Them.
Listen to:
Them.
Do not immediately turn their pain into a theological:
Diagnosis.
Job's friends should have taught us better than:
That.
The Church should help remove:
Stings.
Not add:
More.
We follow the:
Healer.
Jesus repeatedly moved toward people who were:

Hurting.
He touched.
He listened.
He welcomed.
He restored.
He healed.
And ultimately He carried humanity's deepest wound into:
Himself.
So we acknowledge the:
Tail.
We acknowledge its:
Sting.
We acknowledge its:
Pain.
But suffering does not become the center of Christian:
Faith.
Jesus does.

14. The Sting Has a Clock; the Lamb Has Forever

The sting is:
Temporary.
The Lamb is:
Eternal.
The torment is:
Measured.
The Kingdom is:
Everlasting.
The creatures have five:
Months.
God has:
Forever.
That is the proportion Revelation wants us to:
Recover.
When suffering becomes enormous, eternity becomes difficult to:
See.
Revelation stretches our:
Vision.
Not to make today's suffering:
Small.
But to make God's future:
Large again.
The horizon of pain says:
This is:
Everything.

The horizon of resurrection says:
There is:
More.
The horizon of despair says:
Nothing can:
Change.
The horizon of new creation says:
God is making all things:
New.
Faith lives somewhere between the:
Sting—
and the:
Promise.
The sting has:
Happened.
The complete healing has not:
Yet.
We live in the:
Between.
Christianity has a name for that space:
Hope.
Not:
Possession.
Not:
Completion.
Hope.
We wait for what God has:
Promised.
And waiting requires:
Endurance.
Sometimes:
Faith Must Endure.
Not because faith always receives immediate:
Deliverance.
Sometimes it:
Does.
Not because circumstances always quickly:
Improve.
Sometimes they:
Do.
But because sometimes faith must remain faithful while the clock is still:
Running.
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.
Verse 10 leaves room for all:
Three.
The five months will:
End.
But the people living inside those five months do not experience them from the:
Ending.
They experience them one day at a:
Time.
That is how endurance usually:
Works.
Not five months at:
Once.
Today.
Then tomorrow becomes:
Today.
Then the next:
Day.
And grace usually arrives the same:
Way.
Daily.
Enough for:
Today.
Then tomorrow's grace when tomorrow:
Comes.
We often want grace for the entire five months before the first day has:
Finished.
God often gives:
Daily bread.
So Verse 10 leaves us with both:
The tail.
And the:
Clock.
Do not ignore the:
Tail.
It can:

Sting.
Do not ignore the:
Clock.
It will:
Stop.
Hold both truths:
Together.
The pain is:
Real.
The pain is not:
Ultimate.
The creatures can:
Harm.
They cannot:
Reign.
The sting may occupy today's:
Page.
It cannot write the final:
Chapter.
And when suffering whispers:
Forever—
faith looks toward the throne and answers:
No.
Not:
Forever.
Because the abyss has a:
Key.
The creatures have:
Limits.
The torment has a:
Clock.
The people of God have a:
Seal.
And eternity belongs not to the creatures who:
Sting—
but to the Lamb who was slain and yet:
Stands.

Pastoral Reflection

There are seasons of life when the hardest question is not:
Why?
It is:
How long?
How long will this:

Hurt?
How long will this uncertainty:
Continue?
How long before something:
Changes?
How long before I can breathe:
Again?
Scripture does not shame us for asking:
That.
The Psalms ask:
How long?
The prophets ask:
How long?
The saints beneath the altar ask:
How long?
Faithful people have always lived somewhere between the promise and its:
Fulfillment.
Verse 10 does not tell us suffering is:
Easy.
It tells us suffering has a:
Boundary.
The creatures have a:
Sting.
But they also have a:
Clock.
Sometimes we can see the:
Clock.
Sometimes we:
Cannot.
And perhaps that is when faith becomes most:
Difficult.
We do not know when the season will:
End.
We do not know how the story will:
Turn.
And we should not pretend to know what God has not:
Revealed.
We only know that the present moment cannot become:
Eternity.
So perhaps the prayer for today is not:
Lord, give me strength for the rest of my life.
Perhaps it is simply:

Lord, give me enough grace for:
Today.
Tomorrow can receive tomorrow's:
Grace.
Today I need today's:
Bread.
Today's:
Strength.
Today's:
Mercy.
Today's:
Faith.
And if today contains a:
Sting—
then let grace meet me:
Here.
Because sometimes endurance does not look:
Heroic.
Sometimes endurance is simply getting through:
Today—
without surrendering the conviction that God still holds:
Tomorrow.

Something Worth Pondering

The scorpion has a:
Sting.
But the sting has a:
Clock.
That may be one of the quietest expressions of hope in this frightening:
Chapter.
Pain often says:
Forever.
Grief says:
Forever.
Fear says:
Forever.
Loneliness says:
Forever.
The present moment tries to become the entire:
Future.
But Revelation refuses to grant suffering:
Eternity.
Only God possesses:
That.

The sting may be:
Real.
The wound may be:
Deep.
The scar may:
Remain.
But suffering itself does not receive the final:
Word.
Perhaps faith sometimes consists of answering one word with:
Another.
Suffering says:
Forever.
Faith answers:
No.
Not because I know when this will:
End.
Not because I understand why it:
Began.
Not because today does not:
Hurt.
But because I know that pain is not:
God.
Death is not:
God.
The abyss is not:
God.
And none of them possesses:
Eternity.
The sting has a clock.
The Lamb has forever.

Ask Yourself This:

When pain whispers:
Forever—
have I begun allowing today's sting to write tomorrow's:
Story?
When someone else is suffering, am I helping remove a:
Sting—
or adding another through explanations God never authorized me to:
Give?
And when today's burden feels larger than I can:
Carry—

can I receive enough grace for:
Today,
and trust tomorrow to receive tomorrow's:
Grace?

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:11

“And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.”
— Revelation 9:11, KJV

John has described these creatures in extraordinary:
Detail.
Their appearance.
Their power.
Their limitations.
Their torment.
Their armor.
Their sound.
Their sting.
Now he tells us something about their:
Organization.
They have a:
King.
And their king is the angel of the:
Abyss.
Then John gives us his:
Name.
In Hebrew:
Abaddon.
In Greek:
Apollyon.
The precise nuance can be discussed.
But the central idea is unmistakable:
Destruction.
The:
Destroyer.
And suddenly the character of the kingdom becomes:
Clear.

1. The Locusts Have a King

Verse 11 confirms something the strange imagery has already led us to:
Suspect.
These are not ordinary:
Locusts.
Ordinary locusts do not have a king over them who is the angel of the:
Abyss.

These creatures belong to a realm associated with:
Darkness.
And they are not merely a random eruption of:
Chaos.
There is:
Structure.
Direction.
Leadership.
Organization.
A:
King.
That matters because evil does not always appear:
Chaotic.
Sometimes evil can become remarkably:
Organized.
Systems can become:
Corrupt.
Institutions can become:
Oppressive.
Organizations can become:
Exploitative.
Groups can coordinate toward destructive:
Ends.
Order itself is not evidence of:
Goodness.
Neither is:
Efficiency.
Success.
Scale.
Leadership.
Structure.
Human beings can become impressed by all of:
Those.
But the deeper question is not merely:
Is it organized?
The deeper question is:
What is it organized to do?
The creatures are:
Organized.
But they are organized around:
Torment.
Their structure does not redeem their:
Character.

Organization tells us they have a:
King.
Their fruit tells us what kind of kingdom he:
Rules.

2. The King Reveals the Kingdom

If we want to understand the character of a kingdom—
look at its:
King.
What does the ruler:
Value?
What does the ruler:
Produce?
Where does the ruler:
Lead?
What happens beneath that ruler's:
Authority?
John gives this king two names:
Abaddon.
Apollyon.
And the name itself becomes almost a theological:
Summary.
Destroyer.
Notice what he is not:
Called.
Healer.
Redeemer.
Savior.
Shepherd.
Prince of:
Peace.
His name points toward:
Destruction.
And the fruit matches the:
Name.
The creatures:
Torment.
Their tails:
Sting.
Their presence:
Threatens.
Their king is the:
Destroyer.
The kingdom resembles its:

King.
That should not surprise:
Us.
Every kingdom eventually reveals something about the ruler whose character shapes:
It.
And every ruler eventually produces something recognizable in those who learn that ruler's:
Ways.

3. Every Kingdom Produces a Family Resemblance

We have encountered this principle already in Chapter: 9
What we worship shapes what we:
Become.
What we admire shapes what we:
Imitate.
What we follow shapes where we:
Go.
Allegiance eventually becomes:
Character.
That is why worship is so central throughout:
Revelation.
The question is never merely:
What do you:
Believe?
It is also:
Whom do you:
Follow?
Because every kingdom produces a family:
Resemblance.
The subjects of the Destroyer participate in:
Destruction.
The people of the Lamb should increasingly resemble the:
Lamb.
If He is:
Merciful—
we become more:
Merciful.
If He is:
Faithful—
we become more:
Faithful.
If He speaks:
Truth—

we become people of:
Truth.
If He gives Himself in:
Love—
His people learn to:
Love.
Revelation is filled with competing:
Allegiances.
God.
Or:
Idols.
The Lamb.
Or:
The beast.
The Kingdom.
Or:
Babylon.
Faithful worship.
Or:
False worship.
And Verse 11 gives us another contrast:
The:
Destroyer.
And the:
Lamb.
One kingdom:
Harms.
The other:
Heals.
One kingdom:
Destroys.
The other:
Redeems.
One takes life.
The Other gives His life for:
Others.
The abyss:
Takes.
The Lamb:
Gives.
Two kings.
Two kingdoms.
Two radically different understandings of:

Power.
And Revelation asks us which one will shape:
Us.

4. Know Enough About the Destroyer to Resist Him

Interpreters have long asked:
Who exactly is Abaddon or:
Apollyon?
Is this:
Satan?
Some particular demonic:
Being?
Another angelic figure associated with the:
Abyss?
John does not give us enough information to construct a complete:
Biography.
And perhaps we should respect that:
Silence.
We do not need a complete organizational chart of the demonic:
Realm.
Scripture does not give us:
One.
And perhaps that is because Christians do not need one in order to remain:
Faithful.
The Church is called to know:
Christ.
Not become experts in:
Demons.
There can be an unhealthy fascination with:
Darkness.
Demons.
Prophecy.
Antichrist.
Conspiracies.
Signs.
Hidden meanings.
Until Jesus becomes almost a supporting character in His own:
Revelation.
Something has gone wrong when the beast receives more attention than the:
Lamb.
Or when the Destroyer becomes more interesting than the:
Redeemer.
Revelation begins:
The revelation of Jesus Christ.

That must remain our:
Center.
Know the enemy well enough to:
Resist.
Know the Lamb well enough to:
Follow.
Those priorities are not:
Equal.
The Christian life is not centered upon understanding:
Darkness.
It is centered upon knowing:
Jesus.
John gives us enough.
There is a king over these:
Creatures.
He is associated with the:
Abyss.
His name communicates:
Destruction.
That is enough to understand the theological character of what we are:
Seeing.

5. A King—but Not the King

John calls him:
A king.
But not:
The King.
That distinction is:
Enormous.
Revelation contains many lesser:
Kings.
Authorities.
Beasts.
Powers.
Empires.
But none possesses ultimate:
Sovereignty.
There is one throne around which the entire universe is ultimately:
Ordered.
The Destroyer has a:
Kingdom.
But not the:
Kingdom.
He has:

Subjects.
Authority.
Destructive:
Power.
But his kingdom exists inside boundaries established by:
Another.
Even his title contains a:
Boundary.
He is king of the:
Abyss.
Not King over:
Heaven.
Not King over:
Creation.
Not King over the:
Church.
Not King over:
History.
Not King over:
Eternity.
His title tells us both what authority he:
Has—
and what authority he does:
Not.
That is consistent with everything we have seen throughout this fifth:
Trumpet.
The key was:
Given.
Power was:
Given.
Instructions were:
Given.
Torment was:
Allowed.
Time was:
Limited.
And now we meet a king whose kingdom itself has:
Boundaries.
The Destroyer has a kingdom.
But not the:
Kingdom.

6. The Destroyer Is Not God's Equal

That must be stated:

Clearly.
Christian theology does not present the universe as an eternal struggle between two equal and opposite:
Gods.
A good God on one:
Side.
An evil god on the:
Other.
That is not the biblical:
Picture.
Evil is:
Rebellion.
Distortion.
Corruption.
Opposition.
But never an equal:
Creator.
The abyss is not another:
Heaven.
The Destroyer is not another:
God.
There is no cosmic:
Tie.
Revelation contains genuine:
Conflict.
Real:
Suffering.
Powerful:
Opposition.
But it never presents ultimate sovereignty as an unsettled:
Question.
The throne is never:
Vacant.
The Destroyer never sits upon God's:
Throne.
Not for a:
Moment.
Not while God tries to regain:
Control.
That never happens in:
Revelation.
Evil can oppose:
God.

It cannot become:
God.
Evil can destroy what God has:
Made.
It cannot become the:
Creator.
Evil can produce:
Death.
It cannot become the source of:
Life.
The difference is not merely one of:
Degree.
It is the difference between:
Creature.
And:
Creator.

7. The Throne Was Occupied Before the Abyss Opened

Once again, the order of Revelation:
Matters.
Chapter:
4—
before Chapter: 9
The throne before the:
Locusts.
Worship before the:
Woe.
The Lamb before the:
Destroyer.
Revelation gives us the center before showing us the:
Chaos.
That is pastoral:
Wisdom.
If John had begun with the abyss, we might wonder whether anyone was truly in:
Control.
Instead he takes us into:
Heaven.
Look.
There is a:
Throne.
Someone is sitting upon:
It.
Then the seals:

Open.
The horsemen:
Ride.
The martyrs:
Cry.
The trumpets:
Sound.
The abyss:
Opens.
The smoke:
Rises.
The locusts:
Come.
The Destroyer receives a:
Name.
But none of those things moves the:
Throne.
The throne was occupied before the abyss:
Opened.
So when Chapter 9 becomes:
Dark—
remember Chapter: 4
Before seeing what rises from:
Below—
remember who reigns:
Above.
The abyss has a:
King.
Heaven has the:
King.
The difference between those statements is:
Everything.

8. We Cannot Serve the Lamb Using the Destroyer's Methods

The character of the king shapes the mission of the:
People.
The subjects of the Destroyer participate in:
Torment.
The people of the Lamb are called toward:
Witness.
Faithfulness.
Worship.
Endurance.

If our King is the:
Lamb—
our mission cannot become:
Destruction.
Our methods cannot become:
Cruelty.
Our identity cannot be built upon:
Hatred.
We cannot serve the Lamb using the Destroyer's:
Methods.
That may be one of the most challenging truths Revelation gives the:
Church.
A Christian cause pursued through unchristian character becomes a:
Contradiction.
Truth pursued through:
Deception.
Holiness pursued through:
Cruelty.
Faithfulness pursued through:
Hatred.
Witness pursued through:
Coercion.
Something has gone:
Wrong.
That does not mean Christians never:
Fail.
We:
Do.
Churches:
Fail.
Believers:
Sin.
Grace remains:
Necessary.
But over time our methods reveal whose vision of power has captured our:
Imagination.
The Destroyer says power exists to overcome:
Others.
The Lamb reveals power by giving Himself for:
Others.
The Destroyer:
Takes.
The Lamb:

Gives.
The Destroyer:
Wounds.
The Lamb bears:
Wounds.
That is why the Cross is so:
Revolutionary.
At the Cross, the world sees:
Weakness.
Heaven reveals:
Victory.
The powers destroy:
Jesus.
And through that very act Christ accomplishes:
Redemption.
Destruction does not understand that kind of:
Power.

9. The Destroyer Cannot Create

The Destroyer knows how to:
Destroy.
He does not know how to:
Create.
That distinction is:
Profound.
Evil can corrupt what already:
Exists.
It can:
Damage.
Twist.
Break.
Pollute.
Kill.
But creation belongs to:
God.
Destruction is remarkably:
Easy.
Anyone who has ever built something knows:
That.
Years to:
Build.
Minutes to:
Destroy.
A relationship can take decades to:

Develop.
One betrayal can tear it:
Apart.
Trust takes time to:
Build.
A lie can destroy it:
Quickly.
The Destroyer specializes in what destruction always:
Does.
Break.
Divide.
Accuse.
Harm.
Destroy.
God does something destruction cannot:
Do.
Create.
Redeem.
Restore.
Reconcile.
Make:
New.
That difference becomes increasingly important as Revelation moves toward its:
Conclusion.
Because Revelation does not end with:
Destruction.
It ends with:
New creation.
God does not merely defeat what is:
Evil.
He makes all things:
New.
That is a much greater:
Victory.

10. Destruction Has No Resurrection

The Destroyer cannot produce New:
Jerusalem.
He cannot create the river of:
Life.
He cannot grow the tree of:
Life.
He cannot wipe away:

Tears.
He cannot raise the:
Dead.
Destruction has no:
Resurrection.
That belongs to:
God.
The Destroyer's power therefore contains a fundamental:
Limitation.
He can damage:
Life.
He cannot become the source of:
Life.
He can kill.
He cannot:
Raise.
He can break.
He cannot make:
New.
The Lamb possesses what the Destroyer never:
Can.
Creative:
Power.
Redemptive:
Power.
Resurrection:
Power.
The ability not merely to defeat death—
but to bring life from:
Death.
That is why Christian hope is greater than:
Survival.
We are not merely hoping to escape the:
Destroyer.
We are hoping for:
Resurrection.
Restoration.
New creation.
Communion with:
God.
Escape would be smaller than the:
Gospel.
God's purpose is not simply:

Get My people away from:
Evil.
It is:
Make all things new.
The Destroyer has no answer to:
That.
He can destroy what:
Is.
God can call forth what does not yet:
Exist.
That is the difference between:
Creature.
And:
Creator.
Evil itself is:
Parasitic.
It needs something good to:
Corrupt.
A lie requires truth to:
Distort.
Hatred requires relationship to:
Break.
Injustice requires something good and just to:
Violate.
Destruction requires something already created to:
Destroy.
Evil cannot become:
Ultimate.
It is dependent even in its:
Rebellion.
And it cannot produce:
Resurrection.

11. The Destroyer Arrives Late—and Leaves Before the Story Ends

Genesis does not begin in the:
Abyss.
It begins:
With God.
Before rebellion:
God.
Before destruction:
Creation.
Before death:

Life.
The Destroyer arrives late in the:
Story.
And he leaves before the story:
Ends.
That is Christian:
Hope.
The Destroyer is not present in Revelation's final:
Picture.
The river:
Is.
The tree:
Is.
The city:
Is.
The servants of God:
Are.
God:
Is.
The Lamb:
Is.
Destruction has an expiration:
Date.
Five months in this particular:
Vision.
But ultimately something much:
Larger.
Destruction itself does not belong to God's eternal:
Future.
The Destroyer is:
Temporary.
The Redeemer is:
Eternal.
The darkness may occupy several:
Chapters.
It does not own the:
Book.
Never let the middle pretend to be the:
Ending.
The Destroyer appears in the:
Middle.
The Lamb remains at the:
End.

That is how Christians learn to read:
History.
Not pretending history is:
Easy.
Not pretending evil is:
Weak.
Not pretending suffering is:
Small.
But refusing to believe destruction is where history is ultimately:
Going.
History is moving toward:
New creation.
Not endless:
War.
Not endless:
Death.
Not endless:
Empires.
Not endless:
Graves.
New creation.
And if that is God's future—
it should begin shaping how God's people live:
Now.

12. Practice the Future Now

If destruction is:
Temporary—
do not build your life around:
Destruction.
If hatred is:
Temporary—
do not give your heart to:
Hatred.
If violence is:
Temporary—
do not make violence your:
Identity.
If the Lamb is:
Eternal—
learn the Lamb's:
Way.
Practice the future:
Now.

That is one way to understand Christian:
Discipleship.
If God's future is:
Reconciliation—
practice:
Reconciliation.
If God's future is:
Justice—
practice:
Justice.
If God's future is:
Truth—
speak:
Truth.
If God's future is:
Love—
Love.
The Church should become a preview of the coming:
Kingdom.
Imperfectly.
Certainly.
But:
Genuinely.
A community where God's future becomes visible in the:
Present.
Mercy.
Forgiveness.
Truth.
Justice.
Hospitality.
Love.
The Church should not become a preview of the:
Abyss.
Our King is not:
Abaddon.
Our King is not:
Apollyon.
Our King is the:
Lamb.
Therefore destruction cannot become our spiritual:
Personality.
Christians should not become people primarily known for what we:
Hate.

What we:
Condemn.
What we want to:
Destroy.
What we:
Oppose.
We are people of:
Good news.
That does not mean avoiding hard:
Truth.
Jesus spoke hard:
Truth.
The prophets spoke hard:
Truth.
Revelation certainly speaks hard:
Truth.
But the Gospel remains an invitation out of:
Destruction.
Repent.
Why?
Because there is:
Life.
Turn around.
Why?
Because the road you are walking leads toward:
Death.
Come home.
Why?
Because the Father still opens the:
Door.
The kingdom of the Destroyer eventually produces what his name:
Promises.
Destruction.
The Kingdom of the Lamb leads through death into:
Life.
Every road goes:
Somewhere.
Whom we follow:
Matters.

13. The Destroyer Does Not Get to Disciple Us

Revelation must eventually become a:
Mirror.
Not merely a window through which we identify the darkness in:

Others.
It asks:
What about:
You?
Whose kingdom is shaping:
You?
Whose methods are becoming:
Yours?
Whose character is appearing in your:
Life?
We may never command an army.
We may never control an:
Empire.
But we can carry tiny versions of the Destroyer's methods:
Gossip.
Cruel words.
Vindictiveness.
Humiliation.
Character assassination.
The pleasure of watching someone we dislike:
Fail.
Destruction can become:
Entertaining.
Someone else's humiliation can become:
Spectacle.
Someone else's failure can become something we:
Enjoy.
And Revelation asks us to remember whose name is associated with:
Destruction.
The Lamb does not delight in:
Ruin.
He calls sinners to:
Repentance.
He seeks the:
Lost.
He restores the:
Broken.
He forgives.
He heals.
He makes:
New.
That should shape our response even toward those we:
Oppose.

We may resist what someone:
Does.
We may confront:
Wrong.
We may insist upon:
Justice.
But Christians should never need another person's destruction in order to feel:
Whole.
Where repentance and redemption remain possible—
we hope for:
Repentance.
Restoration.
Transformation.
And where judgment finally belongs—
it belongs to:
God.
That frees us from needing to become:
Judge.
Jury.
Executioner.
We can pursue justice without surrendering our souls to:
Vengeance.
The Destroyer does not get to:
Disciple us.
Not through:
Fear.
Not through:
Anger.
Not through:
Resentment.
Not through:
Suffering.
Not through:
Opposition.
The:
Lamb
disciples us.
Even in the:
Darkness.
Especially in the:
Darkness.
When the abyss opens—

follow the:
Lamb.
When the swarm appears—
follow the:
Lamb.
When the sting hurts—
follow the:
Lamb.
Endurance means remaining under the right:
King.
Not merely lasting through:
Trouble.
Remaining faithful in:
Allegiance.
The world around us may:
Change.
Our King does:
Not.

14. The Destroyer Has a Kingdom—but Not the Kingdom

The Destroyer may have a:
Season.
The Lamb has:
Forever.
The sting has a:
Clock.
The Destroyer has a:
Season.
The Lamb has:
Forever.
That is why Christians can:
Endure.
Not because evil is:
Imaginary.
Not because suffering is:
Easy.
Not because every problem is quickly:
Solved.
But because no temporary ruler can overturn the eternal reign of:
God.
The king of the abyss is still only:
King of the abyss.
Read that:

Again.
His title sounds:
Impressive.
Until we notice the:
Boundary.
King.
Of the:
Abyss.
Not King of:
Kings.
Not Lord of:
Lords.
Not Alpha and:
Omega.
The Destroyer has a:
Title.
Christ has:
Authority.
The Destroyer has a:
Realm.
Christ possesses the:
Kingdom.
The Destroyer has:
Subjects.
Christ has a redeemed:
People.
Never confuse a lesser throne with:
The Throne.
History produces many:
Kings.
Culture produces many:
Powers.
Empires construct many:
Thrones.
But Revelation keeps pointing:
Upward.
There is a:
Throne.
And Someone is sitting upon:
It.
The Destroyer cannot occupy that:
Throne.
Not through:

Fear.
Not through:
War.
Not through:
Torment.
Not through:
Death.
Nothing emerging from the abyss can climb high enough to make God cease being:
God.
Therefore the Church does not need to:
Panic.
It needs to remain:
Faithful.
Those are very different:
Responses.
Panic asks:
How do we save:
Everything?
Faithfulness asks:
What does obedience require of us:
Today?
Panic assumes everything ultimately depends upon:
Us.
Faithfulness remembers the:
Throne.
Our calling is not to defeat every darkness by:
Ourselves.
Our calling is to follow:
Christ.
Speak:
Truth.
Love.
Serve.
Resist:
Evil.
Practice:
Mercy.
Seek:
Justice.
Bear:
Witness.
Endure.

God remains responsible for being:
God.
And so John gives the Destroyer a:
Name.
Abaddon.
Apollyon.
The:
Destroyer.
It is a frightening:
Name.
But it is not the greatest name in the:
Book.
There is another:
Name.
Jesus.
The:
Lamb.
The Faithful:
Witness.
The Firstborn of the:
Dead.
The Ruler of the Kings of the:
Earth.
The One who was dead and came to:
Life.
So let the Destroyer have his:
Name.
Let the abyss have its:
King.
Let the darkness have its:
Season.
But never confuse the king of the abyss with the King of:
Kings.
The Destroyer has a:
Kingdom.
But not the:
Kingdom.
He can:
Destroy.
He cannot:
Create.
He can:
Wound.

He cannot:
Redeem.
He can participate in:
Death.
He cannot produce:
Resurrection.
And when everything the Destroyer has broken has finally passed:
Away—
the Lamb will still:
Stand.

Pastoral Reflection

Some people are extraordinarily good at:
Destroying.
A sentence can destroy:
Confidence.
A betrayal can destroy:
Trust.
A lie can destroy a:
Reputation.
Anger can destroy a:
Relationship.
Hatred can destroy a:
Community.
And sometimes destruction happens much faster than anything can be:
Built.
That is one reason destruction can feel so:
Powerful.
But destruction is actually a very limited kind of:
Power.
Breaking something does not mean you know how to:
Build it.
Tearing something down does not mean you know how to:
Restore it.
Wounding someone does not mean you know how to:
Heal them.
And death certainly does not know how to create:
Life.
That belongs to:
God.
Perhaps there is something here we desperately need to:
Remember.
When we have been hurt, we may discover that we possess the power to hurt:
Back.

We know the:
Words.
We know the:
Weakness.
We know exactly where the other person is:
Vulnerable.
And for a moment—
destruction can feel like:
Justice.
But before we use that power, perhaps we should ask:
Whose kingdom does this resemble?
Our King is not the:
Destroyer.
Our King is the:
Lamb.
The One who possessed all authority chose the way of self-giving:
Love.
The One who endured the violence of others refused to allow their violence to determine who He:
Was.
That does not make justice:
Unnecessary.
It tells us what kind of people we must remain while seeking:
It.
There are things that must be:
Confronted.
There are boundaries that must be:
Established.
There are wrongs that should be:
Named.
There are times when love requires us to say:
No.
But the Destroyer does not get to teach us how to:
Respond.
Not even when we have been:
Wounded.
Perhaps the prayer of endurance is:
Lord, when I have been wounded, do not let the Destroyer teach me how to respond.
Teach me the way of the:
Lamb.
Because surviving what hurt me is not:
Enough.

I want to come through it still belonging to:
You.

Something Worth Pondering

The creatures from the abyss have a:
King.
And his name means:
Destroyer.
That tells us almost everything we need to know about his:
Kingdom.
But Revelation has already introduced another:
King.
The:
Lamb.
And the Lamb's Kingdom moves in the opposite:
Direction.
The Destroyer:
Breaks.
The Lamb:
Restores.
The Destroyer:
Wounds.
The Lamb:
Heals.
The Destroyer:
Takes.
The Lamb:
Gives.
The Destroyer leads toward:
Death.
The Lamb leads through death into:
Life.
Perhaps one of the most important questions we can ask about any influence in our lives is:
What is this making me become?
More:
Destructive?
Or more:
Redemptive?
More eager to:
Wound?
Or more willing to:
Heal?
More interested in:

Winning?
Or more interested in remaining:
Faithful?
Because every kingdom eventually produces a family:
Resemblance.
The Destroyer has a:
Kingdom.
But not the:
Kingdom.
And the people of the Lamb should increasingly look like their:
King.

Ask Yourself This:

When I have the power to wound someone who wounded: Me—
whose kingdom will my response: Resemble?
Am I allowing fear, anger, resentment, or fascination with darkness to:
Disciple me—
or am I learning the way of the: **Lamb?**
And when the Destroyer appears frighteningly powerful, can I remember the boundary contained even within his: Title?
He is king of the: **Abyss.**
But Jesus Christ is King of: **Kings.**
The Destroyer has a: Kingdom.
But not the: **Kingdom.**

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:12

“One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.”
— Revelation 9:12, KJV

After everything we have just:
Seen—
the abyss.
The smoke.
The locusts.
The torment.
The despair.
The strange creatures.
The Destroyer.
John gives us four remarkably important:
Words.
The first woe has:
Passed.
It is:
Over.
But John does not allow us to remain there for:
Long.
There are still two woes to:
Come.
One woe:
Behind.
Two woes:
Ahead.
And grace in the:
Middle.

1. The First Woe Has Passed

That word matters:
Passed.
Not:
Paused.
Not:
Hidden.
Not temporarily:
Delayed.
Passed.
Something terrible has reached its:
Boundary.

That should not surprise us.
John has been telling us throughout the fifth:
Trumpet.
Five:
Months.
A measured:
Season.
A defined:
Limit.
Now the narrative confirms what the limitation had already:
Promised.
The woe:
Passed.
The clock eventually reached its:
Boundary.
The season did not continue:
Forever.
The woe looked:
Terrifying.
It felt:
Overwhelming.
It came from the:
Abyss.
It was ruled by the:
Destroyer.
But it still:
Passed.
The Destroyer could not make it:
Permanent.
He had a:
Kingdom.
But not the:
Kingdom.
And one evidence of that limitation appears immediately in Verse: 12
His woe:
Ends.
The Destroyer has a:
Season.
The Lamb has:
Forever.

2. Given. Told. Allowed. Limited. Passed.

Throughout this fifth trumpet, Revelation has repeatedly placed boundaries around:

Darkness.
The key was:
Given.
Power was:
Given.
The creatures were:
Told.
They were:
Allowed.
Their torment was:
Limited.
And now the woe has:
Passed.
Perhaps we should add that last word to our growing:
Refrain.
Given.
Told.
Allowed.
Limited.
Passed.
That is the biography of the first:
Woe.
The descriptions have been:
Terrifying.
But the grammar keeps:
Restraining them.
What looked uncontrolled from earth remained bounded from:
Heaven.
And now the boundary becomes:
Visible.
While the suffering was occurring, those inside it may not have been able to see the:
Ending.
But eventually:
It came.
That distinction matters.
An ending can be real before we can:
See it.
When we are inside a difficult:
Season—
we rarely know where the final page:
Is.
We do not know when circumstances will:

Change.
We do not know when relief will:
Come.
We do not know when we will finally be able to say:
That has passed.
But we must be careful with that:
Truth.
It should never become a careless response to someone who is:
Suffering.
Do not tell a grieving person:
It will pass.
as though grief were merely something to:
Wait out.
Do not tell someone in pain:
This is temporary.
as though temporary pain does not:
Matter.
Temporary does not mean:
Insignificant.
A storm can last ten:
Minutes—
and destroy a:
House.
A sentence can take five:
Seconds—
and change a relationship:
Forever.
A painful season may:
Pass—
while leaving scars that remain for:
Years.
The first woe passed.
That does not mean nobody remembered:
It.
Pain leaves:
Memory.
Sometimes:
Scars.
Sometimes:
Questions.
Sometimes:
Wisdom.
Sometimes deeper:

Faith.
Biblical hope is not:
Amnesia.
God's redemption does not require us to pretend nothing:
Happened.

3. “It Passed” Can Become Sacred Language

There are things we once thought would:
Destroy us.
Things we could not imagine living:
Beyond.
Things that filled so much of our world that we could not see anything on the other:
Side.
And eventually—
sometimes slowly—
we found ourselves standing somewhere we once could not imagine:
Standing.
And we could say:
It passed.
Not:
It did not:
Matter.
Not:
It did not:
Hurt.
Not:
I would choose it:
Again.
Simply:
It passed.
There can be something almost sacred about those:
Words.
Because they do not deny the:
Pain.
They testify that the pain did not become:
Eternal.
We do not have to romanticize:
Suffering.
We do not have to pretend the darkness was secretly:
Pleasant.
We can simply testify:
God carried me through something I could not see beyond while I was inside it.

That may be:
Enough.
The wound may become a:
Scar.
And sometimes the scar becomes a:
Testimony.
Not because the wound was:
Good.
But because the wound did not receive the final:
Word.

4. Explanation and Testimony Are Not the Same

There is an important difference between:
Explanation.
And:
Testimony.
Explanation says:
Here is why this happened.
Sometimes we do not know:
That.
Sometimes we may never know:
That.
And we should be careful about inventing explanations God has not:
Given.
Testimony says:
Here is what I discovered while walking through it.
That we may:
Know.
Perhaps we discovered:
Grace.
Perhaps:
Strength.
Perhaps:
Community.
Perhaps:
Patience.
Perhaps we discovered how much we needed:
Others.
Perhaps we discovered that God remained present even when He seemed:
Silent.
Sometimes we discover what we believe only when belief becomes:
Necessary.
It is easy to say:
God is faithful

when life is:
Easy.
Those same words sound different when spoken through:
Tears.
Not more:
True.
But more:
Tested.
That is one of the ways endurance turns theology into:
Testimony.
Before the trial:
I believe God is:
Faithful.
After the trial:
I have learned something about God's faithfulness that I could not have learned in quite the same:
Way.
That does not make the suffering:
Good.
It means grace was present inside:
It.
And that distinction matters.
We do not need to say:
God caused this so I would learn:
Something.
We can say:
I do not understand why this:
Happened.
But grace met me:
There.
That is not an explanation of the:
Wound.
It is testimony to the presence of:
God.

5. One Woe Has Passed—Two More Are Coming

And just when we are ready to celebrate—
John continues:
There are still two woes to come.
Well.
That changes the:
Mood.
The first woe has:
Passed.

Two remain.
There is the tension of the:
Verse.
It looks:
Backward.
The first woe has:
Passed.
Then immediately:
Forward.
Two are still:
Coming.
Past:
Deliverance.
Future:
Trouble.
Both are:
True.
That makes Verse 12 remarkably realistic about:
Life.
Sometimes we imagine faith should produce a steadily improving:
Journey.
One problem:
Solved.
Then another.
Then another.
Until eventually everything becomes:
Easy.
Life rarely works that:
Way.
One woe can end while another is still:
Ahead.
That does not mean God failed:
Us.
It means we are still living in a world awaiting final:
Restoration.
Deliverance from one difficulty does not guarantee immunity from the:
Next.
The first woe:
Passed.
Two more:
Come.
And God remains:
God.

6. God's Faithfulness Is Not Measured by the Absence of Trouble

This is important for Christian:
Expectations.
If we believe faithfulness guarantees an increasingly trouble-free:
Life—
the next difficulty may feel like spiritual:
Failure.
What did I do:
Wrong?
Why is this happening:
Again?
Did God stop:
Caring?
Revelation gives us a more mature:
Hope.
God's faithfulness is not measured by the absence of:
Trouble.
If trouble proved God had abandoned His:
People—
then the apostles were:
Abandoned.
The martyrs were:
Abandoned.
The early Church was:
Abandoned.
And Jesus Himself would become impossible to:
Understand.
Faithfulness and suffering can occupy the same:
Life.
Revelation assumes:
That.
The saints endure precisely because there is something to:
Endure.
Christian faith does not say:
The darkness is actually:
Light.
Never.
Pain is:
Pain.
Death is an:
Enemy.
Injustice is:

Wrong.
Suffering can be:
Terrible.
Christian faith does not rename darkness:
Light.
Faith says something:
Different.
The darkness is:
Dark.
And God is still:
God.
The woe is:
Terrible.
And Christ is still:
Lord.
I am:
Hurting.
And I still belong to:
Him.
That is:
Endurance.
Not:
Denial.
Not:
Pretending.
Not spiritual:
Performance.
Endurance.

7. Endurance Is Needed on the Road Toward Paradise

Endurance is not needed in:
Paradise.
It is needed on the road toward:
It.
That distinction belongs at the heart of this:
Book.
The Church is not yet standing in Revelation: 22
It is traveling:
There.
And the road goes through Chapter: 9
We would prefer to move directly from the throne room to the New:
Jerusalem.
John does not let us.
There are:

Seals.
Trumpets.
Woes.
Beasts.
Babylon.
Conflict.
Revelation does not promise an easy:
Road.
It promises a faithful:
Christ.
That is much:
Better.
An easy road can:
Disappear.
A faithful Savior:
Does not.
Sometimes we confuse God's faithfulness with comfortable:
Circumstances.
When things go:
Well—
God is:
Good.
When things go:
Badly—
where is:
God?
Scripture teaches something:
Deeper.
God's character does not change when our circumstances:
Do.
The first woe:
Passed.
Two more:
Come.
The road changes.
The Savior:
Does not.

8. Memory Does Not Predict Circumstances; It Remembers Character

Verse 12 teaches us how to look:
Back.
The first woe has:
Passed.

There are moments when Christians should stop and:
Remember.
I made it through:
That.
God carried me through:
That.
The thing I once thought would never end finally:
Ended.
Memory matters because more difficulty may still lie:
Ahead.
If two more woes are coming—
what do we carry with:
Us?
Memory.
I have been afraid:
Before.
I have been uncertain:
Before.
I have wondered how I would make it:
Before.
And grace met me:
There.
Past grace becomes evidence for future:
Trust.
Not proof that nothing painful will:
Happen.
Verse 12 explicitly prevents that:
Conclusion.
But evidence that whatever happens—
God will still be:
God.
Remembering grace does not predict:
Circumstances.
It remembers:
Character.
That is a crucial:
Difference.
I cannot say:
God delivered me this way last time, therefore He must do exactly the same thing:
Again.
But I can say:
The God who was faithful then remains faithful now.

Methods may:
Change.
Character does:
Not.
Sometimes God changes the:
Circumstances.
Sometimes God gives strength within the:
Circumstances.
Sometimes God carries us all the way:
Home.
But He remains:
Faithful.
Our earlier refrain belongs:
Here.
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.
Verse 12 reminds us that endurance may be required more than:
Once.

9. Grace Is Not Spiritual Training Wheels

We do not graduate from needing:
Grace.
We may wish we:
Did.
We may imagine spiritual maturity as reaching some level where life can no longer:
Shake us.
Scripture describes no such:
Level.
Paul needed:
Grace.
Peter needed:
Grace.
John needed:
Grace.
The churches receiving Revelation needed:
Grace.
And so do:
We.
Grace is not spiritual training:

Wheels.
It is the atmosphere of Christian:
Life.
We begin by:
Grace.
We continue by:
Grace.
We endure by:
Grace.
We arrive home by:
Grace.
The passing of one woe does not make the saints self:
Sufficient.
It should make them:
Grateful.
There is a difference.
Self-sufficiency says:
I survived that. I can handle anything.
Gratitude says:
God carried me through that. I will trust Him again.
One produces:
Pride.
The other:
Faith.
Pride says:
Bring them:
On.
Faith says:
Lord, remain with me.
Revelation does not produce:
Swagger.
It produces:
Endurance.
Christian courage is not:
Arrogance.
It does not say:
Nothing can hurt:
Me.
The saints can be:
Wounded.
They can be:
Killed.
Revelation never hides:

That.
Christian security is deeper than circumstantial:
Safety.
Our hope is not:
Nothing painful can happen.
Our hope is that even suffering and death cannot make Christ cease being:
Lord.
The first woe has:
Passed.
But the story has:
Not.
And the saints still need:
Grace.

10. Revelation Does Not Shame Tired Saints

Sometimes Christians want every deliverance to mean the battle is:
Finished.
We pray through a:
Crisis.
It resolves.
And we think:
Finally.
Then another problem:
Appears.
And somewhere inside we say:
I thought we were done.
Surely we have been through:
Enough.
Surely that was the last:
Thing.
Surely life will settle down:
Now.
Then:
Another:
Trumpet.
Revelation does not mock that:
Weariness.
God understands tired:
Saints.
There are times when the announcement:
Two more woes are coming
would not inspire:
Us.
It would make us say:

Two more?
Scripture makes room for that:
Response.
The Bible contains:
Lament.
Complaint.
Questions.
Tears.
How long?
Those voices belong inside:
Faith.
Lament is not necessarily:
Unbelief.
Sometimes lament is faith refusing to stop talking to:
God.
The person crying:
How long, O Lord?
is still saying:
O Lord.
The relationship remains:
Intact.
Indifference walks:
Away.
Lament remains:
Engaged.
Why?
How long?
Where are:
You?
Those questions may be uncomfortable.
But they are still addressed to:
God.
Tired faith is still:
Faith.
Someone may need to hear:
That.
You do not have to feel:
Strong.
You do not have to feel:
Brave.
You do not have to greet the next difficulty with spiritual:
Enthusiasm.
You simply need to keep turning toward:

Christ.
Sometimes endurance sounds like a:
Whisper.
Not:
I can conquer anything!
But:
Jesus, help me.
That may be:
Enough.

11. Endurance Is a Community Project

The Church must make room for tired:
Saints.
Not shame:
Them.
Not tell them:
You should have more:
Faith.
Not compare their suffering with someone else's:
Suffering.
Not demand cheerful spiritual:
Performance.
Walk beside:
Them.
There are seasons when one person's faith feels:
Strong.
There are seasons when another person's faith barely:
Flickers.
That is one reason God gives us:
Community.
Sometimes I carry:
You.
Sometimes you carry:
Me.
No one should have to endure every woe:
Alone.
Remember who first received:
Revelation.
Churches.
Communities.
Not isolated spiritual:
Consumers.
They heard Revelation:
Together.

They heard:
The first woe has passed
together.
And they heard:
Two more are coming
together.
There is something deeply pastoral in:
That.
Whatever comes next—
we face it as the people of:
God.
Western Christianity can become highly:
Individualistic.
My:
Faith.
My relationship with:
God.
My spiritual:
Life.
Those things matter.
But Revelation repeatedly speaks to:
Churches.
Endurance is a community:
Project.
Encourage one:
Another.
Pray for one:
Another.
Carry one another's:
Burdens.
Remind one another of:
Truth.
Sing when someone else cannot:
Sing.
That is:
Church.

12. Sometimes Someone Else Remembers the Throne for Us

This may be one of the most beautiful gifts of Christian:
Community.
When my world becomes too dark to see:
Clearly—
you remind:

Me.
The throne is still:
There.
When you cannot see:
It—
I remind:
You.
Not because another person's faith replaces:
Ours.
But because another believer can hold hope beside us while our own hands are:
Trembling.
Sometimes someone else remembers the:
Throne—
for:
Us.
Sometimes someone else remembers the:
Promise.
Sometimes someone else says:
Keep going.
One more:
Day.
God is still:
Here.
Perhaps someone endured those five months only because someone beside them kept:
Remembering.
And then one day the words that had been believed by faith became visible in:
Experience.
It:
Passed.
The season:
Ended.
There are moments when we should mark those:
Places.
Israel built:
Memorials.
The Church celebrates:
Communion.
Human beings need ways of:
Remembering.
God was faithful:

Here.
That:
Year.
That:
Loss.
That:
Crisis.
That:
Season.
That impossible:
Moment.
God carried me:
Through.
Those memories become stones beside the:
Road.
When another difficult road appears, we look back and:
Remember.
I have walked through darkness:
Before.
And darkness did not become:
God.

13. What We Carry From One Woe Into the Next

The first woe is:
Behind.
Two remain:
Ahead.
What do we carry from the first into the:
Next?
Not merely:
Scars.
We carry:
Wisdom.
Memory.
Experience.
Faith.
Grace.
Nothing we endure with God is entirely:
Wasted.
But we need to state that:
Carefully.
That does **not** mean God caused every painful thing for the purpose of teaching us a:
Lesson.

We should be very cautious about saying:
That.
Redemption is different from:
Explanation.
We may never understand why something:
Happened.
But God can still bring:
Compassion.
Wisdom.
Maturity.
Service.
Deeper:
Dependence.
from what we have:
Endured.
God can bring life from places where we expected only:
Death.
That is resurrection:
Language.
The Cross appeared to be an:
Ending.
God made it a:
Beginning.
So we do not waste our:
Wounds.
We do not worship:
Them.
We do not build our entire identity around:
Them.
But suffering surrendered to grace may make us more:
Compassionate.
Not:
Automatically.
Suffering can also make us:
Bitter.
Pain does not mechanically make people:
Better.
But suffering surrendered to grace can produce remarkable:
Tenderness.
Someone who has survived a woe can sit beside someone still inside one and:
Say—
I will not pretend I know exactly what you are:
Feeling.

But I will stay:
Here.
Sometimes the greatest testimony is:
Presence.
Not:
Advice.
Not:
Answers.
Presence.
I am here.
You are not alone.
We will walk this together.
That is how the Church:
Endures.
Not merely through heroic:
Individuals.
Through a:
Body.
One member:
Hurting.
Another:
Helping.
One member:
Weak.
Another:
Supporting.
One member:
Grieving.
Another sitting quietly:
Beside them.
And eventually the roles:
Change.
The strong become:
Weak.
The comforter needs:
Comfort.
The teacher needs:
Encouragement.
The pastor needs someone to sit beside:
Him.
We all need:
Grace.
So Verse 12 keeps us:

Humble.
One woe:
Passed.
Two:
Remain.
Do not become:
Arrogant.
Do not become:
Despairing.
Remain:
Dependent.
Gratitude without:
Presumption.
Thank You, Lord, for bringing me through that.
And:
Lord, I still need You for whatever comes next.
Both prayers belong:
Together.

14. Between What Has Passed and What Has Not Yet Come

Yesterday's grace becomes today's:
Memory.
Today's grace becomes tomorrow's:
Memory.
And over time a life of faith becomes a long collection of:
Remembrances.
God was faithful:
There.
And:
There.
And:
There.
Eventually we begin to recognize a:
Pattern.
Not that life always becomes:
Easy.
But that God continues to meet:
Us.
Different valleys.
Same:
Shepherd.

Different storms.
Same:
Christ.
Different woes.
Same:
Throne.
That is how endurance:
Deepens.
We accumulate memories of:
Grace.
And when the next trumpet sounds—
we do not begin from:
Nothing.
We carry everything God has already taught us about:
Himself.
The first woe becomes part of our preparation for what comes:
Next.
Not because suffering is merely a spiritual training:
Exercise.
But because what we have learned about God travels with:
Us.
We cannot unknow His:
Faithfulness.
The road ahead may still be:
Difficult.
John does not hide:
That.
Two woes:
Remain.
But the people traveling that road are no longer exactly the people who entered the:
First.
They have endured:
Something.
They have learned:
Something.
They have seen a boundary:
Reached.
They know a woe can:
Pass.
That knowledge:
Matters.
Memory does not remove:

Fear.
It gives fear:
Context.
Yes, I am:
Afraid.
But I have been afraid:
Before.
Yes, I do not know what happens:
Next.
But I have not known:
Before.
And God was still:
Faithful.
That is mature:
Endurance.
Not certainty about:
Circumstances.
Confidence in:
Christ.
Not:
I know what tomorrow:
Holds.
But:
I know whose tomorrow it is.
Verse 12 is both an ending and a:
Beginning.
The first woe has:
Passed.
That is an:
Ending.
Two woes are still:
Coming.
That is a:
Beginning.
Faith often lives exactly:
There.
Between what God has already brought us:
Through—
and what we have not yet been asked to:
Face.
And in that space we:
Remember.
We do not boast:

I survived the first one. I can handle anything.
And we do not despair:
If two more are coming, I cannot go on.
We say something:
Quieter.
Something:
Humbler.
Something more:
Faithful.
The God who carried me through what has passed will still be God in whatever comes next.
The first woe has:
Passed.
Two remain.
The journey is not:
Finished.
Neither is God's:
Faithfulness.

Pastoral Reflection

There are moments when we finally come through something difficult and:
Think—
Thank God that is over.
And sometimes, before we have fully recovered, life reminds us that another challenge may still lie:
Ahead.
That can be:
Discouraging.
We may want to ask:
Haven't I been through enough?
Perhaps you:
Have.
Perhaps you are:
Tired.
Perhaps the thought of enduring one more difficult season feels almost:
Impossible.
Revelation does not shame that:
Weariness.
The people who first heard these words were not spectators watching prophetic images from comfortable:
Seats.
They knew:
Pressure.
Loss.

Fear.
Opposition.
They understood the cost of:
Endurance.
And perhaps Verse 12 offers something more useful than easy:
Optimism.
The first woe:
Passed.
That matters.
Something terrible did not last:
Forever.
And if more trouble comes, we will not enter it empty:
Handed.
We carry:
Memory.
The memory of:
Grace.
The memory of:
Endurance.
The memory that what once seemed endless eventually:
Passed.
The memory that when we could not see the:
Ending—
God remained:
Present.
The memory that sometimes someone else had to remember the throne for:
Us.
We do not know what tomorrow will:
Bring.
Christian faith never promised us that:
Knowledge.
But we know something about the One who will already be there when tomorrow:
Arrives.
So perhaps today's prayer can be very:
Simple.
Thank You for carrying me through what has passed.
Give me grace for whatever comes next.
That is not:
Weakness.
That is:
Endurance.

Something Worth Pondering

Verse 12 stands between two:
Directions.
Behind:
The first:
Woe.
Ahead:
Two:
More.
And perhaps that is where much of life is:
Lived.
Between what has:
Passed—
and what has not yet:
Come.
We cannot return to:
Yesterday.
We cannot see:
Tomorrow.
We live:
Here.
And here is where faith must:
Endure.
The past gives us:
Memory.
The future requires:
Trust.
The present receives:
Grace.
Perhaps that is:
Enough.
We do not need tomorrow's strength:
Today.
We need today's:
Grace.
And when tomorrow becomes:
Today—
grace will meet us:
There.
One woe:
Behind.
Two woes:
Ahead.

Grace in the:
Middle.
The first woe:
Passed.
The next one has not yet:
Come.
And God is present:
Here.

Ask Yourself This:

What has already passed in my life that once seemed:
Endless—
and what do I remember about God's faithfulness:
There?
When another difficulty comes, am I expecting yesterday's method of:
Deliverance—
or trusting yesterday's faithful God in today's:
Circumstances?
And right here—
between what has:
Passed
and what has not yet:
Come—
can I receive the grace God has given me for:
Today?

Revelation 9:13–19 — The Sixth Trumpet: The Four Angels and the Cavalry

Revelation 9:13–19

"And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men. And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of

fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt."[d]
— Revelation 9:13–19, KJV

The first woe has:
Passed.
But John has already warned us.
Two more are:
Coming.
There is almost no pause.
The sixth angel raises the trumpet.
And sounds.
But before John shows us another terrifying scene on earth, he takes our attention somewhere else:
The golden altar before God.
That location matters.
Before the army—
the altar.
Before the destruction—
a voice from heaven.
Before the terror unfolds upon the earth—
John reminds us of the:
Throne.

1. A Voice From the Altar

John hears a voice from the horns of the golden altar before God.
The altar has appeared before in Revelation.
It carries associations with:
Worship.
Prayer.
Sacrifice.
Judgment.
And we should remember the prayers of God's suffering people.
They cried:
How long?
Their cries were not forgotten.
Revelation repeatedly insists that heaven hears what earth may appear to ignore.

But that does not mean human vengeance becomes divine judgment.
Human anger can be:
Selfish.
Distorted.
Vindictive.
God's justice is:
Holy.
The saints cry out to God.
They do not seize the throne for themselves.
That distinction frees the Church from vengeance.
Christians may seek justice.
Oppose evil.
Protect the vulnerable.
But final judgment belongs to:
God.

2. The Four Angels Are Bound

The voice commands the sixth angel:
Release the four angels who are bound at the great River Euphrates.
There is that language again.
Bound.
They have not been free to act whenever they choose.
They have been:
Restrained.
Held.
Waiting.
Throughout Chapter 9, John has repeatedly placed boundaries around destructive power.
Given.
Told.
Allowed.
Limited.
And now:
Bound.
The imagery becomes increasingly terrifying.
But the theology remains remarkably consistent.
Destructive power does not operate with unlimited freedom.
There are:
Boundaries.

3. The Euphrates

The Euphrates was not an abstract geographic reference to John's first hearers.
It represented a significant eastern boundary in their world.
Beyond it lay peoples and powers associated with the fear of:

Invasion.
Threat.
Danger beyond the frontier.
John's first readers did not need a twenty-first-century map to understand the image.
And neither do we need to turn it into one.
This is precisely where Revelation can become a playground for prophetic speculation.
Today's nations.
Today's armies.
Today's alliances.
Today's military movements.
Suddenly the vision becomes a geopolitical puzzle.
But our interpretive principle remains:
Begin with what the imagery communicated to John's first hearers.
Then ask what enduring theological truth speaks into our world.
We should not force our world backward into:
John's vision.
The Euphrates functions here as a boundary of threat.
Something frightening waits beyond it.
And until the appointed moment—
it remains:
Bound.

4. An Appointed Hour

Then the four angels are released.
But John tells us something extraordinary.
They had been prepared for:
The hour.
The day.
The month.
The year.
John stacks the language of time.
The effect is:
Precision.
This is not random.
Not accidental.
Not uncontrolled.
There is an:
Appointment.
The angels do not set it.
They cannot move before it.
What may appear sudden on earth is not unexpected in heaven.
But we must be careful here.

God's sovereignty should never become an excuse for human beings to pretend they understand every tragedy.
Revelation does not give us permission to look at someone's suffering and announce:
God scheduled this.
Nor does permission necessarily mean:
Approval.
Revelation 9 is a particular apocalyptic vision of judgment.
It is not a formula explaining every painful event in human life.
What it does give us is a larger confidence:
Nothing surprises God.
Nothing dethrones God.
Nothing forces God to improvise because history has escaped His control.
There is a great difference between saying:
I know why this happened.
and saying:
I know who God is while it is happening.
Faith can live without knowing:
Why.
Because faith knows:
Who.

5. The Judgment Escalates

The four angels are released to kill a third of humankind.
The fifth trumpet permitted:
Torment.
The sixth permits:
Death.
The vision has escalated.
We should feel that escalation.
Revelation is not giving us an interesting prophetic sequence to admire.
The stakes have become:
Higher.
Yet even here John gives us a boundary.
A third.
Not:
All.
The judgment is terrible.
But it is not total.
That fraction matters.
Throughout Revelation, partial judgments communicate restraint.
Final judgment has not yet arrived.
There remains:
Time.

Opportunity.
The possibility of:
Repentance.
And that becomes especially important because of where Chapter 9 is going.
After everything humanity experiences—
people still do not:
Repent.
We must not become so fascinated with angels, cavalry, numbers, fire, smoke, and brimstone that we miss the theological destination.

6. Two Hundred Million

John hears the number of the mounted troops:
Two hundred million.
An almost unimaginable number.
The point is overwhelming:
Magnitude.
Once again, we should resist turning Revelation into tomorrow's military roster.
John's first readers did not need to identify a future nation capable of fielding such an army.
The number itself creates the impression.
The hearer feels:
Small.
The army feels:
Immense.
But immensity is not:
Sovereignty.
Two hundred million sounds unstoppable.
But numbers do not create ultimate authority.
A large army is still not:
The throne.
Fear counts soldiers.
Faith remembers:
The King.

7. Horses From a Nightmare

John then describes what he sees.
The riders wear breastplates associated with:
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
The horses have heads resembling:
Lions.
From their mouths come:
Fire.

Smoke.
Brimstone.
And their tails resemble serpents with heads capable of inflicting harm.
These are not ordinary horses any more than the creatures of the fifth trumpet were ordinary locusts.
John is seeing:
Apocalyptic imagery.
We do not need to transform the horses into:
Tanks.
Missiles.
Artillery.
Flamethrowers.
Chemical weapons.
Or any other modern technology.
Our task is to understand John's imagery—
not redesign it.
Sometimes:
How does that work?
is the wrong question.
A better question is:
What does this picture communicate?
Destructive power.
Judgment.
Death.
Overwhelming force.
John combines images of:
Warhorse.
Lion.
Serpent.
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
The whole picture is meant to strike us as:
Terrifying.
If we dismantle it into dozens of independent prophetic codes, we may destroy the effect John intended it to have.
John paints a monster because he wants us to see the monstrous character of:
Destruction.

8. Revelation Unmasks Power

Earth can make destructive power appear:
Glorious.
Uniforms.
Banners.

Architecture.
Wealth.
Prestige.
Authority.
Revelation pulls back the curtain and says:
Look again.
That is what apocalypse means:
Unveiling.
What appears magnificent from earth may look very different from heaven.
Every empire tells stories about itself.
We bring:
Peace.
Order.
Prosperity.
Security.
Revelation asks another question:
At whose expense?
Who is hurt?
Who is exploited?
Who is required to bow?
What must be worshiped in order to participate?
The cavalry represents power without:
Redemption.
It does not heal.
It does not restore.
It does not create.
It:
Destroys.
And destruction can never accomplish what belongs to God alone.
Darkness can destroy.
It cannot:
Create.
It can kill.
It cannot:
Resurrect.
It can wound.
It cannot make all things:
New.
That is why resurrection is a greater power than destruction.
Anyone can break something.
Only God can ultimately make all things:
New.

9. Do Not Let Numbers Hide People

We should not rush past the horror.
A third of humanity dies in the vision.
That is not a statistic to admire.
It represents:
People.
Lives.
Stories.
Families.
Large numbers can become abstract.
A million.
Ten million.
Two hundred million.
A third.
Eventually the numbers become so large that human suffering can turn into arithmetic.
But Christians cannot allow numbers to erase:
People.
Revelation does not invite us to enjoy judgment.
Judgment reveals the seriousness of evil.
It should produce:
Sobriety.
Compassion.
Self-examination.
And while repentance remains possible—
an open invitation to:
Turn.

10. Consequences Are Not Repentance

That is why verses 20 and 21 will hurt.
After everything we have seen—
the survivors still do not:
Repent.
Pain does not automatically soften the human heart.
Sometimes it hardens it.
We know that even from ordinary life.
A destructive habit causes pain—
yet continues.
A relationship suffers—
yet behavior does not change.
Warnings accumulate—
yet the direction remains the same.
Consequences can reveal where a road leads.
But they cannot force us to:

Turn.
There is a difference between saying:
I do not want to suffer.
and saying:
I want to return to God.
One seeks:
Relief.
The other seeks:
Restoration.
God does not merely call us away from consequences.
He calls us toward:
Himself.

11. Time Can Be Mercy

Perhaps that helps us understand the significance of the partial judgment.
A third.
Not:
All.
History continues.
Repentance remains possible.
The door has not yet:
Closed.
We usually think of mercy as removing consequences.
Sometimes mercy looks like:
Another moment.
Another warning.
Another opportunity to turn.
As long as Christ is speaking, the invitation to respond remains.
Listen.
Turn.
Repent.
Endure.
The story has not yet reached its final sentence.
That should make us serious—
not speculative.
The appointed hour is not an invitation to calculate prophetic dates.
The proper question is not:
Can I calculate when?
The proper question is:
Am I faithful now?
Revelation is not primarily asking:
Can you decode this?
It asks:
Will you remain faithful?

Will you worship the Lamb?
Will you resist idolatry?
Will you repent?
Will you endure?
The huge army can distract us from one very small word:
Repent.
Two hundred million captures our imagination.
Repentance should capture our:
Heart.

12. The Vision Should Change Us

Perhaps one of the great dangers in reading Revelation is becoming fascinated with what we cannot know while neglecting what the text plainly tells us to:
Do.
We speculate about armies—
while ignoring allegiance.
We calculate numbers—
while neglecting faithfulness.
We decode symbols—
while resisting repentance.
If Revelation makes us more curious but not more faithful—
something is missing.
If it makes us more frightened but not more devoted to Christ—
something is missing.
The vision is meant to form:
Disciples.

13. Fear Counts the Army

The threat is immense.
The judgment is severe.
The suffering is real.
The imagery is terrifying.
But the angels were:
Bound.
Then released.
At an appointed:
Time.
The army was enormous.
But its effect remained:
Limited.
Heaven has not lost control.
That does not make the army imaginary.
It places the army in theological perspective.
Revelation asks us to look directly at evil.

Directly at judgment.
Directly at suffering.
Directly at death.
And then:
Look higher.
The cavalry is not the center.
The Lamb is.
The Euphrates is not the center.
The throne is.
The two hundred million are not the center.
The One worshiped by the multitude no one can count:
Is.
Fear counts the army.
Faith remembers the throne.

14. Before the Army—Heaven Was Already Speaking

Perhaps we should end where the passage began.
Before the army—
a voice.
Before the cavalry—
the altar.
Before the destruction—
the throne.
The four angels do not determine the hour.
The army does not determine the boundary.
The forces of destruction do not determine the final future.
So when Revelation 9:13–19 becomes overwhelming, remember what John showed us before the first horse ever moved.
Heaven was already:
Speaking.
The angels were:
Bound.
The hour was:
Appointed.
The destruction was:
Limited.
And above every frightening image remained the One whose kingdom has no:
End.
The army may be beyond counting.
The judgment may be terrible.
The hour may be frightening.
But the throne is still:
Occupied.

And therefore the Church can:
Endure.

Pastoral Reflection

Some things in life feel overwhelmingly:
Large.
Too many problems.
Too many unknowns.
Too many responsibilities.
Too much suffering.
Too many things beyond our control.
And when the numbers become large enough, we begin to feel:
Small.
Two hundred million.
John gives us a number almost impossible to imagine.
Perhaps that is part of the point.
Human strength looks insignificant beside it.
Yet Revelation never tells the Church:
Become bigger than the army.
It tells the Church:
Remain faithful to the Lamb.
That is enormously freeing.
We are not responsible for becoming powerful enough to control every outcome.
We are responsible for being faithful with what God has placed before us.
Sometimes we cannot stop the:
Army.
Sometimes we cannot change the:
Diagnosis.
Sometimes we cannot repair the:
Relationship.
Sometimes we cannot control the:
Future.
But we can still:
Pray.
Love.
Speak truth.
Show mercy.
Refuse hatred.
Remain faithful.
Perhaps that is why Revelation keeps taking us back to the:
Throne.
Because the burden of running the universe was never placed upon our shoulders.

God is still:
God.
Our task is to remain:
His.
So when the problem becomes too large to count—
remember:
You were never asked to be sovereign.
You were asked to be faithful.

Something Worth Pondering

The four angels were:
Bound.
Then released.
At an appointed:
Hour.
The army was enormous.
The destruction was terrible.
But none of it was:
Ultimate.
Fear becomes especially powerful when we silently give something an attribute that belongs only to God.
We call the problem:
Unstoppable.
The situation:
Hopeless.
The future:
Impossible.
Those are enormous words.
And Revelation teaches us to use enormous words carefully.
The army may be enormous.
It is not:
Infinite.
The creatures may be powerful.
They are not:
Sovereign.
The darkness may be terrible.
It is not:
Eternal.
Fear counts the army.
Faith remembers the throne.
And when the numbers become too large for us to understand, perhaps that is precisely when we should remember:
We were never the ones holding the universe together.

Ask Yourself This:

When something frightening or overwhelming enters my life, do I begin treating it as though it were:
Ultimate?
When I cannot understand why God has permitted something, can I say, **"I do not know why"** and still say, **"But I know who God is"**?
And when the army seems beyond counting and the future beyond my control, can I remember:
I was never asked to be sovereign.
I was asked to be faithful.

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:13

“And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,”[c]
— Revelation 9:13, KJV

The first woe has:
Passed.
But there is little time to:
Rest.
The sixth angel raises the:
Trumpet.
And:
Sounds.
The second woe has:
Begun.
But notice what John gives us:
First.
Not an:
Army.
Not:
Death.
Not:
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
John first hears a:
Voice.
Before the:
Euphrates—
a voice.
Before the four:
Angels—
a voice.
Before the enormous:
Cavalry—
a voice.
Before the terrible:
Judgment—
a voice.
That order:
Matters.

Before earth begins to:
Shake—
heaven has already:
Spoken.

1. The Sixth Trumpet Begins With a Voice

Revelation engages more than our:
Eyes.
John:
Sees.
John:
Hears.
The book has a:
Soundscape.
Trumpets.
Thunder.
Songs.
Voices.
Worship.
Cries.
Silence.
And now:
A voice.
But this voice does not come from just anywhere in:
Heaven.
John locates it.
From the four horns of the golden altar:
Before:
God.
That location gives the voice:
Weight.
Because we have encountered this altar:
Before.
Revelation builds upon what it has already:
Shown.
The altar carries:
Memory.
And if we remember what has already happened around the altar—
we will hear this voice:
Differently.

2. Heaven Speaks Before Earth Shakes

The events about to follow will appear overwhelming from the perspective of:
Earth.

Four angels will be:
Released.
An enormous army will:
Appear.
Death will:
Follow.
The imagery will become:
Terrible.
But the sixth trumpet does not begin with earthly:
Chaos.
It begins in the presence of:
God.
That changes how we read everything that:
Follows.
The army is not the first:
Reality.
The voice is.
The battle is not the first:
Reality.
The altar is.
The darkness is not the first:
Reality.
Heaven has already:
Spoken.
That does not make what follows less:
Terrible.
But it gives the terror a theological:
Location.
The frightening events do not arrive in a universe where heaven has been:
Overthrown.
They do not begin because God has suddenly lost:
Control.
They do not surprise the:
Throne.
The trumpet sounds.
And before John shows us anything else—
he hears a:
Voice.

3. The Altar Carries the Memory of Prayer

We have seen this altar:
Before.
Earlier in Revelation, prayer had already been connected with the heavenly:
Altar.

The prayers of God's people entered the heavenly:
Scene.
What may have appeared weak from the perspective of:
Earth—
was significant in:
Heaven.
That matters enormously:
Here.
Because the sixth trumpet does not emerge from a universe in which suffering has gone:
Unnoticed.
God has heard the cries of His:
People.
Heaven has been:
Listening.
The persecuted Church may ask:
Does anyone:
See?
Does anyone:
Hear?
Does anyone:
Care?
Revelation answers:
Heaven hears.
That does not mean every prayer receives the answer we:
Want.
It does not mean every prayer receives an immediate:
Answer.
It does not mean we understand what God is:
Doing.
But the altar tells us something we desperately need to:
Remember.
Our prayers do not disappear into:
Nothing.
They are brought before:
God.

4. Silence From Heaven Is Not Deafness in Heaven

There are seasons when prayer seems to receive no immediate:
Answer.
We:
Pray.
Nothing:
Changes.

We pray:
Again.
Still:
Nothing.
And delay can begin to feel like:
Absence.
Perhaps God does not:
Hear.
Perhaps God does not:
Care.
Perhaps my prayer never made it beyond the:
Ceiling.
Revelation challenges that:
Conclusion.
Silence from heaven is not necessarily deafness in:
Heaven.
Sometimes we do not understand God's:
Timing.
Sometimes we do not understand His apparent:
Silence.
Sometimes we do not even know how to:
Pray.
And perhaps that last one is more common than we like to:
Admit.
Some prayers are barely:
Sentences.
Help.
Please.
Lord.
Why?
How:
Long?
Those are:
Prayers.
God does not require polished language before He:
Listens.
The power of prayer does not depend upon the eloquence of the person:
Praying.
It depends upon the faithfulness of the God being:
Addressed.
That should encourage anyone who has ever said:
I don't know how to pray.
Sometimes neither do:

I.
Sometimes all we have is:
Lord, help me.
And perhaps that is:
Enough.
Revelation itself contains the prayer:
How long?
That matters in a book about:
Endurance.
The saints do not always pray:
Everything is wonderful.
Sometimes they ask:
How long?
That question is not necessarily:
Faithlessness.
It can be:
Lament.
And lament belongs inside:
Faith.
The person asking:
How long, O Lord?
is still speaking to:
The Lord.
Faith can question without walking:
Away.
There is a difference between questioning:
God—
and abandoning:
God.
Scripture contains faithful people doing the:
First.

5. Divine Justice Is Not Human Revenge

The altar carries the memory of people who:
Suffered.
People who:
Waited.
People who wondered whether justice would ever:
Come.
Their cries entered the presence of:
God.
And now a voice comes from that same sacred:
Setting.
But we need to be:

Careful.
We should not say:
The saints prayed, therefore they demanded precisely the events that follow in Revelation: 9
That would go beyond the:
Text.
The connection is more:
Careful.
Their cries for justice were:
Heard.
God has not forgotten:
Evil.
But divine justice is not the same thing as human:
Revenge.
Human vengeance can say:
You hurt me, so I want you to hurt.
Divine justice belongs to God's holy:
Character.
God does not lose His:
Temper.
Revelation does not portray God as emotionally unstable—
suddenly overwhelmed by:
Rage.
God remains:
God.
Holy.
Just.
True.
Sovereign.
That is one reason final judgment belongs to:
Him.
Not:
Us.
Our knowledge is:
Incomplete.
Our motives can be:
Mixed.
Our emotions can become:
Distorted.
God sees what we:
Cannot.
Christians can therefore seek:
Justice—

without becoming:
Vengeful.
We may name:
Evil.
We may resist:
Evil.
We may protect people from:
Evil.
We may seek what is:
Right.
But we do not become:
God.
Revelation places final judgment near the:
Throne.
Not in our:
Hands.
That should produce:
Humility.

6. Darkness Does Not Authorize Itself

The voice comes from the golden altar:
Before God.
Notice where the order does **not** come:
From.
The:
Abyss.
The:
Destroyer.
The:
Locusts.
The four bound:
Angels.
The order comes from before:
God.
That continues a pattern we have seen throughout Chapter: 9
The star receives a:
Key.
The locusts receive:
Power.
They receive:
Instructions.
Their targets are:
Restricted.
Their duration is:

Limited.
Now another command comes from the heavenly:
Altar.
Authority flows:
Downward.
Darkness does not authorize:
Itself.
Whatever freedom destructive powers possess within this:
Vision—
it is not:
Absolute.
They do not write their own:
Commission.
They do not establish their own:
Boundaries.
They do not decide when God's restrictions cease to:
Apply.
That does not make the mystery of suffering:
Disappear.
And we should not pretend that it:
Does.
We still ask:
Why permit destructive powers at:
All?
Why allow:
Suffering?
Why does God not immediately end every form of:
Evil?
Revelation does not give us a simple philosophical answer to every one of those:
Questions.
And responsible theology should not manufacture one merely because silence makes us:
Uncomfortable.

7. “I Don't Know” Can Be Faithful Theology

There are places where Scripture tells us:
Much.
There are places where Scripture leaves us with:
Mystery.
Faithfulness requires knowing the:
Difference.
Sometimes:
I don't know

is more faithful than a confident answer Scripture never:
Gave.
We do not protect God by inventing explanations for:
Him.
God does not need our:
Excuses.
We can say what the text:
Says.
God remains:
Sovereign.
Evil remains:
Limited.
Judgment remains:
Real.
Prayer is:
Heard.
History moves toward God's appointed:
End.
Beyond that—
some questions remain:
Questions.
Mystery does not mean:
Meaninglessness.
We may not understand:
Why.
That does not mean there is no:
Meaning.
We may not understand the entire:
Story.
That does not mean there is no:
Author.
Faith lives with partial:
Knowledge.
We see:
Part.
God sees:
Whole.
That can be difficult.
Especially when the unanswered question is not:
Academic.
When it has a:
Name.
A face.

A hospital:
Room.
An empty:
Chair.
A grave.
Then:
I don't know
can feel painfully:
Small.
But perhaps faith does not require us to pretend we know what God has not:
Revealed.
Perhaps faith can say:
I do not know why.
And then add:
But I know who God is.
Not as an explanation for:
Pain.
But as an anchor within:
It.

8. Before the Release Comes the Word

John hears a:
Voice.
Then the angels are:
Released.
Word.
Then:
Action.
The destructive powers do not simply burst their:
Chains.
They do not overwhelm their:
Prison.
They do not escape because heaven failed to contain:
Them.
They remain bound until the command comes to:
Release them.
Which means, in the simplest possible language:
The chains were working.
They were:
Bound.
And they remained:
Bound.
Evil cannot simply decide that God's boundaries no longer:
Apply.

Rebellion does not make the rebel:
Sovereign.
The creature never becomes the:
Creator.
That does not make the release less:
Frightening.
But it changes what the frightening event:
Means.
If the angels had simply broken loose, the message would be:
Heaven has lost:
Control.
That is not John's:
Vision.
The frightening event remains inside a larger sovereign:
Framework.
Again—
permission does not mean:
Approval.
And this particular apocalyptic judgment should never become a universal explanation for every painful circumstance in human:
Life.
We cannot look at someone's tragedy and confidently declare what God:
Permitted—
why He permitted:
It—
or what invisible boundary He has drawn around:
It.
Revelation does not give us that kind of:
Knowledge.
What it gives us here is much more:
Specific.
These angels are:
Bound.
They remain:
Bound.
Then a command comes.
Then they are:
Released.
The chains were:
Working.

9. Scripture Gives Us the Anchor Before the Storm

This pattern has appeared repeatedly throughout:
Revelation.

Before the:
Chaos—
the:
Throne.
Before the:
Scroll—
the:
Lamb.
Before the terrible events of Chapter:
9—
the worship of:
Heaven.
And before this frightening:
Release—
a voice from before:
God.
John gives us the anchor:
First.
That is deeply:
Pastoral.
Sometimes Scripture gives us truth in one season that becomes essential in:
Another.
At the time, we may not understand why something matters so:
Much.
Later—
we:
Do.
Chapter: 4
The:
Throne.
Chapter: 5
The:
Lamb.
Chapter: 7
The:
Seal.
Chapter: 8
The:
Altar.
All of that travels with us into Chapter: 9
We do not begin every crisis from theological:
Zero.
We carry what God has already taught:

Us.
Sometimes the present becomes too loud to:
Teach us.
Then we must rely upon what we learned in the:
Quiet.
Scripture.
Prayer.
Worship.
Community.
Memory.
You store truth before the:
Storm.
Then you retrieve it while the wind is:
Blowing.
Perhaps that is one way to describe Christian:
Formation.
We learn:
God is:
Faithful.
And someday life asks whether we actually believe:
It.
Not because every circumstance will turn out the way we:
Want.
Not because faith guarantees circumstantial:
Safety.
But because the God we knew in the quiet remains God in the:
Storm.
Yesterday's revelation becomes tomorrow's:
Anchor.

10. Never Read the Army Without Remembering the Altar

The sixth trumpet is about to become:
Terrible.
Death.
An enormous:
Army.
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
If we forget the altar—
fear will control the:
Reading.
So before we go any:

Further—
remember:
Never read the army without remembering the altar.
The army comes:
Later.
The altar comes:
First.
The order is:
Theological.
Fear wants to reverse the:
Order.
Fear says:
Look at the:
Army.
Look at the:
Danger.
Look at the:
Numbers.
Look at what could:
Happen.
And then—
perhaps somewhere far in the:
Background—
remember:
God.
Revelation reverses:
That.
Look at:
God.
Look at the:
Throne.
Look at the:
Lamb.
Look at the:
Altar.
Then look at the:
Army.
The order changes:
Everything.
Because what we look at first often determines how we see what comes:
Next.
Begin with:
Fear—

and everything can become a:
Threat.
Begin with:
Control—
and everything becomes something we must:
Manage.
Begin with:
Christ—
and even frightening realities are placed within a larger:
Truth.
This does not make them less:
Frightening.
Christian perspective is not a technique for making difficult realities emotionally:
Easy.
It gives them theological:
Location.
The army is:
Frightening.
But it is not:
God.
The angels are:
Powerful.
But they are not:
Sovereign.
The judgment is:
Severe.
But it does not occur outside the awareness of:
Heaven.
The altar comes:
First.
Remember:
That.

11. Only God Gets to Be God

Fear has an unusual ability to give divine attributes to created:
Things.
We say:
This problem is:
All-powerful.
This suffering will last:
Forever.
This enemy controls my:
Future.

This loss defines my entire:
Life.
Those are theological:
Statements.
All-powerful.
Forever.
Controls the future.
Defines reality.
Those words belong very carefully within Christian:
Faith.
Revelation takes those words away from our:
Fears.
The abyss is not:
All-powerful.
The torment does not last:
Forever.
The Destroyer does not control the:
Future.
The army does not define:
Reality.
Only God gets to be:
God.
That does not mean our fears are:
Imaginary.
It means fear is not qualified to describe ultimate:
Reality.
This is:
Frightening.
But this is not:
God.
This:
Hurts.
But this is not:
God.
This is:
Powerful.
But this is not:
God.
Fear has a:
Soundtrack.
Faith has a:
Voice.
The army will become:

Loud.
But the voice comes:
First.
And loudness does not establish:
Authority.
Truth does not have to:
Shout.
Sometimes the most important truth arrives quietly enough that we can almost miss:
It.
A:
Voice.
From the:
Altar.
Before:
God.
Before the thunder of the cavalry—
listen to:
That.

12. Worship Restores Proportion

The altar belongs to:
Worship.
Yet from that sacred setting comes a word that affects:
History.
Revelation refuses to separate heaven and earth into unrelated:
Realities.
Worship does not magically control:
Events.
It is not a technique for forcing God to produce the outcome we:
Want.
Worship does something else.
It reminds us who:
God is.
And once we remember who God is—
everything else begins returning to its proper:
Scale.
Problems can become:
Huge.
God can become:
Small.
Not:
Actually.
But in our:

Perception.
Worship restores:
Proportion.
The throne becomes large:
Again.
The problem returns to its proper:
Size.
Still:
Real.
Still:
Difficult.
Still perhaps:
Frightening.
But no longer:
Divine.
That may be one reason Revelation contains so much:
Worship.
The first Christians lived beneath powers that appeared:
Enormous.
The Roman Empire was:
Real.
Its power was:
Real.
Its ability to intimidate, punish, and destroy was:
Real.
Revelation did not ask Christians to pretend Rome had no:
Power.
It asked them to see a larger:
Reality.
Rome looked:
Huge.
The Church looked:
Small.
Revelation said:
Look again.
There is a throne above every earthly:
Throne.
There is a King above every:
King.
There is a Kingdom beyond every:
Empire.
There is a future no human power can:
Control.

Faith does not require smaller:
Problems.
It requires a larger vision of:
God.
Sometimes we pray:
Lord, make the problem:
Smaller.
And sometimes He:
Does.
But sometimes the problem remains exactly the same:
Size.
And faith grows because God once again fills the:
Horizon.
The problem is still:
There.
But it is no longer:
Everything.
There is something beyond:
It.
Someone beyond:
It.
A throne beyond:
It.
Worship restores:
Proportion.

13. Before God: Seen and Heard

John locates the golden altar:
Before:
God.
Those words matter.
Before:
God.
The bound angels:
Before God.
The Euphrates:
Before God.
The army:
Before God.
The death:
Before:
God.
That does not mean we understand God's:
Permission.

It does not mean everything that happens is morally:
Good.
It does not mean every tragedy can be explained by saying:
God planned this for a particular:
Reason.
It means the vision refuses the idea of a universe slipping unnoticed beyond divine:
Attention.
God:
Sees.
And the altar reminds us:
God:
Hears.
Seen.
And:
Heard.
Those are deeply personal:
Words.
Especially for someone who is:
Suffering.
One of suffering's deepest wounds can be the feeling that nobody:
Notices.
Nobody:
Understands.
Nobody:
Knows.
Revelation says:
God:
Sees.
God:
Hears.
The God of Revelation is not an abstract cosmic:
Force.
He:
Speaks.
Hears.
Knows.
Judges.
Saves.
And ultimately:
Dwells with His:
People.
That is where Revelation is:

Going.
The altar is not the:
Destination.
The trumpets are not the:
Destination.
The woes are not the:
Destination.
The judgments are not the:
Destination.
Communion with:
God
is.
That is why we must never allow judgment to become the center of:
Revelation.
Judgment is:
Important.
Serious.
Necessary within the book's theological:
Vision.
But the center is:
Jesus Christ.
And the destination is:
New creation.
Revelation is not ultimately the story of how everything is:
Destroyed.
It is the story of the God who makes all things:
New.
Even the darkest verses must be read inside that larger:
Story.

14. Heaven Heard Before the Army Appeared

Verse 13 stands at a:
Threshold.
Behind:
The fifth trumpet.
Ahead:
The sixth.
Behind:
One woe.
Ahead:
Another.
And what stands at the doorway?
A:
Voice.

Before John walks deeper into the:
Darkness—
he receives something from:
Heaven.
Perhaps we should do the:
Same.
Before entering tomorrow's:
Uncertainty—
listen.
Before the difficult:
Conversation—
pray.
Before facing frightening:
News—
remember.
Before confronting the:
Problem—
look toward:
God.
Not because prayer guarantees the outcome we:
Want.
It does:
Not.
Jesus prayed in:
Gethsemane.
The cup was not:
Removed.
Prayer is not a technique for manipulating:
God.
Sometimes prayer changes:
Circumstances.
Sometimes prayer changes:
Us.
Sometimes it brings:
Courage.
Sometimes:
Peace.
Sometimes:
Clarity.
Sometimes nothing seems to change at:
All.
And still:
We pray.

Because prayer is more than a technique for getting:
Results.
Prayer is:
Relationship.
Presence.
Dependence.
Trust.
The creature speaking to the:
Creator.
The child speaking to the:
Father.
The altar reminds us that our prayers belong:
Somewhere.
They do not vanish into the:
Ceiling.
They are not wasted because we cannot immediately see an:
Answer.
Revelation gives us the image of prayer entering the presence of:
God.
And perhaps that is enough to keep:
Praying.
Even when we do not:
Understand.
Even when the answer seems:
Delayed.
Even when another trumpet:
Sounds.
Even when the road ahead becomes:
Dark.
Keep:
Praying.
Because heaven heard before the army:
Appeared.
Before the reader sees the frightening events that follow—
John reminds us of the altar before:
God.
The cries of God's people have not:
Disappeared.
The throne has not become:
Vacant.
History has not escaped divine:
Attention.
The sixth trumpet has:

Sounded.
Another woe is:
Beginning.
The road ahead will become:
Terrible.
But the first thing John gives us is not:
Fear.
It is:
Perspective.
A:
Voice.
From the golden:
Altar.
Before:
God.
Perhaps that is exactly what faithful people need before walking into something they cannot yet:
See.
Before the army—there is the altar.
Before the battle—there is a voice.
Before the darkness moves—heaven has already spoken.
So when the next verse takes us toward the:
Euphrates—
we do not go there:
Empty-handed.
We carry the memory of the:
Throne.
We carry the memory of the:
Lamb.
We carry the memory of the:
Altar.
And we remember:
Never read the army without remembering the altar.

Pastoral Reflection

There are moments when life changes with a:
Word.
The phone:
Rings.
The doctor:
Speaks.
The employer asks us into an:
Office.
Someone we love says:

We need to talk.
And suddenly we know something difficult may be:
Ahead.
Those moments become:
Thresholds.
There is life:
Before.
And life:
After.
Revelation 9:13 stands at a threshold like:
That.
The trumpet:
Sounds.
Something is about to:
Happen.
But before John sees what comes next—
he hears a voice from before:
God.
Perhaps there is pastoral wisdom in that:
Order.
We usually want God to tell us everything that is going to:
Happen.
What will the doctor:
Say?
How will this situation:
End?
Will the relationship:
Survive?
Will the job still be:
There?
Will the treatment:
Work?
Will I be:
Okay?
We want:
Answers.
Sometimes God gives us:
Answers.
But often He gives us something:
Else.
Himself.
His:
Presence.

His:
Promises.
His:
Word.
Enough truth for the next:
Step.
We may still walk into:
Uncertainty.
We may still hear difficult:
News.
We may still face something we would never have:
Chosen.
But we do not enter the unknown from an empty:
Place.
We have already seen the:
Throne.
We have already seen the:
Lamb.
We have already seen the:
Altar.
We have already learned something about the God who will be there when tomorrow becomes:
Today.
Sometimes faith does not mean knowing what happens:
Next.
Sometimes faith simply means knowing where to look before it:
Does.
So before the army—
remember the:
Altar.
Before the battle—
listen for the:
Voice.
Before the darkness moves—
remember that heaven has already:
Spoken.

Something Worth Pondering

The sixth trumpet begins with a:
Voice.
That is easy to overlook because we know what comes:
Next.
Four:
Angels.

The:
Euphrates.
An enormous:
Army.
Death.
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
Those images are much more:
Dramatic.
But perhaps the quietest detail is the one we most need to:
Remember.
The voice came first.
Fear usually wants us to begin with the:
Army.
Faith begins somewhere:
Else.
The:
Throne.
The:
Lamb.
The:
Altar.
The:
Voice.
Only then does faith look toward the:
Army.
Perhaps we cannot choose everything we will hear in:
Life.
But we can decide which voice will interpret everything:
Else.
Fear has a:
Soundtrack.
Faith has a:
Voice.
And when the soundtrack becomes overwhelming—
listen again for the voice that came: **First.**
Because the army may be:
Loud.
The problem may be:
Large.
The future may be:
Uncertain.

But none of those things sits upon the:
Throne.
Never read the army without remembering the:
Altar.

Ask Yourself This:

When God seems: Silent—have I confused unanswered prayer with unheard:
Prayer?
And what truth has God already given me in the: Quiet—that I may need to remember when the next storm becomes: **Loud?**
Before the army—there is the altar.
Before the battle—there is a voice.
Before the darkness moves—heaven has already spoken.

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:14

“Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates.”
— Revelation 9:14, KJV

Verse 13 told us where the voice came:
From.
The golden altar before:
God.
Now Verse 14 tells us what the voice:
Says.
Release the four angels who are bound at the great River:
Euphrates.
The command is:
Short.
The consequences will be:
Enormous.
But before we rush toward what happens after the command—
John gives us something important to notice:
They are about to be:
Released.
Because they have been:
Bound.
And those two words must remain:
Together.
Released.
But previously:
Bound.
Fear notices the first.
Faith must remember the:
Second.

1. The Voice Says: Release

The voice from the altar gives a:
Command.
Release.
Something that has been restrained is now permitted to:
Move.
Something that has been held is now:
Loosed.
Something prevented from acting has reached an appointed:
Moment.

The restraint is:
Removed.
That is frightening.
And John intends us to feel the:
Weight.
But the command also tells us something about everything that came:
Before.
You cannot release what has not first been:
Restrained.
The four angels have not been wandering freely through creation doing whatever they:
Want.
They have been:
Bound.
That means the command:
Release
contains within it the memory of:
Restraint.
The present action cannot be understood without the previous:
Boundary.
And that distinction will matter as the vision becomes increasingly:
Terrible.

2. Release Presupposes Restraint

We naturally focus upon what happens when the angels are:
Released.
John quietly tells us something equally important about everything that happened:
Before.
They were:
Bound.
Their restraint had been:
Effective.
As we said in the previous verse:
The chains were working.
Whatever these beings were capable of:
Doing—
they could not simply do it whenever they:
Wanted.
The angels do not:
Escape.
They are:
Released.
That difference is:

Everything.
An escape would mean the restraint had:
Failed.
A release means the restraint remained effective until the command was:
Given.
And once again, the grammar of Chapter 9 begins preaching the:
Theology.
Was:
Given.
Were:
Told.
Were:
Allowed.
Were:
Limited.
Has:
Passed.
Were:
Bound.
Now:
Release.
The imagery becomes increasingly:
Terrifying.
But the verbs keep placing fences around the:
Terror.
That is not:
Accidental.
The darkness keeps encountering:
Limits.

3. Never Let "Released" Make You Forget "Bound"

Fear sees four frightening:
Angels.
Faith notices they were:
Bound.
Fear hears:
Release.
Faith remembers:
They could not release:
Themselves.
Both truths belong in the:
Verse.
Released tells us something about the present:
Moment.

Bound tells us something about ultimate:
Authority.
We should not erase either:
One.
If we focus only upon:
Released—
the vision can begin to look like uncontrolled:
Chaos.
If we focus only upon:
Bound—
we may minimize the terrible reality of what is about to:
Happen.
John gives us:
Both.
The threat is:
Real.
The restraint was:
Real.
The release is:
Real.
The sovereignty above all of it is:
Real.
Christian hope does not require us to make the frightening thing:
Small.
It requires us to refuse to make the frightening thing:
God.
So remember both:
Words.
Released.
Bound.
And never let the first make you forget the:
Second.

4. Creature, Not Creator

Who exactly are these four:
Angels?
John does not give us their:
Names.
He does not explain their:
Origin.
He does not provide their complete spiritual:
Biography.
He tells us what we need to:
Know.

They are:
Four.
They are:
Angels.
They have been:
Bound.
They are located at the great River:
Euphrates.
And the next verse will tell us more about their appointed:
Purpose.
Beyond that, responsible interpretation needs:
Humility.
We can explore:
Possibilities.
We can notice biblical:
Connections.
But we should distinguish what Scripture:
Says—
from what we have:
Constructed.
Sometimes:
John does not tell us
is the most faithful answer we can:
Give.
We do not need an elaborate angelic:
Taxonomy.
The theological point is already sitting in front of:
Us.
They were:
Bound.
Bound beings are not sovereign:
Beings.
Anything that can be:
Bound—
is not:
God.
Anything awaiting:
Release—
is not:
God.
Anything receiving:
Permission—
is not:

God.
No matter how:
Frightening.
No matter how:
Powerful.
No matter how:
Destructive.
Creature.
Not:
Creator.
Christian faith rejects cosmic:
Dualism.
Revelation does not present two equal powers fighting over the universe while everyone waits to see who:
Wins.
God on one:
Side.
Evil on the:
Other.
That is not John's:
Vision.
Evil is:
Real.
But not:
Equal.
We must preserve both:
Truths.
If we minimize evil, we become:
Naive.
If we make evil equal with God, we become theologically:
Distorted.
Revelation does:
Neither.
Evil can be:
Terrifying.
And:
Bound.
Powerful.
And:
Limited.
Destructive.
And:
Temporary.

Those truths can exist:
Together.

5. The Great River Euphrates

Then John gives us a:
Location.
The great River:
Euphrates.
That name carried historical and cultural weight for John's original:
Hearers.
It was not merely a blue line on a:
Map.
Across biblical history, the Euphrates appears as an important geographic:
Marker.
A:
Boundary.
A:
Frontier.
Here.
And:
There.
Known.
And:
Unknown.
Security.
And potential:
Threat.
For people living within the Roman world, the eastern frontier carried real:
Significance.
Threats from beyond that frontier were not imaginary:
Concepts.
So when John's congregations heard:
the great River Euphrates
they did not need someone living two thousand years later to explain why the location could sound:
Ominous.
The river already possessed emotional:
Weight.
And that gives us an important interpretive:
Rule.
We should begin with what John's first hearers could reasonably have:
Heard.

6. Revelation Was Meaningful Before We Arrived

That sentence may be worth:

Remembering.
Revelation was meaningful before we arrived.
The book did not suddenly become understandable when modern nations:
Appeared.
It did not wait for:
Satellites.
Television.
Missiles.
Computers.
Or the:
Internet.
John's congregations heard Revelation:
First.
These were churches being called to:
Endure.
Whatever the imagery communicates must have spoken meaningfully to:
Them.
Therefore we begin with:
Their Scriptures.
Their geography.
Their political environment.
Their experience of:
Empire.
Their fears.
Their worship.
Their allegiance to:
Christ.
Then we carry that truth into:
Our world.
That is very different from forcing our world backward into:
John's.
We are not trying to make John's imagery predict whatever happens to be in today's:
Headlines.
We are allowing John's imagery to speak from his world into:
Ours.
Every generation is tempted to turn Revelation into a newspaper:
Codebook.
A war:
Begins.
A nation:
Rises.
A treaty:

Changes.
Something happens to a:
River.
And suddenly someone announces:
This is it.
History should make us:
Humble.
Generations before us confidently identified the final:
Actors.
They were:
Certain.
History moved:
On.
New interpreters made new:
Identifications.
And the cycle:
Repeated.
Revelation deserves better than continual prophetic:
Revision.
Its theology is deeper than:
Headlines.
The Euphrates already communicates something powerful without our adding modern:
Speculation.
A significant:
Boundary.
A threatening:
Frontier.
Something dangerous has been:
Restrained.
And now comes the command:
Release.
That is enough.

7. Geography Becomes Theology

The Euphrates is a real:
River.
But within John's vision it becomes more than mere:
Geography.
It becomes the location of restrained:
Threat.
A boundary holding something:
Back.

The river therefore participates in the theological pattern already running throughout Chapter: 9
The abyss has a:
Door.
The door has a:
Key.
The locusts have:
Instructions.
The torment has a:
Duration.
The targets have:
Limits.
The angels are:
Bound.
For a chapter that initially feels almost completely:
Chaotic—
there are boundaries:
Everywhere.
Look:
Closer.
The chapter is filled with:
Fences.
That does not make what happens inside those fences:
Harmless.
It tells us that chaos is not:
Sovereign.
The river marks a:
Boundary.
But the boundary itself points beyond:
Geography.
Something has been:
Held.
Something has been:
Restrained.
Something has not been permitted to move until the command is:
Given.
The human eye sees the:
River.
Faith notices the:
Boundary.

8. Chaos Has Fences

That may be worth:
Keeping.

Chaos has fences.
Not fences we always:
See.
Not fences we always:
Understand.
But Revelation repeatedly insists that destructive powers do not possess unlimited:
Freedom.
Earth sees what has been:
Released.
Heaven knows how long it had been:
Bound.
Those perspectives are:
Different.
We usually experience the:
Release.
We notice when something goes:
Wrong.
We notice the crisis that:
Arrives.
We notice the door that suddenly:
Opens.
We notice what crosses the boundary into our:
Lives.
What we do **not** know is everything that never:
Happened.
And we should be very careful:
Here.
We cannot count prevented:
Disasters.
We should not invent invisible:
Miracles.
We should not confidently announce that God prevented this or restrained that when Scripture has given us no such:
Knowledge.
We simply acknowledge the limits of our:
Perspective.
We know what:
Happened.
We do not know everything that could have:
Happened.
We see a small portion of:
Reality.

God sees:
Whole.
Within this particular vision, however, John lets us see something we normally could:
Not.
Before the angels were:
Released—
they were already:
There.
Already:
Dangerous.
Already prepared for a future:
Purpose.
Yet:
Bound.
Within Revelation 9, divine restraint precedes human awareness.
That is what the text allows us to:
Say.
No more is:
Necessary.

9. A Fence Can Be Mercy

We often think grace means receiving something:
Good.
And it:
Can.
But Scripture also teaches us that healthy love sometimes includes:
Boundaries.
God:
Liberates.
God also:
Commands.
Grace:
Frees.
Grace also:
Forms.
Love:
Welcomes.
Love also says:
No.
Those are not:
Contradictions.
A fence can be:
Mercy—

especially when there is a cliff on the other:
Side.
Not every restriction is:
Cruelty.
Sometimes restraint protects:
Life.
Parents understand:
This.
Love does not give a child unlimited freedom simply because love desires the child's:
Good.
Sometimes love says:
Stop.
Not because love wants less:
Life—
but because love protects:
Life.
There may be times when something similar occurs in our own:
Lives.
A door does not:
Open.
An opportunity does not:
Come.
Something we wanted remains beyond:
Reach.
Could that sometimes be:
Mercy?
Perhaps.
But we need humility:
Here.
We should not declare every closed door supernatural:
Protection.
Sometimes it may be:
Wisdom.
Sometimes:
Timing.
Sometimes circumstances.
Sometimes another person's:
Decision.
And sometimes:
We simply do not:
Know.
Christians should neither assume every boundary is an:

Enemy—
nor claim divine explanations we have not been:
Given.
Sometimes the faithful response to a closed door is simply:
I don't know.
But I can still ask whether there is wisdom in respecting the boundary that is:
There.

10. God's Sovereignty Is Not Nervous

Notice how calmly the command is:
Given.
Release.
No:
Panic.
No emergency.
No heavenly council shouting:
They're getting loose!
Simply:
Release.
Heaven is not portrayed as barely containing destructive powers that might overpower it at any:
Moment.
The angels were:
Bound.
The command is:
Given.
They are:
Released.
God's sovereignty is not:
Nervous.
Human control often:
Is.
We:
Grip.
Manage.
Manipulate.
Worry.
Because we know how easily our control can be:
Lost.
God does not grip the universe with white:
Knuckles.
The throne is:
Stable.
But we need both halves of that:

Truth.
The throne may be:
Stable.
Our lives may feel anything:
But.
Faith does not require us to pretend our circumstances feel:
Secure.
The diagnosis can still:
Frighten us.
The loss can still:
Hurt.
The future can still feel:
Uncertain.
The boundary can still appear to:
Collapse.
The angels can still be:
Released.
Christian security is therefore located somewhere deeper than:
Circumstances.
Not:
Health.
Not:
Money.
Not:
Governments.
Not:
Technology.
Not even our ability to understand what is:
Happening.
Christian security is ultimately:
Relational.
Whose are:
We?
That question takes us back to the:
Seal.
The people of God belong to:
God.
The river may be:
Crossed.
The boundary may be:
Opened.
The angels may be:
Released.

But belonging to Christ remains deeper than the:
Threat.

11. The Worst Thing That Happens to Me Cannot Rename Me

We must remain careful with:
Protection.
The seal is not a magical guarantee that Christians avoid every:
Pain.
Revelation itself contains suffering:
Saints.
Some:
Die.
Jesus was perfectly:
Faithful.
And:
Suffered.
Therefore faithfulness cannot mean immunity from:
Suffering.
Protection must always be read through the:
Cross.
Christian security is not:
Nothing bad can happen to me.
It is:
Nothing can finally take me from Christ.
Pain can:
Hurt me.
Loss can:
Change me.
Death can end earthly:
Life.
But if I belong to Christ—
the worst thing that happens to me cannot:
Rename me.
The Euphrates is a geographic:
Boundary.
The seal is an identity:
Boundary.
This one belongs to God.
That is deeper than circumstantial:
Safety.
The world may call me:
Defeated.
Christ calls me:

His.
The world may see:
Weakness.
Christ sees:
Faithfulness.
The world may take earthly:
Life.
It cannot seize the future God has promised in:
Christ.
That is not denial of:
Suffering.
It is the Christian claim that suffering does not possess ultimate authority over:
Identity.
The worst thing that happens to me does not become my:
God.
It does not sit upon the:
Throne.
It does not receive the final:
Word.

12. God's Eternal Design Is Not an Abyss With Better Locks

There is another important truth hidden inside this language of:
Restraint.
Restraint is not God's final:
Goal.
Christian hope is not that God spends eternity keeping evil chained somewhere while creation remains permanently:
Broken.
Revelation moves toward something far:
Greater.
For now:
Evil is:
Limited.
Ultimately:
Evil is:
Judged.
And creation is:
Renewed.
God is not merely managing evil:
Forever.
History is moving toward:
Resolution.

New:
Heavens.
New:
Earth.
New:
Jerusalem.
Life.
God's eternal design is not an abyss with better:
Locks.
The biblical hope is:
All things made new.
That is why Chapter 21 matters while we are reading Chapter: 9
The darkest imagery belongs inside the whole:
Story.
Otherwise judgment can become the destination rather than part of the road toward final:
Restoration.
Bound:
Angels.
Released:
Angels.
Judgment.
Woe.
These are not God's eternal:
Design.
They belong to a story moving toward:
Consummation.
The abyss does not get the final:
Scene.
The Destroyer does not get the final:
Word.
Death does not get the final:
Chapter.
The Lamb:
Does.

13. Capability Is Not Permission

The angels have been:
Bound.
That tells us something important about their:
Power.
They may be capable of terrible:
Things.
But capability is not:

Sovereignty.
And capability is not:
Permission.
A being may possess the ability to:
Harm.
That does not mean it possesses unlimited authority to exercise that:
Ability.
The angels were:
Capable.
Yet:
Bound.
There is a human mirror in:
That.
We possess capabilities:
Too.
We can:
Speak.
Build.
Influence.
Control.
Destroy.
Create technologies.
Exercise:
Authority.
But the ability to do something does not automatically give us the moral right to:
Do it.
Can we?
is not the same question as:
Should we?
Power requires:
Character.
And Christian theology asks us to interpret power through the:
Lamb.
Ultimate power belongs to the God revealed in:
Christ.
And the Lamb reveals divine power as:
Self-giving.
Faithful.
Holy.
Just.
Merciful.
Truthful.

That is why we keep returning to the:
Lamb.
The four angels possess:
Power.
What will their power:
Produce?
Death.
The Lamb possesses:
Power.
What does His Kingdom ultimately produce?
Life.
Once again:
Fruit reveals:
Kingdom.
That should make the Church examine its own use of:
Power.
Whenever Christians possess:
Influence.
Authority.
Resources.
Prestige.
Access.
We should ask:
How are we using this?
Jesus had:
Power.
And washed:
Feet.
The Lord:
Kneels.
The Master:
Serves.
The King carries a:
Cross.
That is not:
Weakness.
It is power governed by:
Love.
And power governed by love looks very different from power governed by:
Fear.
Pride.
Hatred.
Self-interest.

This becomes painfully:
Personal.
I may be free to say many:
Things.
Should:
I?
I may know exactly how to hurt someone who hurt:
Me.
Should:
I?
I may possess authority over another:
Person.
How will I use:
It?
Sometimes we spend all our time asking God to remove the restraints from our:
Lives.
Open the:
Door.
Give me the:
Opportunity.
Let me do what I:
Want.
Perhaps there are also moments when we need to pray:
Lord, restrain me.
Restrain my:
Anger.
My:
Pride.
My:
Tongue.
My desire to:
Retaliate.
My need to:
Control.
My temptation to use power in a way that does not resemble the:
Lamb.
Sometimes the boundary we most desperately need is not around:
Someone else.
It is around:
Us.

14. The Euphrates Is Not God's Border

Verse 14 leaves us standing beside a:

Boundary.
The voice from the altar has:
Spoken.
Four angels wait at the great River:
Euphrates.
They are:
Frightening.
They are:
Powerful.
And they are about to be:
Released.
But before fear takes over the:
Scene—
look carefully at the word John has already:
Given us.
Bound.
They were bound before they were:
Released.
Restrained before they were permitted to:
Act.
They did not break:
Free.
They did not overpower:
Heaven.
They did not escape God's:
Authority.
And the river that represented a significant frontier to human empires was never the frontier of God's:
Kingdom.
The Euphrates may mark a human:
Boundary.
It does not mark God's:
Boundary.
There is no territory beyond His:
Sovereignty.
Before the angels are:
Released—
God knows:
Them.
Before the river is:
Crossed—
God rules beyond:
It.

Before the army:
Moves—
heaven has already:
Spoken.
So when the boundary opens—
remember who established the:
Boundary.
When destructive power moves—
remember that it had been:
Restrained.
And when the world seems suddenly out of:
Control—
remember:
Released does not mean sovereign.
The angels may cross the:
Boundary.
They may fulfill their appointed:
Role.
They may terrify the:
Earth.
But they remain what they were before the command was:
Given.
Creatures.
Not:
Creator.
Bound before:
Released.
Limited even when:
Active.
And always beneath the authority of the One whose throne has no:
Boundary.

Pastoral Reflection

Most of us do not notice:
Restraint.
We notice what:
Happens.
The door that:
Opens.
The problem that:
Arrives.
The diagnosis we:
Receive.
The relationship that:

Breaks.
The crisis that crosses into our:
Lives.
What we cannot see are all the boundaries that existed before that:
Moment.
Verse 14 gives us an unusual glimpse behind the:
Curtain.
Before the angels were released—
they were:
Bound.
But that does not answer the painful:
Question.
Why were they released?
And we should not pretend that it:
Does.
There are moments in our lives when we will not understand why something painful was permitted to enter our:
Story.
Faith does not require us to invent an:
Answer.
Sometimes faith says:
I do not understand why this was allowed.
But then adds:
I will not confuse what has been allowed with the One who reigns.
That distinction can become enormously:
Important.
The crisis is not:
God.
The illness is not:
God.
The loss is not:
God.
The fear is not:
God.
And none of them receives His:
Attributes.
They are not:
All-powerful.
They are not:
Eternal.
They do not own the:
Future.
They do not sit upon the:

Throne.
So perhaps when something frightening crosses a boundary into our lives, we can remember one small word from:
Revelation.
Bound.
Not as an explanation for our:
Pain.
Not as permission to speculate about invisible boundaries we cannot:
See.
But as a reminder that created things remain:
Created.
There are limits we cannot:
See.
There are mysteries we cannot:
Explain.
But there is still a throne we can:
Remember.
And the worst thing that enters my life cannot become my:
God.
It cannot rewrite who Christ:
Is.
And it cannot finally rewrite whose I:
Am.

Something Worth Pondering

The command says:
Release.
Fear hears that word and immediately imagines:
Chaos.
But Revelation gives us another word in the same:
Sentence.
Bound.
Perhaps faith needs to hear them:
Together.
Released.
But previously:
Bound.
Active.
But still:
Created.
Dangerous.
But not:
Divine.
Powerful.

But not:
Sovereign.
The river may represent a boundary to human:
Eyes.
But there is no boundary beyond which God ceases to:
Reign.
Perhaps the thing that frightens us most is not simply that something has:
Power.
It is the fear that nothing has power over:
It.
Revelation answers that:
Fear.
The angels were:
Bound.
They did not:
Escape.
They were:
Released.
The restraint did not:
Fail.
The throne did not:
Move.
And even beyond the great River:
Euphrates—
God was already:
There.

Ask Yourself This:

When something frightening crosses a boundary into my:
Life—
do I see only what has been:
Released—
or can I remember that released does not mean:
Sovereign?
When I possess the ability to speak, influence, control, or:
Wound—
do I ask merely:
Can I?
Or also:
Should I?
And:
Would this resemble the Lamb?

And when I reach a boundary I do not:
Understand—
can I resist inventing an explanation and trust that the river marking the edge of my understanding does not mark the edge of God's:
Reign?

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:15

“And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.”
— Revelation 9:15, KJV

Verse 14 gave the:
Command.
Release.
Now the command is:
Carried out.
The four angels are:
Released.
But John immediately tells us something important about:
Them.
They had been held:
Ready.
For the:
Hour.
The:
Day.
The:
Month.
And the:
Year.
Their release is not:
Random.
Their appearance is not an unexpected outbreak of:
Chaos.
They have been prepared for an appointed:
Moment.
And once again, before John tells us what destructive power:
Does—
he tells us something about its:
Limits.
The altar before the:
Army.
The restraint before the:
Release.
And now:
The appointment before the action.

1. The Appointment Before the Action

The four angels are:
Released.
But they do not choose the moment of their:
Release.
They do not announce:
We are ready.
They do not seize an opportunity because heaven has become:
Distracted.
They have been held ready for an appointed:
Time.
The:
Hour.
The:
Day.
The:
Month.
The:
Year.
John deliberately stacks the language of:
Time.
The effect is:
Unmistakable.
This is an:
Appointment.
Not an:
Accident.
Not an:
Escape.
Not an unforeseen outbreak of:
Chaos.
An appointed:
Moment.
And that appointment comes before the:
Action.
The angels are:
Powerful.
Their purpose is:
Terrible.
But before John tells us what they accomplish—
he tells us that their moment has already been:
Set.
Once again, Revelation places divine sovereignty before destructive:

Power.

2. God Owns the Clock

Throughout Chapter 9 we have repeatedly said:

Evil has a clock.

Verse 15 takes that truth even:

Further.

Evil does not merely have a:

Clock.

God owns the clock.

The angels do not determine their:

Hour.

They cannot move the hands:

Forward.

They cannot turn them:

Backward.

They cannot create another:

Moment.

They:

Wait.

And waiting itself reveals:

Limitation.

These beings possess:

Power.

But they do not possess authority over:

Time.

Human beings understand something about:

Waiting.

We measure:

Time.

Schedule:

Time.

Manage:

Time.

Complain about:

Time.

Waste:

Time.

Wish for more:

Time.

But we do not create:

Time.

We live:

Inside it.

We see:
Moments.
We live the page currently open before:
Us.
And sometimes we mistake that page for the entire:
Story.
Verse 15 reminds us that there is a larger:
Story.
The hour has a place within:
It.
So does the:
Day.
The:
Month.
The:
Year.
The angels have their appointed:
Moment.
But the moment does not belong to:
Them.
The darkness has a schedule.
But it does not own the:
Calendar.

3. Precision Is Not Calculation

John could simply have said:
They were prepared for the appointed:
Time.
Instead he gives us:
Hour.
Day.
Month.
Year.
The language is deliberately:
Precise.
But precision is not the same as:
Calculation.
That distinction is:
Critical.
John tells us there is a precise:
Appointment.
He does not give us the information necessary to calculate that appointment on our:
Calendars.

The point is not:
Figure out when.
The point is:
Someone already knows when.
That changes the emphasis:
Completely.
Verse 15 is not an invitation to prophetic:
Mathematics.
It is a declaration of divine:
Sovereignty.
Revelation has often been treated like a calendar:
Puzzle.
Dates.
Years.
Generations.
Timelines.
Intervals.
Calculations.
Predictions.
And repeatedly those predictions have:
Failed.
Perhaps calculation was never the:
Point.
The Church was not commanded to become expert prophetic:
Accountants.
The Church was called to:
Watch.
Repent.
Worship.
Remain:
Faithful.
Endure.
Knowing there is an appointment is:
Enough.
We do not need to know the:
Date.
The angels themselves do not control:
It.
Why should the Church imagine its calling is to discover what heaven has not:
Disclosed?
The hour is:
Appointed.

The date is not:
Given.
Those truths belong:
Together.

4. Faithfulness Does Not Require a Calendar

Faithfulness does not require a:
Calendar.
It requires:
Christ.
We can follow Jesus without knowing when every prophetic event will:
Occur.
In fact, becoming consumed with:
When?
can distract us from another question:
How?
How should I:
Live?
How should I:
Love?
How should I:
Worship?
How should I:
Endure?
Revelation is more concerned with who we become than what we:
Calculate.
Information:
Matters.
Understanding:
Matters.
Interpretation:
Matters.
But transformation is the:
Goal.
Someone could construct the most elaborate prophetic chart imaginable—
every seal:
Located.
Every trumpet:
Dated.
Every symbol:
Identified.
Every event placed neatly upon a:
Timeline.
And still fail to love:

Christ.
Still fail to love:
Neighbor.
Still fail to love:
Enemy.
Still fail to:
Endure.
Then the chart has taught us the wrong:
Lesson.
Revelation is not merely trying to produce people who know something about the:
Future.
It is forming people who can remain faithful to Christ whatever the future:
Contains.
The appointed hour should therefore produce:
Humility.
Not:
Arrogance.
We do not know:
Everything.
We were never expected to know:
Everything.
Creaturely knowledge has:
Limits.
And perhaps there is freedom in finally admitting:
That.

5. Trust Is Not Prediction

If I were required to understand every future event before I could trust:
God—
faith would become:
Impossible.
God asks something both simpler and more:
Difficult.
Trust Me.
Trust is different from:
Prediction.
Prediction says:
I know what happens next.
Trust says:
I know who will be there when it happens.
Those are very different:
Statements.
Christian faith is primarily the:

Second.
We do not know every:
Tomorrow.
But we know the One we will meet when tomorrow becomes:
Today.
That language can become sentimental if we are not:
Careful.
Verse 15 gives it theological:
Weight.
The angels have an:
Appointment.
The future is not unknown to:
God.
It may be unknown to:
Us.
But human ignorance is not divine:
Ignorance.
Life can change in:
Seconds.
A phone:
Call.
An:
Accident.
A:
Diagnosis.
A:
Death.
A:
Decision.
And we say:
I never saw that coming.
Verse 15 tells us that human surprise does not mean divine:
Surprise.
That does not answer:
Why.
It does not remove:
Pain.
It does not make tragedy:
Easy.
It simply means that our inability to see what was coming is not evidence that God has lost His:
Way.
Trust does not say:

I know tomorrow.
Trust says:
I know Christ.
And sometimes that must be:
Enough.

6. “I Don't Understand” and “God Is Sovereign” Can Stand Together

This is where we must be especially:
Careful.
Revelation 9:15 describes a particular apocalyptic:
Judgment.
The angels have been prepared for an appointed:
Moment.
That does **not** authorize us to look at every tragedy in ordinary human life and declare:
God scheduled this.
We do not know:
That.
We must not use divine sovereignty as an explanation for mysteries Scripture itself has not:
Explained.
When illness:
Comes.
When someone:
Dies.
When a relationship:
Breaks.
When a job:
Disappears.
When tragedy enters someone's:
Life.
We should be very cautious about pretending we know why God permitted that particular:
Thing.
Faith does not require invented:
Explanations.
Sometimes the most faithful sentence is:
I don't know why.
And that sentence can stand beside another:
God is still God.
Both can be:
True.
I do not understand why this:

Happened.
And:
God is still:
God.
I do not understand why this was:
Allowed.
And:
Christ is still:
Lord.
I cannot explain the:
Mystery.
And:
I will not pretend the mystery means God has disappeared from the:
Story.
Revelation does not solve the entire problem of:
Suffering.
It refuses something different:
Meaningless, sovereign:
Chaos.
Within this vision, the angels are:
Prepared.
The moment is:
Appointed.
The effect is:
Limited.
Chaos does not possess final:
Authority.
That is comforting without pretending to be:
Explanatory.
And sometimes comfort does not come from knowing:
Why.
Sometimes comfort comes from knowing that the One we trust has not ceased to be:
God.

7. Place. Time. Extent.

Verse 14 gave us the:
Boundary.
Verse 15 gives us the:
Clock.
And then the verse gives us the:
Extent.
Where?
The:

Euphrates.
When?
An appointed:
Moment.
How much?
A:
Third.
Place.
Time.
Extent.
All are:
Bounded.
That is remarkable in a chapter that feels increasingly:
Unbounded.
John keeps measuring the:
Darkness.
Five:
Months.
A:
Third.
An appointed:
Hour.
What can be measured is not:
Infinite.
Five months is:
Measured.
A third is:
Measured.
An hour is:
Measured.
The darkness is:
Terrible.
But it is not:
Infinite.
The creatures have:
Limits.
The angels have:
Limits.
The judgments have:
Limits.
God alone is:
God.

And that distinction matters because fear naturally exaggerates what frightens:
Us.
Fear whispers:
Forever.
Revelation keeps answering:
Measured.
Fear says:
Everything.
Revelation says:
A third.
Fear says:
No boundary.
Revelation gives us:
Place.
Time.
Extent.
The darkness has power.
But it does not receive:
Infinity.
That belongs to:
God.

8. A Third Is Not Just a Number

Then John tells us the purpose for which these angels have been:
Prepared.
To kill a third of:
Humankind.
The language becomes:
Severe.
We should not soften:
It.
The sixth trumpet escalates the:
Judgment.
Under the fifth trumpet, the locusts were not permitted to:
Kill.
They could:
Torment.
Now the restriction:
Changes.
Death enters the:
Vision.
The second woe is more severe than the:
First.

Torment.
Then:
Death.
Revelation wants us to feel the:
Weight.
This is not merely an interesting sequence for prophetic:
Charts.
People:
Die.
The imagery should:
Disturb us.
If judgment becomes entertainment, we are reading Revelation:
Wrong.
There can be a strange fascination with apocalyptic:
Destruction.
People can discuss catastrophe almost:
Excitedly.
As though devastation were:
Spectacle.
John is not giving us an action:
Movie.
He is showing us:
Judgment.
And a third of humanity is not merely a:
Number.
Every fraction contains:
People.
Lives.
Relationships.
Families.
Stories.
Faces.
Numbers can protect us from:
Compassion.
Thousands.
Millions.
A:
Third.
Eventually the scale becomes so large that suffering becomes emotionally:
Distant.
Statistics replace:
Faces.
But the Christian must resist:

That.
Judgment should produce:
Sobriety.
Not:
Glee.
Not self-righteous:
Satisfaction.
Not fascination with:
Destruction.
We are not spectators applauding from a morally superior:
Balcony.
We too stand under:
Grace.
And if we speak about judgment without remembering grace—
we can become:
Cruel.

9. The Judge Is Also the Lamb

The Cross should shape how Christians speak about:
Judgment.
At the Cross we encounter both the seriousness of:
Sin—
and the depth of divine:
Love.
Neither should be:
Minimized.
God does not treat evil as:
Trivial.
Neither should:
We.
But God does not remain distant from human:
Suffering.
In Christ—
He enters:
It.
The One worthy to open the scroll is the One who appears:
Slain.
The Judge is also the:
Lamb.
Judgment belongs to the One who bears:
Wounds.
That does not make Verse 15:
Easy.
A third of humanity is:

Killed.
We should allow that sentence to remain:
Difficult.
Not every biblical text is meant to make us immediately:
Comfortable.
Some texts are meant to:
Wake us.
And this is one of:
Them.
The Christian response is not to make judgment less:
Serious.
Nor is it to become enthusiastic about the suffering of:
Others.
The Cross gives us another:
Way.
Take evil:
Seriously.
Take grace:
Seriously.
Take suffering:
Seriously.
And never forget that the Judge revealed in Revelation is the Lamb who was:
Slain.

10. Warning Can Be Mercy

Some texts function like:
Alarms.
An alarm is unpleasant because the danger is:
Real.
Nobody complains that the smoke alarm lacks:
Gentleness—
while the house is:
Burning.
If danger is real—
warning can be:
Mercy.
Silence would be:
Cruel.
The trumpet is therefore an appropriate:
Image.
Trumpets:
Announce.
Warn.
Gather.

Signal.
They say:
Pay attention.
And the sixth trumpet demands:
Attention.
The consequences of rebellion are becoming increasingly:
Severe.
But the chapter is moving toward an even deeper:
Question.
Will humanity repent?
We know where Chapter 9 is:
Going.
Verses 20 and 21 will tell us something:
Tragic.
The survivors still do not:
Repent.
That makes the warning even more:
Painful.
Judgment exposes where rebellion:
Leads.
Look where this road:
Goes.
Look what separation from the source of life:
Produces.
Look what happens when worship becomes:
Distorted.
And hear the invitation still implicit within the:
Warning.
Turn.
Warning can be mercy because warning still assumes there is something worth:
Hearing.

11. “Make This Stop” Is Not the Same as “Change My Heart”

One of Revelation 9's hardest truths is that suffering does not automatically produce:
Repentance.
Pain can awaken:
Us.
Pain can also harden:
Us.
We can regret:
Consequences—

without regretting the path that produced:
Them.
We can desperately want:
Relief—
without wanting:
Transformation.
Make this stop
is not always the same prayer as:
Change my heart.
Both may be honest:
Prayers.
When we hurt, asking for the pain to stop is entirely:
Human.
Jesus Himself prayed in the presence of approaching:
Suffering.
But repentance goes:
Deeper.
Repentance says:
Turn:
Me.
Change my:
Direction.
Restore my:
Allegiance.
Show me what I have become.
Bring me:
Home.
Revelation repeatedly returns to:
Allegiance.
Who do you:
Worship?
Whom do you:
Follow?
What kingdom shapes your:
Life?
What kind of person are you:
Becoming?
The appointed hour is therefore not given merely for:
Spectators.
It is given to:
Disciples.
The question is not:
Can you identify the hour?

The question is:
Will you be faithful before it arrives?

12. Today Matters More Than the Date

Yesterday is:
Gone.
Tomorrow is not yet:
Ours.
Today is where obedience becomes:
Possible.
Today we can:
Follow.
Love.
Pray.
Serve.
Forgive.
Speak truth.
Repent.
Endure.
We often want information about:
Tomorrow.
God gives grace for:
Today.
We want the whole:
Map.
Often we receive the next:
Step.
Israel received daily:
Manna.
Not a warehouse filled with:
Tomorrow.
Daily:
Bread.
Daily:
Grace.
Daily:
Faithfulness.
Verse 15 gives us God's calendar without giving us the:
Date.
There is a:
Date.
You do not know:
It.
God does.

And perhaps faith learns to say:
That is:
Enough.
We would prefer:
Details.
God gives:
Himself.
We are not saved by knowing the:
Schedule.
We are saved by:
Christ.
That keeps prophecy in its proper:
Place.
Prophecy serves:
Faithfulness.
It does not replace the:
Gospel.
The future belongs to:
Jesus.
Not to our:
Charts.
Not to our:
Predictions.
Not to our:
Calculations.
Not to our ability to interpret every:
Symbol.
Jesus.
So we study:
Carefully.
Compare:
Scripture.
Learn:
History.
Consider:
Language.
Listen to:
Scholarship.
And remain:
Humble.
Sometimes:
Perhaps
is a faithful:

Word.
So is:
Possibly.
So is:
We cannot know with certainty.
Those are not necessarily signs of weak:
Faith.
They can be signs of responsible:
Interpretation.
Certainty should match the:
Text.
Where Scripture is:
Clear—
we can be:
Clear.
Where Scripture is:
Ambiguous—
we should be:
Cautious.
Verse 15 is clear about what matters:
The angels were:
Prepared.
The moment was:
Appointed.
Their purpose was:
Severe.
Their effect was:
Limited.
That is:
Enough.

13. Hold the Handrail

The more terrifying the imagery becomes, the more John seems to leave us theological:
Handrails.
Bound.
Prepared.
Appointed.
A:
Third.
And behind those:
The:
Throne.
The:

Lamb.
The:
Seal.
The:
Key.
The:
Limits.
The:
Altar.
The:
Appointment.
Chapter 9 can feel like a dark:
Stairway.
So:
Hold the handrail while walking through the darkness.
Faith does not require seeing the entire:
Staircase.
Sometimes we receive enough light for the next:
Step.
We want:
Floodlights.
Sometimes God gives a:
Lamp.
And endurance lives one step at a:
Time.
One:
Day.
One:
Prayer.
One act of:
Faithfulness.
One decision not to:
Quit.
One moment of trusting:
Christ.
We may never understand the entire:
Calendar.
But we can live faithfully within the day we have been:
Given.
God holds the:
Hour.
We are called to faithfulness within:
It.

We should not reverse those:
Responsibilities.
We often try to manage God's:
Calendar—
while neglecting today's:
Faithfulness.
When will this:
End?
When will that:
Happen?
When will God:
Act?
When will something finally:
Change?
Those questions are:
Understandable.
But another question may matter even:
More.
Who am I becoming while I wait?
Bitter?
Fearful?
Controlling?
Or:
Faithful?
Patient?
Compassionate?
More dependent upon:
God?
Waiting is not necessarily doing:
Nothing.
Faithful waiting can include:
Prayer.
Service.
Preparation.
Obedience.
Love.
Work.
Hope.
We do what belongs to:
Today.
And leave tomorrow with:
God.

Perhaps some of our anxiety comes from trying to carry authority we were never:
Given.
We want to:
Know.
Control.
Predict.
Guarantee.
But we were never given control of the:
Hour.
Sometimes surrendering the calendar is itself an act of:
Faith.
**Lord, I do not know:
When.
I do not know:
How.
I do not know what tomorrow:
Contains.
But I know:
You.**
That is not intellectual:
Surrender.
It is relational:
Trust.

14. The Darkness Has a Schedule—but It Does Not Own the Calendar

Verse 15 gives us both:
Terror.
And:
Boundary.
Terror:
A third of humanity is:
Killed.
Boundary:
Even this terrible event is:
Measured.
Prepared.
Appointed.
Limited.
The darkness has a:
Schedule.
But it does not own the:
Calendar.

The angels have their:
Hour.
Their:
Day.
Their:
Month.
Their:
Year.
But those belong inside a larger:
Story.
The angels were:
Bound.
Then:
Released.
They had been:
Prepared.
For an appointed:
Moment.
Their judgment would be:
Terrible.
But even its extent would be:
Limited.
The darkness has:
Power.
But not ultimate:
Authority.
It has an:
Appointment.
But it does not own:
Time.
It has a:
Purpose within the vision.
But it does not write the final:
Story.
So when the future frightens:
Us—
when we wonder what tomorrow might:
Bring—
when we wish God would show us the entire:
Calendar—
perhaps Verse 15 invites us to surrender something we were never meant to:
Carry.
The:

Future.
We do not know the:
Hour.
We do not need to know the:
Hour.
We need to know the One who holds the:
Hour.
The angels have an:
Appointment.
The darkness has a:
Schedule.
But God owns the:
Clock.
And the Church is called not to:
Calculate—
but to:
Endure.

Pastoral Reflection

Most of us would like God to give us a:
Calendar.
Not merely dates for prophetic:
Events.
Dates for our own:
Lives.
When will this difficult season:
End?
When will the answer:
Come?
When will the door:
Open?
When will the grief become easier to:
Carry?
When will things finally:
Change?
We ask:
When?
And sometimes heaven seems:
Silent.
Verse 15 does not give us the dates we:
Want.
Instead, it tells us there is an appointed:
Time.
But we need to handle that truth with great:

Care.
This verse does not mean that every painful event in our lives should be simplistically described as something God directly:
Scheduled.
Revelation 9:15 describes a particular apocalyptic:
Judgment.
It does not give us permission to explain every:
Illness.
Accident.
Loss.
Death.
Broken relationship.
Or tragedy—
as though we had been allowed to read God's private:
Calendar.
We have not.
We must not use sovereignty to explain mysteries Scripture has not:
Explained.
Sometimes:
I don't know why
is faithful:
Theology.
But we can surrender the illusion that everything depends upon our ability to predict the:
Future.
We do not know the:
Hour.
Perhaps we were never meant:
To.
We were meant to know:
Christ.
So if you are waiting today—
for an:
Answer—
for:
Healing—
for:
Direction—
for:
Resolution—
for the end of something:
Difficult—
perhaps the prayer is not:

Lord, show me the entire calendar.
Perhaps it is:
Lord, give me grace for today.
Tomorrow's grace belongs to:
Tomorrow.
Today's grace is already:
Here.
And when tomorrow becomes:
Today—
grace will meet us:
There.
One:
Day.
One:
Prayer.
One act of:
Faithfulness.
One step beside:
Christ.
That is how faith:
Endures.

Something Worth Pondering

Hour.
Day.
Month.
Year.
John could hardly make the language of timing more:
Deliberate.
And yet he gives us no date to:
Calculate.
Perhaps that is the:
Point.
The appointment is:
Known.
Just not to:
Us.
We often imagine peace will finally come when we know what happens:
Next.
But Christian peace rests somewhere:
Deeper.
Not in knowing the:
Schedule.
In knowing the:

Savior.
There are things on God's calendar that are not written on:
Ours.
There are answers we cannot yet:
See.
There are endings whose dates we do not:
Know.
But ignorance of the date does not mean absence of:
God.
The darkness has a:
Schedule.
But it does not own the:
Calendar.
And perhaps faith can live with not knowing:
When—
because faith knows:
Who.

Ask Yourself This:

When I want God to show me what happens:
Next—
am I seeking:
Trust—
or trying to gain control over a future that was never mine to:
Carry?
When suffering comes—
can I say:
I don't know why
without turning mystery into an explanation God has not:
Given?
And while I wait for:
Tomorrow—
what faithfulness has Christ placed before me:
Today?

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:16

“And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them.”
— Revelation 9:16, KJV

The four angels have been:
Released.
Their appointed time has:
Come.
Their terrible purpose has been:
Stated.
Then John hears something:
Else.
A:
Number.
Not:
Two hundred.
Not:
Two thousand.
Not:
Two hundred thousand.
Two hundred:
Million.
The vision suddenly expands from four:
Angels—
to an enormous:
Army.
Mounted:
Troops.
Cavalry.
A force so immense that ordinary imagination struggles to hold the:
Number.
And perhaps that is precisely what the number is supposed to:
Do.
Overwhelm:
Us.
But there is something else we must:
Remember.
Two hundred million may be:
Enormous.
It is not:

Infinite.

1. John Hears a Number

John gives us an interesting:
Detail.
He does not say:
I counted them.
That would be nearly impossible to:
Imagine.
He does not say:
I estimated their number.
He says:
I heard their number.
The number belongs to the visionary:
Revelation.
It is:
Disclosed.
John knows the number because he:
Hears it.
This is not battlefield:
Arithmetic.
John is not standing on a hill trying to count rows of:
Cavalry.
He receives the number as part of the:
Vision.
That should make us cautious about treating it merely as an ordinary military:
Statistic.
Revelation uses numbers in different:
Ways.
They can communicate:
Scale.
Completeness.
Limitation.
Order.
Symbolic significance.
Sometimes several things at:
Once.
So is two hundred million intended as a precise literal:
Count?
Is it primarily an expression of overwhelming:
Magnitude?
Interpreters:
Differ.

And the text does not require us to settle every question before we can understand its:
Impact.
Whatever else the number may:
Mean—
the impact is unmistakable.
The army is:
Enormous.

2. Two Hundred Million

The KJV's "two hundred thousand thousand" is two hundred million. That number is meant to make us:
Stop.
Imagine hearing Revelation read aloud in a first-century:
Church.
Two hundred:
Million.
The congregation could not picture every:
Soldier.
They were not expected:
To.
The number pushes beyond ordinary human:
Experience.
John's hearers knew:
Armies.
They knew:
Cavalry.
They knew imperial military:
Power.
But a force of two hundred million mounted troops exceeds anything they could ordinarily:
Imagine.
That is characteristic of apocalyptic:
Imagery.
It stretches the:
Imagination.
It makes the hearer feel:
Small.
And that feeling is part of the:
Vision.
Revelation repeatedly expands our:
Horizon.
Vast:
Forces.

Cosmic:
Scenes.
Enormous:
Multitudes.
Things too large for ordinary human experience to:
Contain.
Two hundred million belongs within that:
World.
The number overwhelms ordinary:
Imagination.
But overwhelming is not the same as:
Ultimate.

3. Enormous Is Not Infinite

Something can be enormous without being:
Infinite.
Something can be numerous without being:
Sovereign.
Something can be overwhelming without being:
God.
Two hundred million is still a:
Number.
That may sound:
Obvious.
Theologically, it matters:
Enormously.
A number can be:
Defined.
Counted.
Bounded.
Two hundred million may feel:
Limitless.
But it is not:
Limitless.
It has an:
Amount.
Eventually the counting:
Stops.
And perhaps that gives us the central sentence for this entire:
Verse.
Enormous is not infinite.
Fear often confuses the:
Two.
That problem is too:

Big.
That enemy is too:
Powerful.
That situation is too:
Complicated.
That future is too:
Uncertain.
Then fear quietly adds a:
Conclusion.
Therefore:
There is no:
Hope.
But the conclusion does not necessarily follow from the:
Facts.
Something may be bigger than:
Me.
That does not make it bigger than:
God.
Something may exceed my ability to:
Understand.
That does not make it:
Infinite.
Something may overwhelm my:
Resources.
That does not make it:
Sovereign.
The army is:
Huge.
The throne is still:
Higher.

4. Fear Counts the Army; Faith Remembers the Throne

That has been one of the theological themes running throughout this:
Chapter.
Fear counts the army.
Faith remembers the throne.
Verse 16 gives that line a:
Home.
But we must understand what it does **not**:
Mean.
Faith does not pretend the army is:
Small.
That would be:
Denial.

Two hundred million is not:
Small.
Faith does not say:
There really aren't that many.
Faith looks honestly at what stands before:
It.
Two hundred:
Million.
Then faith refuses to make the threat:
God.
That is a different kind of:
Courage.
Christian courage is not mathematical:
Denial.
It does not require us to reduce the size of what frightens:
Us.
Sometimes what stands before us really is larger than:
Us.
Sometimes our resources really are:
Insufficient.
Sometimes we genuinely cannot solve the problem in front of:
Us.
Faith allows us to say:
This is bigger than me.
But faith refuses the next:
Sentence.
Therefore there is no hope.
Because hope was never grounded in our ability to be larger than the:
Problem.
The army may overwhelm human:
Strength.
It cannot overwhelm the:
Throne.
Fear counts the:
Army.
Faith remembers the:
Throne.

5. Do Not Judge Reality by Visible Size

Revelation repeatedly exposes the limits of visible human:
Power.
Empires appear:
Invincible.
Kings appear:

Powerful.
Armies appear:
Unstoppable.
Economic systems appear:
Permanent.
Then Revelation pulls back the:
Curtain.
Governments:
Change.
Borders:
Move.
Armies:
Disappear.
Civilizations:
Rise.
Civilizations:
Fall.
No human empire possesses:
Forever.
That word belongs to:
God.
The Church's hope therefore cannot rest in human:
Permanence.
There is no such:
Thing.
Revelation relocates our:
Security.
Away from:
Empire.
Away from:
Army.
Away from:
Economy.
Away from human:
Power.
Toward the:
Lamb.
That would have been radical for John's original:
Hearers.
Rome surrounded:
Them.
Roman authority appeared:
Everywhere.

Roman military power enforced imperial:
Order.
The Church looked:
Tiny.
Then Revelation says:
Do not judge reality by visible size.
The Church may look:
Small.
Empire may look:
Huge.
But appearance does not determine ultimate:
Reality.
The Lamb Himself looked:
Defeated.
He had been:
Slain.
Yet He:
Stands.
That single image overturns the world's understanding of:
Power.
What looks weak may be:
Victorious.
What looks victorious may already be passing:
Away.
So an enormous army does not automatically mean:
Victory.
Numbers can create the appearance of:
Invincibility.
But Revelation has already taught us:
Appearance is not the same as ultimate:
Reality.
The Lamb remains the interpretive:
Center.

6. Revelation Was Not Waiting for a Modern Population Census

Two hundred million has repeatedly invited modern:
Speculation.
Which nation could field an army that:
Large?
Which population could provide that many:
Soldiers?
Which geopolitical coalition fits the:
Number?

Our interpretive discipline remains:
Consistent.
We do not begin with today's:
Map.
We begin with John's:
Vision.
And with the churches that first heard:
It.
Revelation was not waiting for a modern population census.
The first Christians did not need twenty-first-century demographic:
Data—
to understand that two hundred million represented overwhelming:
Magnitude.
The image already:
Worked.
If our interpretation requires information unavailable to John's first hearers before the verse can become meaningful—
we should become:
Cautious.
Revelation was written to actual:
Churches.
They were expected to:
Hear.
Understand enough to:
Respond.
And:
Endure.
The number must therefore speak meaningfully within their:
World.
An unimaginable:
Army.
Overwhelming military:
Force.
Threat beyond ordinary human:
Capacity.
That much they could:
Understand.
Then we bring that truth into:
Our world.
Not by asking:
Which modern army is this?
But:
What does Revelation teach us when power appears overwhelming?

That question remains relevant in every:
Generation.

7. What Do We Do When We Feel Small?

Every generation encounters powers that seem overwhelmingly:
Large.
Military.
Political.
Economic.
Cultural.
Technological.
Institutional.
Personal.
The forms:
Change.
The theological question:
Remains.
What do we do when we feel small?
What happens to faith when the force before us appears unimaginably:
Large?
Do we:
Panic?
Surrender?
Compromise?
Or remember whose we:
Are?
The Church's security has never been its ability to outnumber every:
Enemy.
It cannot.
Christianity did not begin with numerical:
Superiority.
Quite the:
Opposite.
An occupied:
Land.
An executed:
Messiah.
Ordinary:
Disciples.
No:
Army.
No:
Empire.
And yet the Gospel:

Spread.
Not through:
Cavalry.
Not through military:
Conquest.
Through:
Witness.
Service.
Sacrifice.
Preaching.
Community.
Martyrdom.
Faithfulness.
That is a different kind of:
Power.
The world counts:
Troops.
The Kingdom counts:
Witnesses.
The world asks:
How many soldiers?
Jesus asks:
Who will follow Me?
And that question reaches every:
Generation.
Including:
Ours.

8. Numbers Can Measure Without Defining

Numbers:
Matter.
But numbers do not determine:
Truth.
Something does not become true because millions believe:
It.
Something does not become false because only a few believe:
It.
Truth is not decided by:
Majority.
The Church therefore needs to be careful about worshiping:
Numbers.
Attendance.
Revenue.
Followers.

Views.
Subscribers.
Influence.
Reach.
Sales.
Those can be useful:
Measurements.
They are terrible:
Gods.
Bigger does not automatically mean:
Better.
And smaller does not automatically mean:
Faithful.
We should not romanticize either:
One.
Large can be:
Faithful.
Small can be:
Faithful.
Large can be:
Unfaithful.
Small can be:
Unfaithful.
The question is not:
Size.
The question is:
Allegiance.
Metrics can:
Inform us.
They should not:
Define us.
That applies to:
Ministry.
Work.
Publishing.
Church.
Life.
If enough people attend my:
Church—
that does not tell me who I:
Am.
If enough people read my:
Book—

that does not tell me my:
Worth.
If enough people approve of:
Me—
that does not establish my:
Faithfulness.
Numbers are measurements.
They are not:
Identity.
The Lamb does not ask us to become:
Impressive.
He asks us to become:
Faithful.
That may result in large:
Influence.
It may result in:
Small.
The scale belongs to:
God.
Faithfulness belongs to the calling placed before:
Us.

9. Remember the Other Multitude

Two hundred million is an enormous:
Number.
But this is not the first enormous multitude Revelation has shown:
Us.
Chapter 7 already gave us another:
Multitude.
A multitude John could not:
Count.
From every:
Nation.
Tribe.
People.
Language.
Standing before the:
Throne.
That matters.
One multitude:
Threatens.
The other:
Worships.
One belongs to the imagery of:

Judgment.
The other stands before the:
Throne.
Which multitude defines the final:
Future?
The worshiping multitude:
Does.
Chapter 9 does not erase Chapter: 7
The frightening army does not cancel God's redeemed:
People.
Never let the dark chapter erase the bright one.
Revelation requires long:
Memory.
We keep discovering:
That.
Remember the:
Throne.
Remember the:
Lamb.
Remember the:
Seal.
Remember the:
Altar.
Remember the:
Multitude.
Then look at the army.
Fear has short:
Memory.
Fear sees only what is immediately in front of:
Us.
The latest:
Threat.
The newest:
Problem.
The current:
Headline.
The present:
Pain.
Faith remembers the larger:
Story.
That does not make faith:
Naive.
It makes faith historically and theologically:

Grounded.
God was faithful:
Before.
God remains faithful:
Now.
And this present darkness does not erase everything God has already:
Revealed.
Memory gives the present threat its proper:
Size.

10. Heaven Knows What Earth Cannot Count

John hears a specific:
Number.
Two hundred:
Million.
He could never personally count such a:
Force.
Yet the number is:
Known.
There is something quietly important:
There.
Heaven knows what earth cannot count.
Human inability to comprehend something does not make it incomprehensible to:
God.
There are many things too large for:
Us.
Possibilities.
Consequences.
Variables.
Problems.
Questions.
The future.
We quickly reach the boundaries of human:
Understanding.
God does:
Not.
Sometimes we mistake our limit for God's:
Limit.
I cannot see a way.
Therefore:
There is no way.
I cannot:
Understand.

Therefore:
It cannot make:
Sense.
I cannot imagine:
Restoration.
Therefore:
Restoration is impossible.
Those conclusions go too:
Far.
“I cannot see” tells us something about me.
It does not necessarily tell us something about:
God.
Faith does not require us to pretend we can see what we:
Cannot.
If I cannot see a way:
Forward—
I do not have to invent:
One.
Faith can say:
I do not know.
And then add:
My vision is not the boundary of God's possibilities.
That is humility and hope standing:
Together.
Humility:
I do not know.
Hope:
God does.
We do not need to pretend that we possess heaven's:
Perspective.
We simply stop confusing the limits of our vision with the limits of:
God.

11. Revelation Gives Enough

John receives what he needs to:
Know.
The:
Number.
Not a complete military:
Manifest.
We often want:
More.
Names.
Locations.

Dates.
Mechanisms.
Detailed:
Explanations.
John often gives:
Images.
And images form us differently than:
Charts.
A chart invites:
Analysis.
An image engages:
Imagination.
Emotion.
Memory.
Fear.
Hope.
Worship.
Revelation was designed to be:
Heard.
Imagine hearing:
Two hundred million.
The words hang in the:
Room.
You feel their:
Weight.
Then ask what that feeling is supposed to:
Do.
Not make us:
Obsessive.
Not make us:
Paranoid.
Not make us search for modern military:
Candidates.
The number makes us confront how small human strength can:
Be.
Then Revelation redirects our dependence:
Again.
To the:
Lamb.
Wealth cannot carry the weight of:
God.
Empire cannot carry the weight of:
God.

Military strength cannot carry the weight of:
God.
Political influence cannot carry the weight of:
God.
Human wisdom cannot carry the weight of:
God.
Numbers cannot carry the weight of:
God.
That is what idolatry continually attempts to:
Do.
It asks created things to provide what only the Creator can:
Provide.
Ultimate:
Security.
Identity.
Meaning.
Hope.
Revelation gives us enough to expose those false:
Securities.
Then points us back toward the One who is:
Worthy.

12. Impressive Is Not Worthy

The army is:
Impressive.
Two hundred:
Million.
Mounted:
Troops.
The next verses will make them appear even more:
Terrifying.
But impressive is not the same as:
Worthy.
Revelation repeatedly separates spectacle from:
Worship.
Something can command:
Attention—
without deserving:
Allegiance.
The Beast will be:
Impressive.
Babylon will be:
Impressive.
The army is:

Impressive.
But only the Lamb is:
Worthy.
That distinction is:
Everything.
Power may:
Impress.
Beauty may:
Impress.
Wealth may:
Impress.
Numbers may:
Impress.
But worthiness belongs to:
Christ.
What impresses us can quietly begin to:
Rule us.
That is why discernment:
Matters.
We see:
Size.
Success.
Strength.
Influence.
And assume:
Authority.
Revelation says:
Look deeper.
Ask what kingdom the power:
Serves.
What does it:
Produce?
Whom does it:
Serve?
Does it give:
Life?
Does it:
Destroy?
Does it demand:
Worship?
Does it resemble the:
Lamb?
The army's size cannot answer those:

Questions.
Numbers tell us:
How many.
They do not tell us:
What kind.
Character remains more important than:
Scale.
Two hundred million destroyers are still:
Destroyers.
Multiplying evil does not make it:
Good.
A popular falsehood does not become:
Truth.
And a small act of faithfulness does not cease to be faithful because it is:
Small.

13. Small Faithfulness Still Matters

A cup of:
Water.
A quiet:
Prayer.
A:
Visit.
A word of:
Encouragement.
An act of:
Mercy.
Those things may look almost absurdly small beside two hundred million:
Horsemen.
But heaven measures:
Differently.
Jesus repeatedly draws our attention toward things the world considers:
Small.
A widow's:
Gift.
A mustard:
Seed.
A:
Child.
A:
Servant.
A:
Cross.
God repeatedly works through what the world considers:

Insignificant.
So we should not despise small:
Faithfulness.
Especially when confronting enormous:
Problems.
We look at the size of the need and ask:
What difference can I possibly make?
Perhaps that is the wrong:
Question.
Perhaps the better question is:
What does faithfulness require of me here?
We are not responsible for matching the army's:
Size.
That burden was never placed upon:
Us.
We are not commanded to become equally:
Impressive.
We are commanded to follow the:
Lamb.
The Kingdom does not need to out-spectacle the:
World.
It bears:
Witness.
Sometimes:
Quietly.
Sometimes:
Courageously.
Sometimes at tremendous:
Cost.
But:
Faithfully.
The early Church did not possess two hundred million:
Horsemen.
It had:
Witnesses.
And a:
Gospel.
From the world's perspective, that looked:
Weak.
But the Gospel does not need an army to be:
True.
Truth does not depend upon:
Force.

Jesus did not conquer by becoming a larger version of:
Caesar.
He conquered as the:
Lamb.
That must shape Christian:
Witness.
We do not advance Christ's Kingdom by becoming:
Coercive.
Cruel.
Manipulative.
Deceptive.
Those methods belong to another:
Kingdom.
We follow the Lamb's:
Way.
Truth.
Love.
Courage.
Sacrifice.
Holiness.
Mercy.
Faithfulness.
Those things may appear small beside:
Cavalry.
But appearance is not final:
Reality.
The question is not whether our obedience looks:
Impressive.
The question is whether it looks like:
Jesus.

14. Two Hundred Million Still Has an Ending

The first woe:
Passed.
This woe will not become:
Eternity.
The army has a place in the:
Story.
It does not own the:
Story.
Two hundred million still has an:
Ending.
Because two hundred million is still:
Finite.

The number sounds almost:
Infinite.
But almost infinite is still:
Finite.
Only God gets forever.
That gives us perspective without minimizing the:
Threat.
The army remains:
Terrifying.
The judgment remains:
Severe.
Human suffering remains:
Real.
But none of them receives the final:
Word.
Fear counts the:
Army.
Faith remembers the:
Throne.
That does not mean faith stops:
Counting.
It means faith knows numbers cannot tell the whole:
Story.
John gives us an army too large to:
Imagine.
Two hundred:
Million.
Human strength feels:
Small.
Human control feels:
Fragile.
Human certainty begins to:
Collapse.
Then faith remembers what Revelation has already:
Shown.
The:
Throne.
The:
Lamb.
The:
Seal.
The:
Altar.

The appointed:
Hour.
The:
Boundaries.
The worshiping:
Multitude.
The army is:
Enormous.
But enormous is not:
Infinite.
The army can be:
Numbered.
God cannot.
The army has an appointed:
Moment.
God possesses:
Eternity.
The army may overwhelm human:
Strength.
It cannot overwhelm the:
Throne.
So when something before us seems too large to:
Face—
when the numbers frighten:
Us—
when our own resources appear impossibly:
Small—
perhaps Verse 16 teaches us not to deny the size of what stands before:
Us.
Look at:
It.
Name:
It.
Count it if you:
Can.
Then:
Remember.
Fear counts the army.
Faith remembers the throne.
Two hundred million may be beyond our ability to:
Imagine.
But it is still only a:
Number.

And:
Enormous is not infinite.

Pastoral Reflection

There are moments when the numbers themselves become:
Frightening.
The amount of:
Debt.
The number of:
Tests.
The months without:
Work.
The responsibilities waiting on our:
Desk.
The problems within a:
Family.
The years of:
Grief.
The things that need to be:
Fixed.
We begin adding them:
Up.
Eventually we reach a number that feels larger than:
Us.
Perhaps it:
Is.
That can be especially difficult for people accustomed to solving:
Problems.
We like to believe that if we work hard:
Enough—
think long:
Enough—
plan carefully:
Enough—
we can eventually get everything under:
Control.
Then life gives us two hundred million:
Horsemen.
Something beyond our ability to:
Manage.
And perhaps the first spiritual lesson is simply:
You were never supposed to be God.
You are allowed to be:
Small.

You are allowed not to know how to solve:
Everything.
You are allowed to say:
This is bigger than me.
That confession is not necessarily:
Defeat.
It may be the beginning of:
Trust.
The Church was never asked to outnumber every:
Enemy.
The Christian was never asked to control every:
Outcome.
We were asked to remain faithful to the:
Lamb.
So when the numbers become overwhelming—
do what belongs to:
Today.
Pray the prayer you can:
Pray.
Love the person in front of:
You.
Do the work God has placed in your:
Hands.
Ask for help when you need:
It.
And leave sovereignty where it:
Belongs.
Fear counts the army.
Faith remembers the throne.

Something Worth Pondering

Two hundred million sounds almost:
Infinite.
But it is:
Not.
It can be:
Numbered.
That may be the quiet hope hidden inside an overwhelming:
Number.
Fear often takes something finite and gives it an infinite:
Name.
Forever.
Impossible.
Unstoppable.

Hopeless.
Those are very large:
Words.
Perhaps larger than our circumstances:
Deserve.
The army is:
Huge.
But not:
Infinite.
The problem may be:
Huge.
But it is not:
God.
The grief may feel:
Endless.
But it does not possess:
Eternity.
The future may be:
Unknown.
But it is not unknown to:
God.
Enormous is not infinite.
And sometimes faith begins when we stop asking ourselves to become bigger than the:
Army—
and remember:
God already:
Is.

Ask Yourself This:

When something in my life becomes overwhelmingly: Large—
have I begun giving something finite an infinite: Name?
Impossible.
Unstoppable.
Forever.
Hopeless.
Am I measuring faithfulness by: Size.
Influence.
Recognition.
Results.
Or am I willing to do something: Small—
when small is what obedience requires: Today?

And when I honestly admit: **This is bigger than me—**can I leave sovereignty where it belongs and remember: **Fear counts the army. Faith remembers the throne?**

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:17

"And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone."
— Revelation 9:17, KJV

The previous verse gave us what John:
Heard.
The number of the mounted:
Troops.
Two hundred:
Million.
Now John turns from hearing to:
Seeing.
And before he describes the horses—
he gives us an important interpretive:
Clue.
This was how I saw the horses in my:
Vision.
That word matters.
Vision.
John is describing something:
Seen.
Something:
Revealed.
Something communicated through the language of apocalyptic:
Imagery.
And perhaps the first responsibility of faithful interpretation is simply to let the vision remain a:
Vision.

1. This Is How I Saw Them in the Vision

John does not say:
This is the technical specification of the horses.
He does not say:
This is the military equipment I was shown but could not identify.
He says:
This was how I saw the horses in my vision.
Visionary language communicates through:
Images.

Those images can represent genuine realities without functioning as photographic descriptions of those:
Realities.
John has already taught us to read this:
Way.
Locusts like:
Horses.
Something like:
Crowns.
Faces like human:
Faces.
Hair like women's:
Hair.
Teeth like lions':
Teeth.
Breastplates like iron:
Breastplates.
Comparison has been everywhere.
Like.
Something like.
Appeared like.
Those words are interpretive:
Signals.
John is reaching for familiar language to describe an extraordinary:
Vision.
And now the vision becomes even more:
Vivid.
The riders wear breastplates of fire, jacinth, and brimstone. Jacinth here evokes a blue or violet color; brimstone is sulfur. The colors evoke:
Fire.
Jacinth.
Brimstone.
The horses have heads like:
Lions.
And from their mouths come:
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
John is painting with:
Images.
And he wants us to:
See.

2. Let the Vision Remain a Vision

That requires interpretive:
Discipline.
We should resist the urge to turn every image immediately into something:
Else.
John says the horses have heads **like** the heads of:
Lions.
Comparison.
Not:
Identification.
The horses are not ordinary:
Horses.
Ordinary horses do not have lion-like:
Heads.
They do not breathe:
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
We are unmistakably inside visionary:
Imagery.
And that means we should be careful about treating the vision as though John were drafting an engineering:
Drawing.
The purpose is theological.
Not:
Zoological.
Not:
Mechanical.
Not:
Technological.
John gives us familiar pieces arranged into an unfamiliar:
Whole.
Horse.
Lion.
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
The combination destabilizes ordinary:
Experience.
It tells us:
This is not ordinary.
Yet the pieces still:
Communicate.

Horse:
War.
Military force.
Lion:
Ferocity.
Predatory strength.
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
Destruction.
Judgment.
Together they create an image of overwhelming destructive:
Power.
We should not demand that the image become something other than what John tells us he:
Saw.

3. The Image Does Not Need an Engine

This is where modern speculation can quickly take:
Over.
We see:
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
And immediately ask:
What modern weapon produces those:
Things?
A:
Tank?
Artillery?
A:
Missile?
Some future military:
Technology?
But John has already told us what he:
Saw.
Horses.
Riders.
Lion-like:
Heads.
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.

Why should we assume the image secretly means something John could not possibly:
Recognize?
We do not need to upgrade John's horses.
The text does not need:
Engines.
Tracks.
Rotors.
Jet propulsion.
Missile launchers.
The image does not need an engine.
It needs to be:
Heard.
Seen.
Felt.
John's first hearers understood:
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
Horses.
Lions.
War.
The image already possessed:
Meaning.
They did not need modern:
Technology.
Neither do:
We.
Revelation was not written in invisible ink waiting for the modern world to develop the correct technology so someone could finally:
Decode it.
It was revelation to the:
Church.
Including the churches who first heard:
It.
Our task is:
Interpretation.
Not:
Conversion.
We do not need to convert ancient imagery into modern:
Hardware.
We need to understand what the imagery:
Communicates.

War.
Judgment.
Destruction.
Ferocity.
Death.
Overwhelming:
Threat.
The image already:
Works.

4. Let the Whole Image Work

One of the temptations when reading Revelation is to assign a precise meaning to every individual:
Detail.
Horse means:
This.
Lion means:
That.
Red means:
This nation.
Yellow means:
That weapon.
Eventually the vision becomes a prophetic:
Crossword puzzle.
But sometimes the composite image **is** the:
Meaning.
The whole picture communicates:
Destruction.
That may be more important than decoding every individual:
Component.
Revelation engages the:
Imagination.
That is part of its:
Power.
A simple proposition could say:
Terrible judgment came.
John gives us:
Lion-headed horses breathing:
Fire.
We remember the:
Image.
Human beings are shaped by:
Stories.
Pictures.

Sounds.
Symbols.
Images settle into:
Memory.
Jesus Himself often taught through:
Images.
Seeds.
Sheep.
Vines.
Bread.
Light.
Doors.
Fields.
Coins.
The image carries truth into the:
Imagination.
Revelation does something similar on a cosmic:
Scale.
Thrones.
Lambs.
Dragons.
Beasts.
Stars.
Bowls.
Trumpets.
Cities.
Rivers.
Trees.
The theology is:
Visual.
So perhaps good interpretive discipline begins here:
First:
See it.
Feel it.
Hear it.
Then:
Interpret.
And what do we feel when we encounter Verse:
17?
Dread.
Danger.
Heat.
Violence.

Overwhelming:
Force.
The vision is not intended to make us:
Comfortable.

5. Judgment Should Disturb Us

Judgment should not become:
Comfortable.
Sin is:
Serious.
Rebellion is:
Serious.
Idolatry is:
Serious.
Judgment is:
Serious.
Revelation refuses to trivialize what:
Destroys.
There are realities that wound:
People.
Oppress:
People.
Exploit:
People.
Destroy:
People.
A God who loves His creation cannot be indifferent toward what:
Devours it.
We have said this:
Before.
Judgment is not the opposite of:
Love.
Indifference:
Is.
But that does not make judgment emotionally:
Easy.
The instruments within this vision are:
Terrifying.
That tension should:
Remain.
We should neither trivialize evil nor become fascinated with its:
Destruction.
And we must resist making God into the monster within the:
Vision.

The creatures are not:
God.
The fire is not:
God.
The cavalry is not:
God.
God remains upon the:
Throne.
For Christians, the character of God is revealed most clearly in:
Jesus Christ.
The:
Lamb.
The Faithful:
Witness.
The One who gives:
Himself.
So even when reading judgment—we continue reading through the: **Lamb.**

6. Christians Should Never Cheer the Fire

The Cross prevents cheap talk about:
Judgment.
We cannot speak lightly about:
Sin.
The Cross tells us its:
Cost.
We cannot speak lightly about:
Grace.
The Cross tells us its:
Cost.
And we cannot speak lightly about another person's:
Judgment.
Because we stand by:
Grace.
That should remove:
Smugness.
Arrogance.
Delight in another person's:
Downfall.
Christians should never cheer the fire.
We may long for:
Justice.
We may long for evil to:
End.
We may pray for the oppressed to be:

Delivered.
But delight in human suffering is not the spirit of the:
Lamb.
Jesus wept over a city facing:
Judgment.
Warning and compassion can exist:
Together.
Truth and tears can stand in the same:
Sentence.
The Church should learn that:
Posture.
Speak:
Truth.
Name:
Evil.
Warn:
Honestly.
Seek:
Justice.
And:
Weep.
The fire does not give us permission to become fiery:
People.
Judgment belongs to:
God.
The Church's calling remains:
Witness.
Faithfulness.
Love.
Truth.
Endurance.

7. We Do Not Defeat the Destroyer by Becoming Destroyers

There is our theme:
Again.
We do not defeat the Destroyer by becoming:
Destroyers.
The imagery of destruction should not disciple us into:
Destructiveness.
Quite the:
Opposite.
The more clearly we see what destruction looks like—
Lion heads.

Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
Death.
—the less we should want to resemble:
It.
Every kingdom produces a family:
Resemblance.
The Destroyer's kingdom looks:
Destructive.
The Lamb's kingdom should look:
Lamb-like.
And that turns the vision toward:
Us.
What are we:
Becoming?
Not merely:
What do we oppose?
Not merely:
What do we believe?
But:
What kind of people is our allegiance producing?
Because allegiance eventually becomes:
Character.
And character eventually becomes:
Action.
The darkness wants more than our:
Fear.
It would gladly shape our:
Character.
The Lamb calls us to something:
Different.

8. A Christian Goal Does Not Baptize an Unchristian Method

Our methods:
Matter.
Not merely our:
Goals.
Christians can pursue a good goal through destructive:
Methods.
Cruel:
Speech.
Humiliation.

Deception.
Manipulation.
Hatred.
And then justify the method because the cause seems:
Righteous.
But:
A Christian goal does not baptize an unchristian method.
We cannot say:
The cause is righteous—therefore anything we do for the cause is righteous.
The Lamb does not work that:
Way.
The means can contradict the:
Message.
We proclaim:
Love—
while behaving with:
Hatred.
We proclaim:
Truth—
while spreading:
Falsehood.
We proclaim:
Grace—
while humiliating:
People.
Eventually the contradiction becomes:
Visible.
Revelation asks not merely:
Who wins?
It asks:
How?
The Lamb conquers as the:
Lamb.
That is essential.
He does not become the Beast in order to defeat the:
Beast.
Christ does not need evil's:
Methods.
Neither should His:
Church.
Remain:
Faithful.

Even when faithfulness appears:
Weak.
That is one of Revelation's most difficult ethical:
Lessons.
And one of its most:
Necessary.

9. What Comes Out Reveals What Is Inside

Verse 17 contains another fascinating:
Detail.
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
Come from the horses':
Mouths.
What emerges corresponds to the destructive character of the:
Vision.
What comes out reveals what is:
Inside.
There is a pastoral application here that we should handle:
Carefully.
Verse 17 is not secretly a passage about human:
Speech.
John does not say:
That.
But the image can still prompt a faithful:
Question.
What comes out of us under pressure?
Jesus taught that words emerge from the:
Heart.
When everything is:
Easy—
we may appear:
Patient.
Then pressure:
Comes.
What emerges?
Fear?
Anger?
Grace?
Bitterness?
Love?
Pressure can reveal what has been forming:
Within.

And human mouths can produce their own kind of:
Fire.
Not literal:
Fire.
Words can:
Burn.
Scar.
Humiliate.
Divide.
A sentence can remain in someone's memory for:
Decades.
Words can also create:
Smoke.
Again—
application.
Not symbol:
Identification.
Words can create:
Confusion.
Rumor.
Suspicion.
Misinformation.
An atmosphere.
A family can have:
One.
A workplace can have:
One.
A church can have:
One.
Words contribute to the air everyone:
Breathes.
Some environments become difficult to breathe:
In.
Constant:
Criticism.
Anger.
Gossip.
Suspicion.
Fear.
Conflict.
So perhaps Verse 17 can make us ask:
What kind of atmosphere follows my words?
Healing or:

Wounding?
Clarity or:
Smoke?
Peace or:
Chaos?
Truth or:
Confusion?
What comes out of us may reveal what has been growing:
Within.

10. The Lamb Should Be Recognizable in Our Speech

The Lamb also:
Speaks.
And His words reveal His:
Character.
Truth.
Invitation.
Correction.
Promise.
Judgment.
Grace.
His speech gives:
Life.
Christian speech should carry the family:
Resemblance.
That does not mean always being:
Soft.
Jesus sometimes spoke very:
Directly.
Love can tell difficult:
Truth.
Gentleness is not the absence of:
Conviction.
And conviction is not permission for:
Harshness.
Those distinctions matter.
Especially when disagreement so easily becomes:
Dehumanization.
The Church should sound:
Different.
We belong to a different:
King.
Therefore even our speech should increasingly reveal:
It.

Not:
Perfectly.
But increasingly.
The Lamb should become recognizable in His:
People.
Even in the way we:
Speak.
Especially when we are under:
Pressure.

11. Power Must Never Be Evaluated by Power Alone

The horses are:
Impressive.
The riders are:
Armored.
Their heads resemble:
Lions.
Power surrounds the:
Image.
Yet the fruit is:
Death.
Therefore power must never be evaluated by power:
Alone.
We must ask:
Power for:
What?
Power serving:
Whom?
Power producing:
What?
Power accountable to:
Whom?
Those are moral:
Questions.
The world often celebrates power without asking:
Them.
Strong.
Dominant.
Successful.
Influential.
Winning.
Those words can begin functioning as moral categories when they are actually descriptions of:
Capacity.

Strength is not the same as:
Goodness.
A lion can be:
Strong.
Fire can be:
Powerful.
An army can be:
Mighty.
None of those descriptions tells us whether something is:
Good.
Christianity radically reframes:
Strength.
The strongest figure in Revelation appears as a:
Lamb.
Slain.
Standing.
That image should permanently reshape Christian ideas of:
Power.
Strength can look like:
Sacrifice.
Courage can look like:
Forgiveness.
Victory can look like:
Faithfulness.
Power can look like:
Service.
That is the strange logic of the:
Kingdom.
The world says:
Make them fear you.
Jesus says:
Follow Me.
The world says:
Destroy your enemies.
Jesus says:
Love your enemies.
The contrast is:
Sharp.
And Revelation does not erase Jesus':
Teaching.
It intensifies our need to remember:
It.
Especially when surrounded by violent:

Imagery.

12. The Throne Frees Us From Becoming the Judge

Judgment belongs to:
God.
And there is freedom in:
That.
I do not have to settle every:
Score.
I do not have to make everyone who hurt me:
Pay.
I can seek:
Justice—
without becoming consumed by:
Vengeance.
The throne frees us from needing to become the:
Judge.
God:
Sees.
God:
Knows.
God judges:
Rightly.
Therefore I can release my need to occupy His:
Seat.
That does not mean passivity toward:
Evil.
No.
Protect the:
Vulnerable.
Tell the:
Truth.
Set:
Boundaries.
Seek:
Justice.
Report:
Wrongdoing.
Intervene when:
Appropriate.
Forgiveness does not require remaining in dangerous or abusive:
Situations.
Love does not require pretending evil did not:
Happen.

Leaving vengeance with God does not mean abandoning:
Justice.
It means refusing to surrender our souls to:
Hatred.
We can resist evil without allowing evil to decide what kind of people we:
Become.

13. The Greatest Victory May Be Refusing to Become What Hurt You

Sometimes the greatest victory is refusing to become what hurt:
You.
Pain can disciple:
Us.
Cruelty can teach us:
Cruelty.
Betrayal can teach us:
Suspicion.
Hatred can teach us:
Hatred.
Unless we:
Resist.
That means the Lamb must remain our:
Teacher.
Not the:
Destroyer.
Not the:
Army.
Not the:
Culture.
Not our:
Wounds.
Christ.
Our wounds may affect:
Us.
Deeply.
We should never minimize:
That.
But our wounds do not receive final authority to decide who we:
Become.
What happened to me:
Matters.
But what happened to me does not become my:
King.
Christ remains:

Lord.
That is not:
Easy.
It is:
Endurance.
Perhaps this is one of the deepest dangers of prolonged:
Suffering.
The darkness begins:
Outside.
Then slowly it tries to move:
Inside.
Someone wounds:
Us.
We become:
Hard.
Someone betrays:
Us.
We stop:
Trusting.
Someone hates:
Us.
We learn to:
Hate.
Someone treats us:
Cruelly.
We begin believing cruelty is simply how the world:
Works.
And somewhere along the way—
the thing we opposed begins forming us into its own:
Image.
That is why our prayer throughout this chapter has mattered so:
Much.
Lord, do not merely bring me through the darkness.
Keep the darkness from getting into me.
Survival is not the only:
Goal.
Faithfulness:
Is.

14. Never Let the Smoke Hide the River

The vision is:
Dark.
But darkness is not Revelation's final:
Purpose.

Revelation shows us darkness so that we can recognize:
It.
Resist its:
Allegiance.
And remain faithful to the:
Lamb.
We do not study the monster so that we can become experts in:
Monsters.
We study the vision so that we can become more faithful followers of:
Christ.
The locusts are not the:
Center.
The cavalry is not the:
Center.
The fire is not the:
Center.
The smoke is not the:
Center.
The:
Lamb is.
And the fire does not receive the final:
Word.
Neither does the:
Smoke.
Neither does the:
Brimstone.
Those belong to this chapter of:
Judgment.
They do not belong to the final chapter of:
Creation.
Revelation ends with different:
Images.
Water of:
Life.
Tree of:
Life.
Healing of the:
Nations.
No more:
Curse.
God dwelling with His:
People.
That is the:

Destination.
So:
Never let the smoke hide the river.
Chapter 9 gives us:
Smoke.
Chapter 22 gives us:
Water.
Chapter 9 gives us:
Death.
Chapter 22 gives us:
Life.
The smoke is:
Real.
But it is not:
Forever.
The fire is:
Real.
But it is not:
Forever.
The cavalry is real within the:
Vision.
But it does not ride into:
Eternity.
The Lamb does.
So we let John describe what he:
Saw.
We do not replace his horses with:
Machines.
We do not replace his lions with:
Weapons.
We do not replace his colors with modern military:
Codes.
We allow the vision to remain:
Ancient.
And the truth to remain:
Timeless.
John sees overwhelming destructive:
Power.
Armored.
Predatory.
Fiery.
Terrifying.
But Revelation has already taught us how to read such:

Power.
Appearance is not:
Sovereignty.
Strength is not:
Goodness.
Destruction is not:
Victory.
And terror is not:
God.
So when the smoke becomes:
Thick—
remember the:
Throne.
When the fire becomes:
Frightening—
remember the:
Lamb.
When destructive power looks:
Impressive—
ask what kind of kingdom it:
Produces.
And when the world tells us that victory requires us to become as ruthless as whatever we:
Oppose—
remember:
The Lamb defeats the powers of destruction without becoming a destroyer.
That is His:
Victory.
And that is the path His people are called to:
Follow.

Pastoral Reflection

Sometimes the hardest thing about being hurt is not simply what happened to:
Us.
It is what the hurt begins trying to make us:
Become.
Someone betrays:
Us.
We become:
Suspicious.
Someone speaks:
Cruelly.

We begin speaking:
Cruelly.
Someone treats us:
Unfairly.
We begin dreaming about making them:
Pay.
Someone fills our world with:
Anger.
And slowly—
anger begins filling:
Us.
That is one of suffering's hidden:
Dangers.
The thing outside us begins moving:
Inside us.
Verse 17 gives us a picture of destructive power whose very appearance corresponds with what comes from:
It.
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
Destruction:
Inside.
Destruction:
Outside.
The follower of Jesus is called to another:
Way.
What if grace inside us begins producing grace:
Outside?
What if mercy received becomes mercy:
Given?
What if forgiveness received becomes forgiveness:
Offered?
What if the character of the Lamb slowly becomes visible in the people who belong to:
Him?
That does not mean pretending we were not:
Hurt.
It does not mean refusing:
Justice.
It does not mean remaining in dangerous or abusive:
Situations.
It means refusing to let the thing that wounded us become our spiritual:

Teacher.
Lord, do not merely bring me through the darkness.
Keep the darkness from getting into me.
Because surviving what hurt us is not the only:
Goal.
We want to come through it still looking like the:
Lamb.

Something Worth Pondering

John says:
This is how I saw them in the:
Vision.
Perhaps we should allow that sentence to protect the image from our desire to:
Modernize it.
John does not need our:
Technology.
His horses do not need:
Engines.
His fire does not need:
Artillery.
His smoke does not need:
Missiles.
The vision already says what it needs to:
Say.
Destructive power can be:
Impressive.
Armored.
Numerous.
Frightening.
And still belong to a kingdom whose fruit is:
Death.
So perhaps the deeper question is not:
What modern weapon does this look like?
Perhaps the question is:
What kind of kingdom does this look like?
And then another question follows:
What kind of kingdom does my life look like?
Because every kingdom eventually produces a family:
Resemblance.

Ask Yourself This:

When I confront what is:

Destructive—
do my methods still resemble the:
Lamb—
or have I begun resembling what I:
Oppose?
When I am:
Hurt—
am I allowing my wounds to teach me how to treat other:
People—
or is Christ still my:
Teacher?
And when the darkness has:
Passed—
will I merely have:
Survived it—
or will I still look like the:
Lamb?

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:18

“By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths.”
— Revelation 9:18, KJV

Verse 17 showed us what came from the horses':
Mouths.
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
Verse 18 tells us what those things:
Do.
They:
Kill.
The vision moves from:
Description—
to:
Consequence.
And that movement:
Matters.
John is not giving us extraordinary imagery merely because extraordinary imagery is:
Interesting.
The images have:
Consequences.
People:
Die.
And before we attempt to explain the verse—
we should allow ourselves to feel the weight of what John has:
Said.

1. From Description to Consequence

Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
These are not decorative details added to make John's vision more:
Dramatic.
The vision presents these as deadly:
Judgments.
And their effect is:
Deadly.
A third of:

Humankind.
Killed.
That should trouble:
Us.
It should never become merely a prophetic:
Statistic.
The moment we turn human suffering into nothing more than a number in an end-times chart—
we have stopped seeing the:
People.
A third of humankind means:
Lives.
Families.
Communities.
Grief.
Loss.
Human beings beyond our ability to:
Count.
Revelation may speak in enormous:
Numbers.
But numbers should never make people:
Disappear.
The scale of the vision is:
Enormous.
So is the human:
Cost.
We should not rush past:
That.

2. These Judgments Belong to the Biblical World of Plagues

Verse 18 names three deadly agents; verse 20 speaks of:
Plagues.
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
That language belongs within the larger biblical world of:
Judgment.
John's first hearers knew that:
World.
Exodus.
The prophets.
Daniel.
Temple imagery.

Judgment imagery.
Revelation does not invent an entirely new symbolic language from:
Nothing.
It draws deeply from the scriptural:
Story.
That suggests an important interpretive:
Discipline.
Our first question should often be:
Where has Scripture spoken like this before?
Not:
What modern object does this resemble?
John's imagination was formed by:
Scripture.
Ours should begin there as:
Well.
Fire can carry several meanings within:
Scripture.
So can:
Smoke.
So can:
Brimstone.
Context determines how an image:
Functions.
Here the context is unmistakably:
Destructive.
These are called:
Plagues.
Their result is:
Death.
We do not need to sanitize:
That.
And we do not need to:
Modernize it.
Our principle from Verse 17 still:
Stands.
The image does not need an engine.
John already tells us what matters.
These forces:
Destroy.

3. A Third Is Terrible

Then John gives us another:
Number.
Or more precisely—

a:
Fraction.
A:
Third.
We have encountered that fraction repeatedly within the trumpet:
Judgments.
And we need to hold two truths together.
The first is:
A third is terrible.
We must say that:
First.
A third of humankind:
Killed.
If we could somehow imagine such a thing occurring within ordinary human history, language would struggle to contain the:
Grief.
Families.
Communities.
Nations.
Lives beyond:
Counting.
So when we say the judgment is:
Limited—
we must never allow **limited** to become a synonym for:
Small.
It is:
Not.
Partial does not mean small.
Limited does not mean painless.
Temporary does not mean trivial.
We learned that with the five:
Months.
Five months was a:
Boundary.
The torment was still:
Real.
A third is a:
Boundary.
The death is still:
Real.
Boundaries do not erase:
Suffering.
And Christian hope should never require us to pretend that pain does not:

Hurt.

4. A Third Is Not All

But now we must hold the second truth:
Alongside the first.
A third is:
Terrible.
But a third is not:
All.
Two thirds:
Remain.
History:
Continues.
The final judgment has not yet:
Arrived.
That matters.
The trumpet judgments are:
Severe.
But the story remains:
Open.
There is still:
Time.
People still:
Remain.
The opportunity to turn has not yet:
Closed.
That does not make the judgment:
Mild.
It is not:
Mild.
But it means the judgment is not yet:
Complete.
A third.
Not:
All.
That fraction becomes a:
Boundary.
And within that boundary remains the possibility of:
Response.
There is still time to:
Listen.
Still time to:
Turn.
Still time to:

Repent.
That makes what comes later in this chapter even more:
Tragic.

5. Grief and Hope Can Occupy the Same Heart

Sometimes Christians become uncomfortable with:
Grief.
Especially when we know the theological:
Ending.
We know:
God is faithful.
We know:
Christ is risen.
We know:
Death will not have the final word.
We know:
New Creation is coming.
Therefore we may feel pressure to move quickly from:
Pain—
to:
Hope.
But Scripture does not require that:
Speed.
Jesus knew Lazarus would:
Rise.
And still:
Wept.
That should forever protect Christian hope from becoming emotional:
Denial.
The ending can be:
Known.
And the tears can still be:
Real.
We can:
Mourn.
And:
Believe.
Cry.
And:
Trust.
Ask:
Why?
And still remain with:
God.

Revelation itself contains:
Worship.
And:
Lament.
Victory.
And:
Martyrdom.
Hope.
And:
Woe.
The Christian story is large enough to hold them:
Together.
So when we encounter:
A third—
we do not say:
At least it wasn't everyone.
That would make suffering:
Smaller.
We say:
This is terrible.
And then:
This is not the end.
Both truths can live in the same:
Heart.

6. Consequences Are Not Repentance

The surviving world still has:
Time.
But time does not automatically produce:
Repentance.
Neither does:
Pain.
That becomes one of the great tragedies toward which Chapter 9 is:
Moving.
Judgment can:
Reveal.
Consequences can:
Expose.
Pain can show us that something is:
Wrong.
But none of those things mechanically transforms the:
Heart.
Consequences can become a:
Mirror.

They can show us where a road:
Leads.
Addiction.
Bitterness.
Pride.
Greed.
Hatred.
Idolatry.
Choices have:
Fruit.
But seeing the fruit does not guarantee we will change the:
Root.
We can hate the:
Consequences—
while still loving the:
Cause.
We can desperately want the pain to:
Stop—
without wanting our allegiance to:
Change.
That is why regret and repentance are not necessarily the same:
Thing.
Regret says:
I wish that had not happened.
Repentance says:
I need to turn.
We can regret getting:
Caught—
without regretting what we:
Did.
We can regret what something:
Cost us—
without questioning the road that brought us:
There.
Repentance goes:
Deeper.
It reaches the:
Heart.
Who do I:
Worship?
What do I:
Trust?
What receives my ultimate:

Loyalty?
What am I unwilling to:
Release?
Those questions lie beneath Revelation's terrifying:
Imagery.
Because the ultimate concern is not merely avoiding painful:
Consequences.
It is:
Allegiance.

7. Warning Can Be Mercy

Biblical warning can sound:
Harsh.
Especially when the warning contains:
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
Death.
But warning can also be an expression of:
Mercy.
Imagine a sign:
**BRIDGE:
OUT.
DANGER:
AHEAD.
DO NOT:
ENTER.**
We do not accuse the sign of being too:
Negative.
We are grateful someone warned:
Us.
The warning exists because the direction:
Matters.
Revelation contains enormous warning:
Signs.
The trumpets:
Sound.
The judgments:
Come.
The consequences become increasingly:
Severe.
And the message is:
Wake up.
Look where this road:

Leads.
Do you still want to keep walking:
It?
That is not comfortable:
Mercy.
But it may still be:
Mercy.
Love sometimes warns precisely because love does not want us to reach the:
Cliff.
But there is an important:
Guardrail.
Warnings can become:
Weapons.
Religious people can enjoy telling others they are:
Wrong.
Judgment language can become a way of elevating:
Ourselves.
That is not the way of the:
Lamb.
The Lamb speaks:
Truth.
But the Lamb also bears:
Wounds.
Christian warning should come from people who know they also live by:
Grace.
We warn as people who have been:
Rescued.
Not as people naturally superior to those being:
Warned.
Truth.
And:
Tears.
Warning.
And:
Grace.

8. The Heart Can Become Accustomed to Alarms

An alarm can sound so often that eventually we stop:
Hearing it.
What was once:
Urgent—
becomes background:
Noise.
The same danger exists:

Spiritually.
The first warning disturbs:
Us.
The second may disturb us:
Less.
Eventually we may say:
Nothing will:
Happen.
Or worse:
I do not:
Care.
The heart becomes:
Numb.
And numbness may be more dangerous than the:
Alarm.
Not because God is looking for an excuse to:
Punish.
But because numbness can prevent us from recognizing what is:
Destroying us.
Sometimes the thing hurting us is something we continue to:
Defend.
A:
Habit.
A:
Resentment.
An:
Attitude.
An:
Idol.
A destructive pattern of:
Behavior.
We:
Rationalize.
Excuse.
Minimize.
Blame.
Avoid.
Anything except:
Turn.
Human beings possess an astonishing ability to protect the very thing that is:
Hurting us.
Revelation tears away the:
Excuses.

Look at the:
Fruit.
Where is this road:
Going?
What is this allegiance:
Producing?

9. Fruit Reveals the Kingdom

That has become one of our recurring questions throughout Chapter: 9
What does it produce?
Life?
Or:
Death?
Healing?
Or:
Destruction?
Freedom?
Or:
Bondage?
Fruit reveals the:
Kingdom.
Evil does not always reveal its destination at the:
Beginning.
Sin can appear:
Attractive.
Reasonable.
Profitable.
Pleasurable.
Necessary.
We learned earlier that:
The face can hide the teeth.
But eventually the teeth:
Appear.
Eventually the fruit:
Ripens.
Eventually the road reveals where it was:
Going.
Revelation does something merciful:
It shows us the destination before we:
Arrive.
Look:
Ahead.
See where this road:
Ends.

Then ask whether you still want to walk:
It.
That is one purpose of prophetic:
Warning.
Not merely:
Look what will happen.
But:
Turn before you get there.

10. Grace Tells the Truth and Offers a Way Home

Before something can be:
Healed—
it often must first be:
Named.
This is:
Wrong.
This is:
Hurting us.
This is:
Destroying us.
This cannot:
Continue.
Grace does not require pretending everything is:
Fine.
Grace tells the truth.
Then grace offers a way:
Home.
That is what separates grace from:
Indifference.
God loves too much to call:
Death—
life.
Bondage—
freedom.
Hatred—
love.
Idolatry—
worship.
Destruction—
peace.
Truth matters because:
People matter.
And sometimes the loving word is:
Stop.

Not because God desires our:
Humiliation.
Because the road ahead leads toward:
Death.
And there is another:
Road.

11. Do Not Find Babylon Everywhere Except Within

Revelation confronts more than individual:
Sin.
Its vision is large enough to address:
Empires.
Systems.
Cities.
Economies.
Kings.
Cultures.
Institutions.
Human sin can become:
Organized.
Greed can become:
Institutional.
Hatred can become:
Cultural.
Deception can become:
Political.
Idolatry can become:
Religious.
Destructive systems can multiply the consequences of human:
Sin.
Revelation will confront all of:
That.
But there is another temptation we must:
Avoid.
It is much easier to identify evil:
Out there.
Other:
People.
Other:
Groups.
Other:
Institutions.
Other:
Churches.

Other:
Cultures.
Other:
Nations.
We can become remarkably skilled at identifying:
Babylon.
And remarkably poor at identifying the Babylon within:
Us.
What do:
I worship?
What do:
I desire?
What do:
I excuse?
What do:
I defend?
What am:
I unwilling to surrender?
The prophetic word eventually becomes:
Personal.
Revelation does not merely give us a telescope through which to examine the:
World.
It gives us a:
Mirror.
And sometimes the most uncomfortable Babylon to confront is the one we have learned to call:
Mine.

12. Judgment Means Evil Has an Ending

Verse 18 also confronts us with another difficult:
Question.
Why does God:
Judge?
But Scripture also asks another:
Question.
How long should evil be allowed to:
Continue?
The martyrs have already cried:
How long?
Their question assumes that God will eventually:
Act.
Divine patience is not divine:
Indifference.

God's delay does not mean evil does not:
Matter.
And Christian hope includes more than the promise that someday I will go somewhere:
Better.
Christian hope includes the promise that God will make things:
Right.
That means what destroys His creation cannot possess:
Forever.
Oppression will not have:
Forever.
Violence will not have:
Forever.
Death will not have:
Forever.
Judgment means evil has an ending.
That is good news to those who have been crushed by:
It.
New Creation requires the end of what destroys:
Creation.
You cannot have Revelation:
21—
without ultimately dealing with everything that makes Revelation 21:
Necessary.
Tears.
Death.
Pain.
Evil.
Those must ultimately:
End.
But Revelation 9:18 is not that final:
Ending.
The fraction tells us:
That.
A:
Third.
Not:
All.
Partial judgment:
Reveals.
Warns.
Interrupts.
Limits.

But it does not yet bring final:
Resolution.
Verse 18 therefore lives between:
Warning and finality.
Judgment has:
Come.
Final judgment has:
Not.
And within that space remains the possibility of:
Response.

13. Repentance Is Return

What will humanity do with that:
Space?
Verses 20 and 21 will give us the tragic:
Answer.
But before we look at:
Them—
we should look at:
Ourselves.
What do we do when Scripture confronts:
Us?
Do we:
Listen?
Or:
Defend?
Do we:
Turn?
Or:
Explain?
Do we:
Confess?
Or:
Rationalize?
Repentance is not merely something for:
Bad people.
It is part of the continuing posture of:
Discipleship.
Christians still need:
Correction.
Realignment.
Confession.
Grace.
We never graduate from:

Repentance.
And repentance should not be confused with:
Humiliation.
Repentance is not humiliation.
It is return.
It says:
I was going the wrong way.
Then:
Turns.
That may be:
Painful.
Humbling.
Costly.
But also:
Liberating.
Because grace makes turning:
Possible.
Without grace, confession can become:
Despair.
I was:
Wrong.
I:
Failed.
Therefore I am:
Finished.
But the Gospel says:
Turn.
There is still a way:
Home.
Judgment says:
This road leads to death.
The Gospel says:
There is another road.
And Jesus does not merely tell us what to run:
From.
He calls us to:
Himself.
The Destroyer:
Takes.
The Lamb:
Gives.
The Destroyer:
Wounds.

The Lamb:
Bears wounds.
The Destroyer:
Consumes.
The Lamb:
Gives Himself.
One kingdom moves toward:
Death.
The other toward:
Life.
And Revelation asks:
Where is your allegiance?

14. A Third Is Not the Final Number

A third is:
Terrible.
But it is not the final:
Number.
The smoke is:
Terrible.
But it is not the final:
Atmosphere.
The fire is:
Terrible.
But it is not the final:
Light.
Revelation keeps:
Moving.
There is another city:
Coming.
Not:
Babylon.
New:
Jerusalem.
There is another river:
Coming.
Not a boundary associated with:
Threat.
The river of:
Life.
There is another tree:
Coming.
Not an instrument of:
Death.

The tree of:
Life.
Its leaves are for the healing of the:
Nations.
That is where the story is:
Going.
And the Church is called to begin practicing that future:
Now.
Where the world produces:
Death—
protect:
Life.
Where the world produces:
Hatred—
practice:
Love.
Where the world produces:
Smoke—
bear:
Light.
Where the world:
Wounds—
become a place of:
Healing.
Where the world:
Dehumanizes—
remember the dignity of:
People.
That is how the Church resists the kingdom of:
Destruction.
Not merely by identifying:
It.
But by refusing to:
Resemble it.
We embody another:
Kingdom.
The Kingdom of the:
Lamb.
So we read:
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
Death.

A third of:
Humankind.
We do not:
Minimize it.
We do not:
Celebrate it.
We do not turn it into modern military:
Hardware.
We let the judgment remain:
Terrible.
Then we notice the:
Boundary.
A:
Third.
Not:
All.
The judgment is:
Severe.
But the story remains:
Open.
There is still time to:
Turn.
There is still opportunity to:
Repent.
There is still a Lamb who:
Calls.
And that makes what comes next so:
Tragic.
The warning could hardly be:
Louder.
The consequences could hardly be:
Clearer.
The road toward destruction has shown its:
Destination.
And still—
the human heart may refuse to:
Turn.
Perhaps that is the deepest horror of Revelation: 9
Not merely that judgment:
Comes.
But that even judgment does not necessarily produce:
Repentance.
So before we look at those who refuse to repent—

perhaps we should ask the question of:
Ourselves.
When God shows me that something is producing:
Death—
will I:
Defend it?
Excuse it?
Rationalize it?
Or will I:
Turn?
Because warning is only useful if someone is willing to:
Listen.
And grace can only bring us home when we finally admit:
I need to turn.

Pastoral Reflection

Sometimes pain gets our:
Attention.
A relationship begins to:
Break.
Our health forces us to:
Stop.
A habit begins producing consequences we can no longer:
Ignore.
Something we have been avoiding finally stands directly in front of:
Us.
And suddenly we can see:
This cannot continue.
That moment can become a:
Gift.
Not because the pain itself is:
Good.
Not because God caused every painful circumstance in order to teach us a:
Lesson.
We should never say that:
Casually.
We do not know enough to explain every:
Tragedy.
Every:
Illness.
Every:
Loss.
Every painful:
Circumstance.

But grace can meet us even in the moment when consequences finally make denial:
Impossible.
Sometimes we suddenly see where a road is:
Going.
And then comes the question:
Will I turn?
Not:
Do I dislike the:
Consequences?
Of course I:
Do.
Not:
Do I wish the pain would:
Stop?
Of course I:
Do.
The deeper question is:
Am I willing to change direction?
That is:
Repentance.
And repentance is not God's way of:
Humiliating us.
It is God's invitation to:
Come home.

Something Worth Pondering

A:
Third.
Terrible.
Devastating.
But not:
All.
The judgment has a:
Boundary.
And because it has a boundary—
the story remains:
Open.
That means the surviving world still possesses something extraordinarily:
Precious.
Time.
Time to:
Think.
Time to:

Listen.
Time to:
Turn.
Time to:
Repent.
We often imagine mercy as God immediately removing every:
Consequence.
Sometimes mercy may appear in another:
Form.
Another:
Moment.
Another:
Warning.
Another opportunity to choose a different:
Road.
Time can be mercy.
And perhaps one of the most dangerous things we can do with mercy is assume there will always be:
More.

Ask Yourself This:

When Scripture shows me that something in my life is producing destructive:
Fruit—
will I:
Defend it?
Excuse it?
Rationalize it?
Or will I:
Turn?
When I warn someone:
Else—
do I speak as someone who also lives by:
Grace—
with truth and:
Tears—
rather than:
Superiority?
And when turning requires me to admit:
I was wrong—
can I trust grace enough to:

Stop.
Turn.
And come:
Home?

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:19

“For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt.”
— Revelation 9:19, KJV

The description of the cavalry now reaches its:
Conclusion.
John tells us where their power:
Lies.
In their:
Mouths.
And in their:
Tails.
The mouths have already been:
Described.
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
Verse 18 told us the:
Result.
Death.
Now John turns our attention toward the other end of the:
Creature.
Their tails are:
Like serpents.
They have:
Heads.
And with them they:
Inflict harm.
The entire creature seems organized around its capacity to:
Destroy.
From the:
Front.
From:
Behind.
Mouth.
Tail.
Death.
Harm.
And once again, Revelation asks us not merely to stare at the strange:
Creature—

but to recognize the kind of kingdom such a creature:
Represents.

1. Their Power Is in Their Mouths and Tails

John is unusually specific.
The power of the horses is located in their:
Mouths.
And:
Tails.
The mouth:
Kills.
The tail:
Harms.
There appears to be no harmless:
Side.
That is part of what makes the vision so:
Disturbing.
John has created—or received—a creature whose entire form communicates destructive:
Power.
Nothing about it suggests:
Healing.
Nothing suggests:
Restoration.
Nothing suggests:
Creation.
Its fruit identifies its:
Kingdom.
And that has become one of our most reliable questions throughout Chapter:
9
What does this power produce?
Here the answer is:
Death.
Harm.
Destruction.
The creature resembles the kingdom from which it:
Comes.

2. Function Can Be More Important Than Identification

John tells us the tails are:
Like serpents.
There is our familiar interpretive word:
Again.
Like.
Not:

Are.
Like:
Serpents.
John does not tell us that ordinary snakes have somehow become attached to supernatural:
Horses.
He gives us visionary:
Imagery.
Horse.
Lion-like:
Head.
Serpent-like:
Tail.
A composite:
Creature.
Ordinary zoology has been left far:
Behind.
And that should make us cautious about forcing every part of the creature into a literal:
Identification.
The serpent image has a long biblical:
History.
Danger.
Deception.
Evil.
Death.
But we should not automatically import every biblical use of serpent imagery into this:
Verse.
John himself tells us what matters:
The tails have:
Heads.
And with them they:
Harm.
Sometimes Scripture gives us the function without giving us a complete explanation of the:
Symbol.
And perhaps the better interpretive question is not:
What exactly is this?
But:
What does John tell us it does?
Here:
It:

Harms.
That keeps us close to the:
Text.
And away from unnecessary:
Speculation.
There will always be details in Revelation about which the most responsible answer remains:
I don't know.
That is not interpretive:
Failure.
Sometimes:
I don't know
is good:
Theology.
We can be uncertain about every feature of the:
Creature—
while being quite certain about the overall:
Picture.
It is:
Numerous.
Armored.
Predatory.
Fiery.
Deadly.
Harmful.
The picture is:
Consistent.
It communicates overwhelming destructive: Power.
And that is enough.

3. The Whole Creature Communicates Destruction

The fifth trumpet gave us creatures with tails like:
Scorpions.
Those tails possessed power to:
Torment.
Now the sixth trumpet gives us horses with tails like:
Serpents.
Those tails:
Harm.
The details are:
Different.
Scorpion.
Serpent.
Torment.

Harm.
But the larger pattern remains:
Destructive power:
Wounds.
That is what the kingdom of destruction:
Does.
The abyss does not:
Heal.
It can:
Torment.
Harm.
Deceive.
Destroy.
Kill.
But it cannot:
Restore.
That distinction becomes increasingly important as Chapter 9 moves toward its:
Conclusion.
We are not merely being shown strange:
Creatures.
We are being shown the fruit of a:
Kingdom.
And fruit eventually tells us something about the:
Root.

4. Destruction Is Easier Than Creation

There is something else worth noticing about destructive:
Power.
It often looks extraordinarily:
Strong.
Partly because destruction can happen so:
Quickly.
A building may take years to:
Construct.
Minutes to:
Demolish.
A relationship may take decades to:
Build.
One betrayal may fracture:
It.
Trust may take years to:
Develop.
A sentence may destroy it in:

Seconds.
Destruction can look more powerful because destruction is often:
Faster.
But speed is not the same as:
Strength.
The Destroyer can:
Break.
But he cannot truly:
Create.
Evil requires something good already existing that can be:
Corrupted.
Life—
to:
Kill.
Truth—
to:
Distort.
Love—
to:
Betray.
Trust—
to:
Break.
Creation—
to:
Corrupt.
Evil is:
Parasitic.
It attacks what it did not:
Create.
That is one of its deepest:
Limitations.
God gives:
Life.
Evil can only attack the life God has:
Given.
And that already tells us something about which power is ultimately:
Greater.

5. Do Not Confuse Spectacle With Power

Destruction is:
Dramatic.
Fire.
Smoke.

Brimstone.
Armies.
Noise.
Death.
Those things command:
Attention.
Healing often looks much:
Quieter.
A:
Conversation.
An:
Apology.
A:
Prayer.
A meal shared around a:
Table.
A hand held beside a hospital:
Bed.
A relationship slowly:
Restored.
Healing may take:
Time.
Reconciliation may take:
Time.
Trust may return:
Slowly.
Character develops:
Slowly.
A tree grows:
Slowly.
A child matures:
Slowly.
God often works through:
Process.
Jesus Himself spoke of:
Seed.
Yeast.
Mustard:
Seed.
Images of growth that is often:
Quiet.
So we should never confuse spectacle with:
Power.

The cavalry is:
Spectacular.
The Lamb was:
Slain.
Which possesses final:
Victory?
The:
Lamb.
Destruction may happen in:
Seconds.
Resurrection remains the greater:
Power.
Because destruction can end:
Life.
But destruction cannot:
Resurrect.
Death can:
Kill.
Death cannot say:
Live.
That belongs to:
God.

6. The Cavalry Gives Wounds; the Lamb Bears Wounds

That creates one of the sharpest contrasts in the:
Chapter.
The cavalry gives:
Wounds.
The Lamb bears:
Wounds.
One harms:
Others.
The Other is wounded for:
Others.
One kingdom says:
You suffer so that I may have power.
The other says:
I will suffer so that you may have life.
Those are radically different:
Kings.
Predatory power takes:
Life.
Christ gives His:
Life.

Predatory power wounds others to preserve:
Itself.
Christ accepts wounds to save:
Others.
That is why the Lamb is:
Worthy.
Not merely because He possesses:
Power.
But because of what His power is:
Like.
Holy.
Faithful.
Self-giving.
Redemptive.
Christian power therefore cannot be measured merely by:
Capacity.
Not merely:
What can I do?
But:
What kind of person am I while doing it?
Power reveals:
Character.
And Christian power must increasingly resemble the:
Lamb.

7. Surrounded by Trouble—but Not Surrounded by Sovereignty

The creature's mouth can:
Harm.
Its tail can:
Harm.
Danger appears to exist wherever it:
Turns.
There is a human experience that can sometimes feel something like:
That.
Trouble in:
Front.
Trouble:
Behind.
One problem:
Here.
Another:
There.
Health.

Work.
Family.
Finances.
Grief.
Relationships.
Uncertainty.
One thing after:
Another.
And eventually we begin asking:
Where is the safe side?
We should be careful with that:
Application.
Revelation 9:19 is not secretly predicting our personal:
Problems.
Our illness is not one of the:
Horses.
Our financial trouble is not a serpent:
Tail.
Our grief is not evidence that the sixth trumpet has entered our living:
Room.
But the imagery understands something about the human experience of:
Overwhelm.
Sometimes life really does feel as though trouble is coming from every:
Direction.
And Scripture can speak pastorally into that feeling without turning our circumstances into fulfillment of the:
Vision.
Because even here—
when the threat appears to surround everything—
we remember what John has already told:
Us.

8. The Description Gets Bigger; the Authority Does Not

Given.
Told.
Allowed.
Limited.
Bound.
Released.
Prepared.
Appointed.
A:
Third.
Those words still surround the:

Vision.
Verse 19 does not cancel Verse: 15
The tails look:
Terrifying.
The appointed hour still:
Exists.
The destructive power remains inside the boundary already:
Established.
The description gets bigger.
The authority does not.
Fear can easily reverse:
That.
Another:
Head.
Another:
Tail.
Another:
Threat.
Another destructive:
Power.
Fear adds them together and concludes:
Nothing can stop this.
But capability is not:
Sovereignty.
Multiple dangers do not add up to:
Divinity.
A thousand finite things do not become:
Infinite.
Neither do two hundred:
Million.
The army remains:
Numbered.
The hour remains:
Appointed.
The destruction remains:
Measured.
The number is:
Enormous.
The harm is:
Enormous.
The vision is:
Enormous.
But:

Enormous is not infinite.
The army has an:
Hour.
The Destroyer has a:
Season.
The sting has a:
Clock.
God has:
Forever.

9. Truth Does Not Need Cruelty to Become True

John once again associates destructive power with the:
Mouth.
We explored that carefully in Verse: 17
We should not turn Revelation 9:19 into a hidden teaching primarily about human:
Speech.
It is:
Not.
But the image can still invite pastoral:
Reflection.
Human mouths can:
Harm.
Words can:
Wound.
Lie.
Accuse.
Humiliate.
Manipulate.
Destroy:
Trust.
James knew something about:
That.
He compared the tongue to:
Fire.
James and Revelation are not saying precisely the same:
Thing.
But both remind us that what comes from a mouth can become:
Destructive.
A person does not need a weapon to wound another human:
Being.
Sometimes a sentence is:
Enough.
Some wounds leave no visible:

Scar.
But they are:
Real.
That means Christian speech deserves serious:
Attention.
We belong to the:
Lamb.
Our mouths should increasingly reflect our:
King.
Truth may:
Confront.
Correct.
Challenge.
Expose.
But:
Truth does not need cruelty in order to become true.
Cruelty does not make conviction:
Stronger.
It merely makes conviction:
Cruel.
Harshness and courage are not the same:
Thing.
Jesus could speak directly without ceasing to:
Love.
So should:
We.

10. Sin Often Has a Tail

Now we come to another pastoral application.
Again—
application.
Not an interpretation of John's:
Symbol.
But actions often have:
Tails.
Consequences that follow:
Behind.
A careless:
Word.
A:
Betrayal.
A:
Lie.
An act of:

Violence.
The moment:
Ends.
The consequences:
Continue.
Sin often has a tail.
The act may take:
Seconds.
The damage may remain for:
Years.
We rarely control the full reach of our:
Actions.
That should make us:
Humble.
We know what we:
Intend.
We do not always know what our actions will:
Produce.
Consequences:
Travel.
Something said in:
Anger—
may remain in someone's memory long after we have forgotten saying:
It.
A broken:
Promise—
may shape another person's ability to trust long after the moment has:
Passed.
A selfish:
Decision—
may affect people we never intended to:
Hurt.
That is part of the seriousness of human:
Action.
What we do rarely stops exactly where we intended it to:
Stop.

11. Grace Can Have a Long Reach Too

But consequences do not belong only to:
Sin.
Grace can travel:
Too.
A kind:
Word.

A faithful:
Prayer.
An act of:
Forgiveness.
A moment of:
Generosity.
A quiet act of:
Faithfulness.
Those may travel farther than we ever:
Know.
Someone loved us when we needed:
Love.
Years later—
we love someone else because we remember:
It.
Someone encouraged us when we were ready to:
Quit.
Years later—
we speak encouragement to someone else standing in that same:
Place.
Someone forgave:
Us.
And slowly we learned how to:
Forgive.
Someone showed:
Mercy.
And mercy multiplied.
There are consequences of:
Grace.
Kingdom fruit can:
Multiply.
That means ordinary acts:
Matter.
We are always planting:
Something.
We may never see where every seed:
Goes.
But grace can have a very long:
Reach.

12. What Follows Behind Me?

Perhaps that gives us one of the simplest pastoral questions in the:
Verse.
What follows behind me?

When I leave a:
Room—
what remains?
Peace?
Encouragement?
Fear?
Tension?
Hope?
Every life leaves a:
Wake.
Not perfectly.
Not always intentionally.
But our presence affects:
Others.
After I:
Speak—
what remains?
After I:
Lead—
what remains?
After I:
Disagree—
what remains?
After I exercise:
Authority—
what remains?
After someone encounters:
Me—
what remains?
More:
Fear?
More:
Hurt?
More:
Anger?
More:
Smoke?
Or perhaps—
a little more:
Grace?
The cavalry leaves:
Harm.
The follower of Jesus should increasingly leave signs of another:

Kingdom.
Mercy.
Truth.
Compassion.
Justice.
Grace.
Faithfulness.
That is a very different:
Wake.

13. The Church Should Leave Healing in Its Wake

Imagine communities being able to say:
When those Christians came—
the hungry were:
Fed.
The lonely were:
Visited.
The grieving were:
Comforted.
The forgotten were:
Seen.
The wounded were:
Loved.
No:
Fire.
No:
Smoke.
No:
Brimstone.
No spectacle:
Required.
Simply the quiet power of:
Love.
A cup of:
Water.
A shared:
Meal.
A hospital:
Visit.
A:
Prayer.
A listening:
Ear.
Small does not mean:

Insignificant.
Destruction is often:
Loud.
Love is sometimes:
Quiet.
But volume does not determine:
Power.
We have learned that:
Before.
Noise is not authority.
Neither is violence the highest form of:
Strength.
The Cross settles that:
Question.
The Lamb conquers through faithful:
Self-giving.
And perhaps the Church most clearly resists the kingdom of destruction not when it merely points at everything that is:
Wrong—
but when it leaves healing behind wherever it:
Goes.
That is another kind of:
Power.
Kingdom:
Power.
Lamb-shaped:
Power.

14. Verse 19 Finishes the Monster; Now John Turns to the Heart

Verse 19 completes the cavalry's:
Portrait.
We have seen:
Their number.
Their armor.
Their horses.
Their lion-like:
Heads.
Their fire.
Their smoke.
Their brimstone.
Their serpent-like:
Tails.
The picture is complete:

Enough.
We do not need to add:
Anything.
No modern:
Machinery.
No contemporary:
Nation.
No secret military:
Technology.
John has given us the:
Image.
And now he leaves the cavalry:
Behind.
The next verses turn toward:
People.
Specifically:
Survivors.
And the question changes.
From:
What does the cavalry look like?
To:
Will humanity repent?
That is the theological turn of the:
Chapter.
The locusts.
The torment.
The cavalry.
The fire.
The smoke.
The brimstone.
The death.
All of it eventually leads toward the:
Heart.
What will humanity do with what it has:
Seen?
Will suffering awaken:
Them?
Will warning turn:
Them?
Will judgment expose the futility of their:
Idols?
Or will they continue holding the very things that are leading toward:
Death?

The cavalry cannot answer that:
Question.
Only the human heart:
Can.
And that tells us something about the purpose of Revelation:
Itself.
Revelation is not trying merely to:
Frighten.
Fear by itself is not the:
Goal.
Recognition.
Awakening.
Repentance.
Faithfulness.
Allegiance.
God wants more than our:
Fear.
He wants our:
Heart.
A terrified person may change behavior temporarily because they fear the:
Consequences.
A transformed person turns because allegiance has:
Changed.
Fear may stop a:
Behavior.
Grace can change a:
Heart.
That is why repentance is deeper than:
Avoidance.
And home is not found in:
Fear.
Not in:
Calculation.
Not in knowing every prophetic:
Detail.
Home is found in:
Christ.
That is why we keep returning to:
Him.
We could spend hundreds of pages discussing:
Locusts.
Horsemen.
Angels.

Numbers.
Symbols.
And still miss:
Revelation.
Because Revelation is the revelation of:
Jesus Christ.
He remains the:
Center.
Verse 19 finishes the:
Monster.
Verses 20 and 21 expose the human:
Heart.
And perhaps the second will prove more frightening than the:
First.
A creature that harms is:
Terrible.
A heart that sees destruction and still refuses to turn is:
Tragic.
Perhaps the greatest danger is not finally the:
Tail.
Or the:
Mouth.
Or the:
Fire.
Or the:
Smoke.
Or the:
Brimstone.
It may be the hardened:
Heart.
So we leave the cavalry:
Here.
The mouths have:
Killed.
The tails have:
Harmed.
The army has filled the vision with:
Terror.
But the army is not the final subject of the:
Chapter.
Humanity:
Is.
And before we turn toward the human heart—

we remember what the cavalry has taught:
Us.
The power of the abyss can:
Wound.
The power of the Lamb can:
Heal.
The Destroyer can:
Harm.
The Lamb can:
Restore.
The cavalry can:
Kill.
The Lamb can:
Raise the dead.
And therefore the greatest power in Revelation 9 is not found in the:
Mouths.
Not in the:
Tails.
Not in the:
Fire.
Not in the:
Smoke.
Not in the:
Brimstone.
The greatest power belongs to the One who can take what death has destroyed—
and say:
Live.

Pastoral Reflection

Some things hurt us from the:
Front.
We see them:
Coming.
Other things hurt us from:
Behind.
Consequences.
Memories.
Words that continue echoing long after they were:
Spoken.
Wounds we thought had:
Healed.
Life can sometimes feel as though there is no safe:
Direction.

Trouble ahead.
Pain behind.
And we become:
Tired.
Verse 19 gives us an image of destructive power that seems dangerous from every:
Side.
But even here we remember everything John has already told:
Us.
The army is:
Numbered.
The hour is:
Appointed.
The destruction is:
Limited.
The creatures can:
Harm.
But they cannot:
Reign.
Sometimes endurance means remembering that distinction when pain seems to surround:
Us.
And sometimes endurance means refusing to let yesterday's wounds determine tomorrow's:
Character.
What hurt us does not deserve to become our:
Teacher.
What wounded us does not deserve to become our:
King.
The Lamb still has the right to tell us who we are:
Becoming.
So perhaps the prayer remains:
Lord, do not merely bring me through the darkness.
Keep the darkness from getting into me.
And perhaps we add:
Lord, let what follows behind my life be healing rather than harm.

Something Worth Pondering

The horses have power in their:
Mouths.
And in their:
Tails.
Their entire image seems organized around:
Harm.

But the Lamb's kingdom moves in the opposite:
Direction.
The Destroyer leaves wounds:
Behind.
The Lamb leaves:
Healing.
The Destroyer takes:
Life.
The Lamb gives:
Life.
The Destroyer produces:
Fear.
The Lamb gives:
Hope.
So perhaps one of the simplest ways to examine our own lives is to ask:
What follows behind me?
After I speak—
what remains?
After I leave the room—
what remains?
After I exercise authority—
what remains?
After disagreement—
what remains?
After someone encounters me—
what remains?
More:
Fear?
More:
Hurt?
More:
Anger?
More:
Smoke?
Or perhaps—
a little more:
Grace?
Every life leaves a:
Wake.
The question is:
What kind?

Ask Yourself This:

When something has wounded:
Me—
am I allowing that wound to teach me how to wound:
Others—
or does the Lamb still determine who I am:
Becoming?
After I speak, act, lead, disagree, or simply leave the:
Room—
what tends to remain behind:
Me?
More fear and:
Hurt—
or more grace and:
Healing?
And as John leaves the cavalry behind and turns toward the human:
Heart—
when God shows me where a road of destruction:
Leads—
will I:
Turn?

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:20–21

Revelation 9:20–21

“And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.”
— Revelation 9:20–21, KJV

The cavalry disappears from view.
The horses have been:
Described.
Their mouths have:
Killed.
Their tails have:
Harmed.
The terrible vision of the sixth trumpet has reached its climax.
And suddenly John turns away from the:
Army.
He turns toward:
The survivors.
Those who were not killed remain:
Alive.
And now comes the question that has been hanging over the entire chapter:
What will they do?
They have:
Seen.
Experienced.
Survived.
Will they:
Turn?
John's answer is devastating.
They did not:
Repent.
After everything—
they did not:
Repent.

Perhaps those are the most tragic words in Revelation 9.
The locusts were terrifying.
The cavalry was terrifying.
The fire, smoke, and brimstone were terrifying.
But perhaps nothing is more frightening than a heart that has seen where its road leads—
and still refuses to:
Turn.

1. Survival Is Not Repentance

Those who remain have been given something extraordinarily valuable:
Another moment.
They survived.
The story continues for them.
Opportunity remains.
But opportunity is not the same as:
Repentance.
A person can receive another day without changing direction.
A crisis can pass.
A danger can end.
A consequence can be survived.
And the heart can remain:
Untouched.
Survival is not repentance.
Being spared is not the same as being:
Changed.
We sometimes imagine:
If people could only see.
If they could only experience something dramatic.
If God would only give unmistakable evidence.
Then surely they would:
Believe.
Revelation 9 challenges that assumption.
These people have experienced something extraordinary.
Yet they do not:
Repent.
The problem is deeper than lack of information.
Truth matters.
Evidence matters.
Witness matters.
But repentance involves more than knowing something.
It involves:
The heart.
The will.

Allegiance.
Repentance means:
Turning.
Away from one direction.
Toward:
God.
Regret says:
I wish this had not happened.
Repentance says:
I need to change direction.
The survivors have seen where their road leads.
Death.
Destruction.
Judgment.
Still—
they do not:
Turn.

2. The Human Heart Can Defend What Is Destroying It

That may be one of sin's strangest features.
We can cling to the very thing that is hurting:
Us.
Defend it.
Excuse it.
Rationalize it.
Protect it.
Sometimes we would rather explain the consequence than abandon the:
Idol.
Something goes terribly wrong, and we can find reasons for everything except the possibility that something we love needs to:
Go.
A warning can be heard.
A consequence can be experienced.
A disaster can be survived.
And the lesson can still be:
Refused.
That is why the deepest problem in Revelation 9 is not merely outside humanity.
It is also:
Within.
Revelation takes human responsibility seriously.
People choose.
Worship.
Act.

Refuse.
Persist.
The survivors are not simply passive characters in the vision.
Their response matters.
Their allegiance matters.
Their refusal to turn:
Matters.

3. The Problem Begins With Worship

John identifies the first problem as:
Worship.
They do not repent of the works of their hands.
They continue worshiping:
Demons.
And idols.
That is not accidental.
Worship is central throughout Revelation.
Who is:
Worthy?
Who receives:
Allegiance?
Praise?
Obedience?
Heaven worships:
God.
Heaven worships:
The Lamb.
The powers opposed to God seek:
Worship.
The battle in Revelation is not merely political or military.
It is also:
Liturgical.
Who will humanity:
Worship?
And worship means far more than:
Singing.
Worship includes what we treat as:
Ultimate.
What we trust.
What we obey.
What we serve.
What defines our lives.
The question is not simply:
Do I worship?

The deeper question is:
What receives the weight of my life?

4. The Works of Their Hands

John says they worship the:
Works of their hands.
There is something tragically absurd about that.
God creates:
Humanity.
Humanity creates:
Idols.
Then humanity bows before what humanity:
Made.
The Creator is replaced by the:
Created.
We may not carve an idol from wood or stone.
But the phrase *works of their hands* remains surprisingly contemporary.
We create:
Money.
Institutions.
Technology.
Systems.
Reputations.
Success.
And then the things we create can begin demanding our:
Allegiance.
Money can become our master.
Technology can control our attention.
Reputation can consume our lives.
Success can leave us terrified of losing it.
That does not make money, technology, institutions, or achievement inherently:
Idolatrous.
The question is what place they:
Occupy.
Do we use them?
Or do they rule:
Us?
Created things cannot carry the weight of:
God.
An idol is a terrible master because it cannot give what it promises.
Security.
Identity.
Meaning.

Life.
Salvation.

5. Eyes That Cannot See

John lists the materials:
Gold.
Silver.
Brass.
Stone.
Wood.
Different materials.
Different values.
Same:
Problem.
The wealthy may have gold.
The poor may have wood.
The price of the idol does not change the nature of:
Idolatry.
And then John exposes their powerlessness.
They cannot:
See.
Hear.
Walk.
Human hands give the idol eyes.
But it cannot:
See.
Ears.
But it cannot:
Hear.
Feet.
But it cannot:
Walk.
The worshiper possesses more life than the thing being:
Worshiped.
Yet the worshiper bows.
Scripture has mocked this absurdity before.
Revelation stands firmly within that prophetic tradition.
Why worship something that cannot:
Save?
But John adds a darker dimension.
They also worship:
Demons.
We should handle that carefully.

Revelation does not invite us into superstition or paranoia about every object around us.
The concern is:
Allegiance opposed to God.
False worship is not harmless.
It:
Deforms.
And that prepares us for verse 21.

6. Worship Eventually Gets Feet

Verse 20 describes:
Worship.
Verse 21 describes:
Behavior.
That order matters.
Worship.
Then:
Life.
Allegiance.
Then:
Action.
What we worship eventually shapes what we become.
False worship does not remain in the temple.
It walks into:
Life.
The kingdom of destruction produces destructive people.
The kingdom of the Lamb should produce:
Lamb-like people.
What we believe eventually begins to:
Walk.
What we worship eventually begins to:
Shape.
What we love eventually begins to:
Direct.
Theology eventually gets:
Feet.

7. The Darkness Gets Into People

John names the practices:
Murders.
Sorceries.
Sexual immorality.
Thefts.
Notice how quickly the text moves from false worship to harm done to:
People.

Idolatry is never merely private.
What we worship affects how we treat:
Others.
If power becomes ultimate—
people can become:
Tools.
If money becomes ultimate—
people can become:
Transactions.
If pleasure becomes ultimate—
people can become:
Objects.
If self becomes ultimate—
everyone else can become a supporting character in:
My story.
This is why love of God and love of neighbor belong together.
Love:
God.
Love:
Neighbor.
The two cannot finally be separated.
Bad worship eventually produces:
Bad ethics.
And here the warning from earlier in the chapter returns with even greater force.
The danger is not merely that darkness surrounds:
Us.
The deeper danger is that darkness begins forming:
Us.
The darkness gets:
Inside.
That is why the prayer remains:
Lord, do not merely bring me through the darkness.
Keep the darkness from getting into me.

8. The Destroyer Takes. The Lamb Gives.

The list in verse 21 has a common thread.
Human desire has become detached from proper allegiance to:
God.
My power.
My desire.
My pleasure.
My possessions.
The self moves toward the:

Center.
And the neighbor becomes:
Secondary.
Idolatry curves life inward.
But the Lamb turns us:
Outward.
Love.
Serve.
Give.
Forgive.
Bear one another's burdens.
The contrast could hardly be greater.
The Destroyer:
Takes.
The Lamb:
Gives.
The Destroyer:
Wounds.
The Lamb bears:
Wounds.
The Destroyer:
Kills.
The Lamb gives:
Life.
And worship determines which King is forming:
Us.

9. We Become Like What We Worship

That may be one of the deepest truths in these two verses.
We become like what we worship.
Worship power long enough—
and we may become:
Controlling.
Worship money long enough—
and we may become:
Greedy.
Worship pleasure long enough—
and we may become:
Consuming.
Worship self long enough—
and we may become unable to see anyone beyond:
Ourselves.
But worship the Lamb—
and another family resemblance should slowly begin to:

Appear.
Mercy.
Truth.
Humility.
Faithfulness.
Sacrifice.
Love.
Not perfectly.
Not immediately.
Christian formation is:
Slow.
There are failures.
Setbacks.
Repentance.
Growth.
More:
Grace.
The goal is not perfection achieved overnight.
The goal is:
Family resemblance.
That people might increasingly see something of:
The Lamb—
in us.

10. Christians Are People Who Know Where to Turn

That brings us back to the word John repeats:
Repent.
Christians are not people who never need to:
Repent.
Christians are people who have learned where to:
Turn.
There is an enormous difference.
Repentance is not evidence that faith has:
Failed.
Sometimes repentance is evidence that faith is:
Alive.
A hardened heart must always be:
Right.
It explains.
Defends.
Blames.
Justifies.
Rationalizes.
But does not:

Bow.
Repentance requires humility.
I am not:
God.
I can be:
Wrong.
My desires can become:
Disordered.
My judgment can:
Fail.
I need:
Grace.
And grace makes that admission:
Safe.

11. Grace Frees Us to Say, "I Was Wrong"

Without grace, confession can feel like:
Annihilation.
If my identity depends upon always being right, then admitting I am wrong can feel like:
Death.
But the gospel gives us another foundation.
My identity does not depend upon my:
Perfection.
It depends upon:
Christ.
Therefore I can say:
I was wrong.
I hurt you.
I am sorry.
Forgive me.
Lord, change:
Me.
Those are not words of spiritual:
Weakness.
They are words made possible by:
Grace.
The tragedy of Revelation 9 is not simply that these people have sinned.
Every human being has:
Sinned.
The tragedy is that when confronted with where their allegiance leads—they still refuse to:
Turn.
The door remains open.

But they will not:
Enter.
The warning sounds.
But they will not:
Listen.
The road reveals its destination.
But they will not:
Turn.

12. Revelation Must Become a Mirror

Perhaps this is John's greatest warning to the Church.
Do not become fascinated with the monsters—
and fail to examine your own:
Heart.
It is easier to identify the locusts than our own:
Idols.
Easier to discuss the cavalry than our own:
Allegiance.
Easier to speculate about the darkness out there than confront the darkness that may be forming:
In here.
Revelation must eventually become:
A mirror.
Not merely:
A window.
We look through it at:
Empires.
Demons.
Judgments.
History.
But eventually the glass turns toward:
Us.
What do I worship?
What am I becoming?
Where do I need to:
Repent?

13. The Real Horror of Revelation 9

And so Chapter 9 ends where it was always going.
Not with:
The abyss.
Not with:
The locusts.
Not with:
The Destroyer.

Not with two hundred million:
Horsemen.
Not with:
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
Not even with:
Death.
It ends with the:
Human heart.
A heart that has seen where rebellion leads.
A heart that has survived the warning.
A heart that has been given another moment.
And still refuses to:
Turn.
That is the tragedy.
The deepest tragedy of Revelation 9 is not simply that judgment comes.
It is that even judgment does not necessarily produce:
Repentance.
And perhaps the warning is not primarily for someone:
Else.
Perhaps John places the mirror before:
Us.
What are the works of my hands?
What receives my allegiance?
What do I protect even when its fruit is destructive?
What is my worship making me:
Become?
And when Christ tells me the truth—
will I defend myself?
Or will I:
Turn?
Because:
Repentance is not God's attempt to humiliate us.
Repentance is God's invitation to come home.
And as long as Christ is speaking—
the invitation to respond:
Remains.

Pastoral Reflection

There are few words more difficult for human beings to say:
I was wrong.
We learn early how to:
Defend.

Explain.
Excuse.
Blame.
Rationalize.
Sometimes we become so skilled at defending ourselves that we can explain almost anything except the possibility that we need to:
Change.
Revelation 9 ends with people who have been given every reason to reconsider their direction.
And they do not:
Repent.
That should make us careful about reading these verses only as a description of:
Them.
Because the capacity to resist repentance lives much closer to:
Home.
Someone confronts us.
We immediately:
Explain.
Someone tells us we hurt them.
We immediately defend our:
Intentions.
Scripture exposes something in us.
We immediately think of someone else who needs to:
Hear it.
The sermon becomes about:
Them.
The verse becomes about:
Them.
The warning becomes about:
Them.
And somehow—
we remain:
Untouched.
Perhaps one of the greatest evidences of spiritual maturity is not reaching the point where we no longer need correction.
It is reaching the point where correction no longer threatens our:
Identity.
Because our identity rests in:
Christ.
Therefore we can say:
I was wrong.
I am sorry.

Forgive me.
Lord, change:
Me.
That is not weakness.
That is:
Repentance.
And repentance is one of grace's greatest:
Gifts.
Because God does not expose what is wrong merely to condemn us.
He calls us to:
Turn.
And home is still:
There.

Something Worth Pondering

Verse 20 describes what humanity:
Worships.
Verse 21 describes how humanity:
Lives.
Perhaps that order tells us almost everything we need to know.
What we worship eventually shapes what we become.
Worship power long enough—
and people become things to:
Control.
Worship money long enough—
and people become things to:
Use.
Worship pleasure long enough—
and people become things to:
Consume.
Worship self long enough—
and everyone else becomes a supporting character in:
Our story.
But worship the Lamb—
and slowly another family resemblance begins to:
Appear.
Mercy.
Truth.
Humility.
Faithfulness.
Sacrifice.
Love.
Not perfectly.
Not immediately.

But:
Increasingly.
Every kingdom produces a family resemblance.
So perhaps one of the deepest questions Revelation asks is not merely:
What do I believe?
But:
What is my worship making me become?

Ask Yourself This:

When Christ shows me something in my life that needs to change, is my first instinct to:
Defend?
Or to:
Turn?
What receives enough of my trust, allegiance, fear, or desire that it may have begun occupying a place that belongs only to:
God?

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:20

"And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk:"
— Revelation 9:20, KJV

A third of humankind has been:
Killed.
But John now directs our attention toward those who:
Remain.
The rest of:
Humankind.
The:
Survivors.
They have lived through something:
Terrible.
The plagues did not kill:
Them.
They have something the dead no longer:
Have.
Time.
Another:

Moment.
Another opportunity to:
Respond.
And now the question becomes:
What will they do with the life that remains?
John gives us the answer almost:
Immediately.
They did not:
Repent.
Those words may be more disturbing than everything that came:
Before.
They survived.
But they did not:
Turn.

1. Survival Is Not Repentance

That distinction deserves to stand:
Alone.
Survival is not repentance.
A person can survive a crisis without being changed by:
It.
Life can:
Continue—
while the heart continues in precisely the same:
Direction.
Another day does not automatically produce another:
Direction.
The survivors have been given:
Time.
And as we have already discovered:
Time can be mercy.
Another day can become another opportunity to:
Turn.
But mercy can be:
Wasted.
Another opportunity can be:
Ignored.
Another warning can be:
Dismissed.
Judgment can:
Warn.
Consequences can:
Expose.
Pain can:

Interrupt.
But none of those mechanically produces:
Repentance.
The human heart is not a machine into which enough suffering can be inserted until repentance comes:
Out.
The person must:
Turn.
God's warning can reveal the:
Road.
But the traveler must be willing to leave:
It.
And Revelation takes that human response:
Seriously.
The survivors are not merely passive:
Observers.
They continue:
Worshiping.
They continue giving their:
Allegiance.
Their response:
Matters.
The abyss.
The locusts.
The torment.
The cavalry.
The fire.
The smoke.
The brimstone.
The death.
All of it has brought us to the deeper:
Question.
Will humanity turn?
And the answer in Verse 20 is:
No.

2. We Can Hate the Consequences Without Leaving the Road

That challenges one of our common:
Assumptions.
We sometimes imagine:
If God would only make Himself obvious enough—everyone would believe.
If people saw something unmistakable—

surely they would:
Turn.
But these survivors have not lacked dramatic:
Experience.
Something deeper is:
Wrong.
The issue is not merely:
Information.
It is:
Allegiance.
Human beings can know something is destructive and still cling to:
It.
We do that all the:
Time.
We:
Know.
Yet:
Continue.
We see the:
Consequences.
Yet defend the:
Pattern.
Knowledge does not automatically become:
Obedience.
Information can reach the:
Mind—
without changing the:
Heart.
And repentance is more than:
Recognition.
I can recognize:
This is wrong.
And still do:
It.
Repentance moves beyond recognition toward:
Change.
It is also more than:
Regret.
Regret says:
I hate what happened.
Repentance says:
I need to change direction.
That difference is:

Crucial.
We can hate the:
Consequences—
without hating the:
Road.
We dislike where the road has taken:
Us.
But still refuse to leave the:
Road.
Sometimes we want:
Rescue—
without:
Transformation.
Take away the:
Pain.
Fix the:
Problem.
Restore what I:
Lost.
But do not ask me to:
Change.
The Gospel offers more than:
Relief.
It offers:
New life.
And repentance is an invitation into that:
Life.
Not merely:
Stop doing bad things.
But:
Turn toward God.
Return.
Come:
Home.

3. The Works of Their Hands

John now identifies what the survivors refuse to:
Leave.
The works of their hands.
There is deep biblical irony in those:
Words.
Human hands make:
Something.
Then human beings bow before what their own hands have:

Made.
The order of Creator and creature becomes:
Reversed.
We fashion:
Something.
Name:
It.
Value:
It.
Then surrender ourselves to:
It.
The idol depends upon the:
Worshiper.
The worshiper made:
It.
The worshiper carries:
It.
The worshiper protects:
It.
Yet somehow the worshiper begins depending upon:
It.
That is the absurdity of:
Idolatry.
We give ultimate allegiance to something that possesses no ultimate power in:
Itself.
Then fear losing the thing we ourselves:
Created.
The creation begins ruling the:
Creator.
Scripture has exposed this irony:
Before.
The prophets repeatedly describe people taking material, fashioning an:
Idol—
and then bowing before:
It.
John stands firmly within that prophetic:
Tradition.
His imagination has been formed by:
Scripture.
That matters for how we read:
Revelation.
Our first interpretive world should be:

Scripture.
Not modern:
Headlines.
Not technological:
Speculation.
Not contemporary geopolitical:
Maps.
Scripture.
And John's first readers knew something else about:
Idolatry.
Their world was filled with:
Images.
Temples.
Cultic practices.
Imperial religious:
Expectations.
Public life and religious allegiance could become deeply:
Intertwined.
Refusing idolatrous worship was not merely an internal theological:
Opinion.
Faithfulness could become:
Costly.
Because worship has:
Consequences.
Who we worship affects how we:
Live.

4. The Materials Change; the Heart Does Not

John lists the idols.
Gold.
Silver.
Brass.
Stone.
Wood.
The materials vary enormously in:
Value.
Gold to:
Wood.
Expensive to:
Cheap.
Beautiful to:
Ordinary.
But the spiritual problem remains the:
Same.

The materials change.
The heart does not.
Idolatry does not require something obviously:
Evil.
Something good can become:
Ultimate.
Something useful can become:
Ultimate.
Something beautiful can become:
Ultimate.
Something valuable can become:
Ultimate.
The issue is not simply what the object is made:
Of.
The issue is what the heart gives to:
It.
John also says the survivors continue worshiping:
Demons.
That language should make us take false worship:
Seriously.
Idolatry is not spiritually:
Neutral.
But John is not inviting us to become obsessed with finding demons behind every:
Object.
That would move our attention away from the theological:
Point.
False worship draws humanity away from:
God.
Darkness loves misplaced:
Worship.
Because worship shapes:
Allegiance.
And allegiance shapes:
Life.
Revelation continually asks:
Who is worthy?
Who deserves:
Glory?
Honor?
Power?
Allegiance?
Its answer is:

God.
And the:
Lamb.
Idolatry takes worthiness that belongs to:
God—
and gives it to something:
Created.
That is the fundamental:
Disorder.

5. Good Things Make Convincing Idols

For many of us, idols no longer look like:
Statues.
That does not mean idolatry has:
Disappeared.
It may simply have changed:
Form.
Career.
Family.
Money.
Success.
Security.
Reputation.
Nation.
Church.
Technology.
Even:
Ministry.
None of those things is necessarily:
Wrong.
Some are extraordinarily:
Good.
And good things can make particularly convincing:
Idols.
Because we can easily defend:
Them.
Family is:
Good.
Work is:
Good.
Security is:
Good.
Ministry is:
Good.

The problem begins when good becomes:
Ultimate.
When I cannot imagine life without:
It.
When losing it would destroy my:
Identity.
When I compromise faithfulness to preserve:
It.
Then perhaps something has moved into God's:
Place.
An idol is often revealed by what we cannot:
Surrender.
What must I:
Keep?
What can God not:
Touch?
What am I terrified to:
Lose?
We should be careful:
Here.
Not every fear means:
Idolatry.
Grieving the possible loss of someone or something precious does not prove we have made that person or thing a:
God.
Fear is part of being:
Human.
But disproportionate fear can sometimes reveal where we have placed ultimate:
Security.
What do I believe will:
Save me?
Money?
Influence?
Intelligence?
Health?
Relationships?
Planning?
Control?
None of those is necessarily:
Bad.
But none of them is:
God.

6. Created Things Are Too Small to Be God

Money can:
Disappear.
Health can:
Change.
Relationships can:
End.
Plans can:
Fail.
Created things are:
Finite.
And that may be one of idolatry's deepest:
Problems.
Created things are too small to be God.
We ask finite things to provide infinite:
Security.
They cannot.
The burden eventually crushes:
Them—
or:
Us.
Imagine asking another human being to provide everything only God can:
Provide.
Perfect security.
Unfailing identity.
Ultimate meaning.
Permanent peace.
Complete fulfillment.
That person cannot carry:
It.
Neither can a:
Career.
A bank:
Account.
A reputation.
A nation.
A ministry.
A church.
A:
Plan.
Good things become crushing gods precisely because they were never created to bear the weight of our:
Worship.

They can be:
Received.
Enjoyed.
Loved.
Stewarded.
Thanked God:
For.
But not:
Worshiped.
The moment a created thing becomes our ultimate:
Security—
we have asked something finite to become:
Infinite.
It cannot.

7. The Idol Says “Carry Me”; God Says “I Will Carry You”

John now makes the powerlessness of idolatry almost:
Comical.
The idols cannot:
See.
Cannot:
Hear.
Cannot:
Walk.
Imagine worshiping something that cannot even:
Move.
The idol has:
Eyes.
But cannot:
See.
The worshiper can:
See.
Yet the one who sees bows before the thing that:
Cannot.
The idol has:
Ears.
People:
Pray.
Cry.
Beg.
Ask.
The idol hears:
Nothing.

Because it cannot:
Hear.
The idol has:
Feet.
But if it needs to:
Move—
someone must:
Carry it.
The god depends upon the worshiper for:
Transportation.
The irony is:
Deliberate.
Now compare that with the living:
God.
God:
Sees.
God:
Hears.
God:
Acts.
The biblical God is not something humanity must:
Carry.
He carries:
Humanity.
And that reversal is:
Beautiful.
The idol says:
Carry me.
God says:
I will carry you.
The idol requires:
Protection.
God becomes our:
Refuge.
Idols exhaust their:
Worshipers.
Because idols must constantly be:
Maintained.
Protected.
Fed.
Defended.
Carried.
A reputation must continually be:

Protected.
An image must continually be:
Managed.
Success must continually be:
Proven.
Control must continually be:
Exercised.
The worshiper eventually becomes servant to the god the worshiper:
Made.
But the direction of the Gospel is:
Opposite.
The idol:
Takes.
The Lamb:
Gives.
The idol consumes the:
Worshiper.
The living God gives Himself to His:
People.

8. The God Who Sees, Hears, and Comes

The idol cannot:
See you.
But God:
Does.
That matters:
Pastorally.
There are moments when people feel:
Invisible.
Forgotten.
Unnoticed.
The living God is not:
Blind.
The idol cannot:
Hear you.
But God:
Does.
That does not mean every prayer receives the answer we:
Want.
But unanswered is not the same as:
Unheard.
We learned that at the:
Altar.
The prayers of God's people were not:

Lost.
Heaven had been:
Listening.
Verse 20's deaf idols stand in sharp contrast with the God before whose altar those prayers:
Rise.
The idol cannot:
Walk.
But God comes toward:
Us.
That is the Gospel's extraordinary:
Claim.
Humanity does not merely struggle upward toward:
God.
God comes to:
Humanity.
The Word became:
Flesh.
Christian faith centers upon a God who:
Came.
Walked among:
Us.
Touched:
People.
Ate with:
People.
Wept with:
People.
Our God has walked our:
Roads.
Jesus walked:
Galilee.
Jerusalem.
The road to:
Calvary.
The idol cannot:
See.
Jesus saw the:
Forgotten.
The idol cannot:
Hear.
Jesus heard the:
Crying.

The idol cannot:
Walk.
Jesus walked toward the:
Broken.
Christ is not merely a better:
Idol.
He is the living:
Lord.
Christianity is not exchanging one religious object for:
Another.
It is reconciliation with the living:
God.

9. A God Who Never Disagrees With Me May Simply Be Me

Idolatry offers something that can be strangely:
Attractive.
Control.
A god we create can become a god we:
Manage.
We decide what it:
Looks like.
Where it:
Stands.
What it:
Requires.
A manageable god can be very:
Convenient.
The living God is not:
Manageable.
God:
Speaks.
Commands.
Corrects.
Calls.
We do not create:
Him.
He created:
Us.
Sometimes we would prefer a god who always agrees with:
Us.
Approves our:
Choices.
Blesses our:

Plans.
Never:
Corrects.
Never:
Challenges.
Never says:
Turn.
But:
A God who never disagrees with me may simply be me.
If my god always shares my:
Opinions—
approves my:
Desires—
and never calls me to:
Repent—
perhaps I have fashioned something in my own:
Image.
The living God has the right to correct:
Us.
Because He is:
God.
And because He:
Loves.
Correction is not necessarily:
Rejection.
Sometimes correction is evidence of:
Relationship.
Repentance becomes possible when God is allowed to be:
God.
I stop insisting:
My:
Way.
My:
Truth.
My:
Control.
My:
Terms.
And say:
Speak, Lord.
That is the opposite of:
Idolatry.

Idolatry creates a god who conforms to us.
Faith allows God to conform us to Christ.
One makes God in our:
Image.
The other restores God's image in:
Us.

10. We Become Like What We Worship

Worship is:
Formative.
We become like what we:
Worship.
That principle runs deeply through:
Scripture.
What we repeatedly adore shapes our:
Attention.
Desire.
Imagination.
Character.
What we place at the center slowly rearranges everything else around:
It.
That means worship is far more than a Sunday:
Activity.
Far more than:
Music.
Worship concerns what receives our deepest:
Loyalty.
Trust.
Love.
Obedience.
It answers the question:
Who is worthy?
And our answer gradually shapes who we:
Become.
Worship something:
Lifeless—
and spiritual life can begin to:
Diminish.
Worship the living:
God—
and His life begins shaping:
Us.
Every kingdom produces a family:
Resemblance.

And so does every:
Worship.

11. The Blind Idol Produces Blind Worshipers

Now the irony of Verse 20 becomes even more:
Profound.
The idol cannot:
See.
Eventually the worshiper refuses to:
See.
The idol cannot:
Hear.
Eventually the worshiper refuses to:
Hear.
And look at the survivors.
They have:
Seen.
Yet they do not:
See.
They have been:
Warned.
Yet they do not:
Hear.
They worship things that cannot:
See—
and fail to see what God is:
Showing.
They worship things that cannot:
Hear—
and fail to hear what God is:
Saying.
The condition of the idol becomes the spiritual condition of the:
Worshiper.
The blind idol produces blind worshipers.
The deaf idol produces deaf worshipers.
Every kingdom produces a family:
Resemblance.
Even:
Idolatry.
That makes Verse 20 even more:
Tragic.
Their gods cannot:
Respond.
And slowly they have become spiritually:

Unresponsive.
Worship has formed:
Them.
That is why Christian worship matters so:
Deeply.
We gather not merely to perform a religious:
Duty.
We gather to remember who:
God is.
And therefore who:
We are.

12. Worship Says, “Look Again”

The world can distort our sense of:
Proportion.
Problems become:
Ultimate.
Fears become:
Sovereign.
Empires become:
Permanent.
Armies become:
Infinite.
Created things become:
Worthy.
Then the Church:
Worships.
And worship says:
Look again.
There is a:
Throne.
There is a:
Lamb.
There is a:
Kingdom.
There is a:
Future.
The visible world is not the whole:
Story.
Worship reorders:
Reality.
God is:
God.
We are:

Not.
Christ is:
Lord.
Our fears are:
Not.
The Lamb is:
Worthy.
Our idols are:
Not.
True worship restores:
Proportion.
The problem may still be:
Large.
But it is not:
God.
The idol may still be:
Attractive.
But it is not:
Worthy.
The empire may still be:
Powerful.
But it is not:
Eternal.
Worship puts the throne back in the center.
Not because worship moves the:
Throne.
Because worship reminds us where the throne has been all:
Along.

13. Repentance Means Turning From—and Toward

Repentance and worship therefore belong:
Together.
To turn from an idol is also to turn:
Toward God.
Christianity cannot be reduced to:
Stop.
Stop:
This.
Stop:
That.
Stop:
Sinning.
The Gospel also says:
Come.

Come to the living:
God.
The God who:
Sees.
The God who:
Hears.
The God who:
Comes.
The God who:
Carries.
The God who:
Saves.
That is why repentance is not merely:
Subtraction.
It is:
Return.
We put down what cannot give:
Life—
and turn toward the One who:
Can.
We release what cannot:
Save—
and return to the One who:
Does.
We leave what cannot carry:
Us—
and entrust ourselves to the One who:
Will.
That makes the refusal of the survivors especially:
Tragic.
They remain with what cannot:
See.
Cannot:
Hear.
Cannot:
Walk.
They choose the lifeless over the:
Living.
Perhaps that is idolatry's final:
Tragedy.
We settle for something less than:
God.
Something we can:

Control.
Something we can:
Possess.
Something that asks less of:
Us.
But also something that cannot give us:
Life.

14. Put Down What Cannot Carry You

And so Verse 20 finally places a mirror before:
Us.
The surviving world does not:
Repent.
It continues worshiping the works of its own:
Hands.
Gold.
Silver.
Brass.
Stone.
Wood.
Things with eyes that cannot:
See.
Ears that cannot:
Hear.
Feet that cannot:
Walk.
And perhaps the question is not merely:
How could they be so foolish?
Perhaps the better question is:
What have I made and then allowed to master me?
What do I carry that I expect to carry:
Me?
What do I protect because I secretly believe I cannot live without:
It?
What receives the allegiance that belongs to:
God?
Because idols have changed:
Shape.
The human heart has:
Not.
We still:
Create.
Trust.
Cling.

Bow.
And the living God still:
Calls.
Turn.
Come:
Home.
Put down what you have been:
Carrying.
Let God carry:
You.
Stop speaking to what cannot:
Hear.
Come to the One who:
Does.
Stop trusting what cannot:
Walk.
Follow the One who walked all the way to the:
Cross.
The idol cannot:
See you.
God:
Does.
The idol cannot:
Hear you.
God:
Does.
The idol cannot walk toward:
You.
But in Jesus Christ—
God already:
Has.
And as long as Christ is speaking—
the invitation to respond remains.

Pastoral Reflection

Some idols are easy to:
Recognize.
Others look remarkably like good:
Things.
Work.
Family.
Success.
Financial security.
Health.

Reputation.
Ministry.
Even the desire to be:
Needed.
None of those things is necessarily:
Wrong.
The problem begins when something good becomes:
Ultimate.
When we begin saying:
I cannot be okay unless I have this.
I cannot know who I am without this.
I cannot trust God if He allows me to lose this.
Then perhaps we have discovered something that has quietly moved toward the center of our:
Lives.
And idols are:
Exhausting.
Because idols must be:
Maintained.
Protected.
Fed.
Defended.
Carried.
John's idols cannot even:
Walk.
Someone has to carry:
Them.
What a contrast with the living:
God.
The idol says:
Carry me.
God says:
I will carry you.
The idol cannot:
See.
God:
Sees.
The idol cannot:
Hear.
God:
Hears.
The idol cannot:
Walk.

And in Jesus Christ—
God came looking for:
Us.
Perhaps repentance sometimes begins simply by setting down what we have been carrying for far too:
Long—
and allowing ourselves to be carried by:
Grace.

Something Worth Pondering

John's idols have:
Eyes—
but cannot:
See.
Ears—
but cannot:
Hear.
Feet—
but cannot:
Walk.
And their worshipers have survived extraordinary:
Judgment.
They have:
Seen.
They have:
Heard.
They are still:
Walking.
Yet they do not:
Repent.
Perhaps there is a terrible irony:
Here.
We become like what we worship.
Worship what cannot:
See—
and eventually we may refuse to:
See.
Worship what cannot:
Hear—
and eventually we may refuse to:
Hear.
Worship what has no:
Life—

and eventually something within us may become spiritually:
Lifeless.
But worship the living:
God—
and another kind of formation:
Begins.
We learn to:
See.
Hear.
Walk.
Love.
Serve.
Give.
Forgive.
Endure.
Every kingdom produces a family resemblance.
The question is:
Whose resemblance is appearing in me?

Ask Yourself This:

What good thing in my life am I most tempted to make:
Ultimate—
and am I asking something finite to carry a weight only God can:
Bear?
When God corrects, challenges, or calls me to:
Repent—
am I willing to let the living God be:
God—
or have I fashioned a god who always agrees with:
Me?
And what am I still carrying that cannot see me, hear me, save me, or carry:
Me—
and can I finally put it:
Down—
and let grace carry me:
Home?

A Closer Look — Revelation 9:21

“Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.”
— Revelation 9:21, KJV

They did not:
Repent.
Verse 20 said:
They did not repent.
Verse 21 says:
They did not repent.
John repeats the words because they are the theological:
Center. A Closer Look — Revelation 9.21
After everything we have:
Seen—
John wants those words ringing in our:
Ears.
They did not:
Repent.
That is how Chapter 9:
Ends.
Not with the:
Locusts.
Not with the:
Destroyer.
Not with the:
Cavalry.
Not with:
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
Chapter 9 ends with:
Humanity.
And perhaps that is the greatest interpretive clue in the entire:
Chapter.

1. They Did Not Repent

A third of humankind has:
Died.
The survivors remain.
They have seen:
Judgment.

Destruction.
Death.
They have been given:
Time.
And yet:
They did not:
Repent.
That should stop:
Us.
Because John is showing us something more frightening than a strange apocalyptic:
Creature.
He is showing us the human capacity to continue in a destructive direction even after the destruction has become:
Visible.
The problem is not merely:
Ignorance.
They have:
Seen.
It is not merely lack of:
Warning.
They have been:
Warned.
Something deeper has happened in the human:
Heart.
They refuse to:
Turn.
And John allows that uncomfortable truth to:
Remain.

2. Chapter 9 Ends With Humanity

Think about where this chapter has taken:
Us.
The abyss was:
Opened.
Smoke:
Rose.
Locusts:
Came.
People were:
Tormented.
The Destroyer was:
Named.
The sixth trumpet:

Sounded.
Four angels were:
Released.
An enormous cavalry:
Appeared.
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
Death.
John has spent enormous imaginative energy describing supernatural:
Terror.
And then—
the monsters disappear from the:
Center.
Human beings become the:
Subject.
The question is no longer:
What are those creatures?
The question becomes:
What has happened to humanity?
That is considerably more:
Personal.
We can discuss locusts at a comfortable:
Distance.
We can debate:
Cavalry.
Numbers.
Angels.
The abyss.
But repentance comes much closer to:
Home.

3. Repentance Turns the Telescope Into a Mirror

For much of Revelation 9, we have been looking:
Outward.
What does this:
Mean?
Who are:
They?
What does that image:
Represent?
How should this symbol be:
Understood?
Those questions:

Matter.
We should read carefully.
Interpret responsibly.
Respect the text.
But eventually Scripture turns the telescope:
Around.
And suddenly we are no longer looking through:
It.
We are looking into a:
Mirror.
The question is no longer merely:
What does this symbol mean?
It becomes:
What do I need to change?
That is less comfortable than prophetic:
Speculation.
But considerably more spiritually:
Useful.
Revelation is not merely information about:
Things.
It is Scripture intended to form a:
People.
And formation eventually reaches:
Us.

4. It Is Easier to Decode a Symbol Than Repent of a Sin

We can spend hours discussing what a trumpet might:
Mean.
Repentance may require only three:
Words.
I was wrong.
And those three words can be harder than any prophetic:
Puzzle.
Because interpretation exercises the:
Mind.
Repentance involves the:
Heart.
Pride.
Desire.
Will.
Allegiance.
There is nothing wrong with serious:
Study.
We have done plenty of it.

History.
Imagery.
Structure.
Symbolism.
Theology.
Interpretive possibilities.
But the homework must eventually serve:
Life.
If we finish Revelation knowing more about:
Prophecy—
but loving Jesus:
Less—
we have missed something.
If we can explain every theory but cannot receive:
Correction—
we have missed the:
Point.
The goal is not prophetic:
Mastery.
Not winning:
Arguments.
Not possessing secret:
Knowledge.
The goal is:
Faithfulness to Christ.

5. Verse 20 Shows the Root; Verse 21 Shows the Fruit

Verse 20 was about:
Worship.
Verse 21 is about:
Life.
That order matters.
Worship.
Then:
Behavior.
Allegiance.
Then:
Character.
Verse 20 showed the:
Root.
False:
Worship.
Verse 21 shows the:
Fruit.

Broken human:
Relationships.
What we worship eventually shapes what we:
Become.
Theology becomes:
Life.
Worship becomes:
Character.
Allegiance becomes:
Behavior.
That does not mean human beings become machines mechanically controlled by whatever they:
Worship.
We remain morally:
Responsible.
But what we continually love, trust, desire, and worship profoundly shapes how we:
Live.
Worship is:
Formative.
Attention shapes:
Desire.
Desire influences:
Choice.
Choice forms:
Character.
And character eventually becomes visible in:
Action.

6. Idolatry Never Stays at the Altar

That may be one of the most important truths connecting Verses 20 and: 21
Idolatry never stays at the altar.
Eventually it walks into:
Life.
False worship eventually reaches the:
Neighbor.
Because worship shapes how we understand:
God.
Self.
Others.
Power.
Possessions.
Bodies.
Life.

When God is removed from the:
Center—
something else moves:
There.
Often:
Self.
My:
Desires.
My:
Power.
My:
Security.
My:
Pleasure.
My:
Possessions.
And then other people can slowly become means to my:
Ends.
Instead of neighbors to:
Love—
they become:
Tools.
Obstacles.
Competitors.
Objects.
Threats.
Verse 21 shows us where disordered worship can:
Lead.
Not merely to bad religious:
Ideas.
To damaged human:
Lives.

7. Life, Power, Bodies, and Possessions

John names four areas.
Murders.
Sorceries.
Fornication—sexual immorality.
Thefts.
We should not make them less serious than John:
Does.
But perhaps their relationship becomes clearer when we see what each one:
Touches.
Life.

Power.
Bodies.
Possessions.
Murder takes human:
Life.
God gives:
Life.
Murder takes:
Life.
Creation says:
Live.
Murder says:
Die.
The directions could hardly be more:
Opposite.
Then John mentions:
Sorceries.
The word points toward magical or occult practices—attempts to engage supernatural power apart from faithful dependence upon:
God.
Again the issue touches:
Allegiance.
Human beings have always been tempted by:
Power.
We want to:
Know.
Control.
Predict.
Manipulate.
Guarantee.
Especially when life feels:
Uncertain.
But we were never created to be:
Sovereign.
We were created to be:
Faithful.
That distinction can bring enormous:
Freedom.
Faith is not:
Control.
Faith is:
Trust.
We:

Plan.
Work.
Prepare.
Think.
Act.
Seek:
Wisdom.
But we do not pretend we are:
God.
There is freedom in being a:
Creature.
I do not have to know:
Everything.
Control:
Everything.
Fix:
Everything.
Predict:
Everything.
God is:
God.
I am:
Not.
And remarkably—
God has not assigned me the job of running the:
Universe.
That position is already:
Filled.
Then John names fornication, which we may describe as sexual:
Immorality.
And here again we encounter:
People.
Bodies.
Trust.
Vulnerability.
Dignity.
The other person must never become an:
Object.
A person is never merely a means for satisfying my:
Desire.
When all I can see is what I:
Want—
I may stop seeing:

You.
Love restores the neighbor to:
View.
Love asks:
What is good for:
You?
What honors your:
Dignity?
What is:
Faithful?
What is:
True?
Love sees the:
Person.
Finally:
Theft.
Taking what belongs to:
Another.
Again:
I want.
Therefore I:
Take.
My desire becomes more important than my:
Neighbor.
And here the contrast with the Lamb becomes:
Beautiful.
The thief:
Takes.
The Lamb:
Gives.
One reaches toward another and says:
Mine.
The Other opens His hands and says:
For you.
Life.
Power.
Bodies.
Possessions.
Human rebellion reaches into the whole:
Person.
And therefore redemption must reach the whole:
Person.
Jesus is not merely Lord of our religious:

Thoughts.
He claims our:
Life.
Power.
Bodies.
Possessions.
Relationships.
Everything.

8. Do Not Let the Darkness Teach You Its Methods

Something particularly disturbing has happened by the end of Chapter: 9
Earlier the darkness seemed to be attacking humanity from:
Outside.
Now human beings are practicing destruction against one:
Another.
The Destroyer:
Destroys.
The cavalry:
Kills.
Human beings:
Kill.
The character of destruction has begun reproducing:
Itself.
And suddenly our prayer throughout this chapter becomes even more:
Urgent.
Lord, do not merely bring me through the darkness.
Keep the darkness from getting into me.
Because what we resist can still:
Shape us.
Someone hurts:
Us.
We learn to:
Hurt.
Someone hates:
Us.
We learn to:
Hate.
Someone becomes:
Cruel.
We answer with:
Cruelty.
And then darkness has accomplished something even without destroying:
Us.
It has taught us its:

Methods.
We may still claim to oppose:
Darkness—
while increasingly resembling:
It.
That is not Christian:
Victory.
The Lamb offers another:
Way.
Jesus confronts:
Evil—
without becoming:
Evil.
He speaks:
Truth—
without surrendering to:
Hatred.
He suffers:
Injustice—
without becoming:
Unjust.
We do not defeat the Destroyer by becoming:
Destroyers.
A Christian goal does not baptize an unchristian:
Method.
The Lamb remains our:
Teacher.
Not the:
Destroyer.
Not our:
Fear.
Not our:
Anger.
Not even our:
Wounds.
Christ.

9. “I Remained His”

That brings us again to the meaning of:
Endurance.
Christian endurance is not merely:
I survived.
It is:
I remained His.

I was:
Hurt.
But I remained:
His.
I was:
Misunderstood.
But I remained:
His.
I was:
Afraid.
But I remained:
His.
I was:
Disappointed.
But I remained:
His.
I did not understand:
Everything.
But I remained:
His.
That may be one of the most important definitions of endurance in this entire:
Journey.
Endurance is about:
Allegiance.
Not merely physical:
Survival.
Faithful:
Belonging.
Whose are:
You?
The people of God may walk through:
Darkness.
They may carry:
Wounds.
They may ask:
Questions.
They may become:
Weary.
But endurance says:
I am still His.
And because I am still:
His—
the darkness does not get to decide who I:

Become.

10. Repentance Produces Fruit, Not Instant Perfection

Repentance therefore reaches the whole:
Person.
What I:
Believe.
What I:
Love.
What I:
Do.
How I treat:
Others.
How I use:
Power.
Repentance is not merely feeling:
Bad.
Feeling bad may accompany:
It.
But repentance means:
Turning.
And turning eventually becomes visible in:
Life.
Genuine repentance produces:
Fruit.
Not:
Perfection.
Fruit.
A changed direction begins producing changed:
Choices.
Sometimes:
Slowly.
Sometimes:
Unevenly.
But:
Genuinely.
That matters because Christian formation is usually a:
Journey.
Step.
Failure.
Grace.
Repentance.
Growth.
Another:

Step.
Grace receives us where we:
Are.
But grace does not leave us where it found:
Us.
It continues shaping us toward:
Christ.
That is why Christians still:
Repent.
Repentance is not merely the doorway into Christian:
Faith.
It becomes part of Christian:
Life.
We keep turning toward:
Christ.
Again.
And:
Again.

11. The Mature Christian Can Receive Correction

Spiritual maturity does not mean reaching a point where we no longer need:
Correction.
Perhaps maturity increasingly means being able to:
Receive it.
That is a very different:
Thing.
When identity is rooted securely in:
Christ—
being wrong does not have to destroy:
Us.
Correction does not have to become a threat to our entire:
Identity.
We can say:
I was wrong.
And remain:
Loved.
We can say:
I made a mistake.
And remain:
His.
We can say:
I need to change.
And discover that grace was already waiting for:
Us.

That is freedom.
We no longer have to defend ourselves at every:
Turn.
We no longer have to win every:
Argument.
We no longer have to explain away every:
Failure.
Because our identity does not rest upon always being:
Right.
It rests in: **Christ.**

12. Pride Would Rather Be Right Than Healed

That may be one of pride's greatest:
Tragedies.
Pride would rather be right than healed.
If healing requires admitting:
I was wrong—
pride may choose the:
Wound.
Anything except:
Surrender.
So we:
Defend.
Explain.
Rationalize.
Blame.
Deflect.
Counterattack.
Anything except:
Repent.
But grace says:
You do not have to protect your:
Failure.
Christ already knows:
It.
You are not surprising:
Him.
Nothing to:
Hide.
Nothing to:
Perform.
Nothing to:
Pretend.
Known.

And still:
Loved.
That makes holy speech:
Possible.
I was wrong.
I am sorry.
Forgive me.
Lord, change me.
Those words are not:
Weakness.
They require:
Courage.
Defense protects:
Pride.
Repentance risks:
Humility.
And sometimes:
Lord, change me
is the deepest prayer of:
All.
Not merely:
Forgive what I:
Did.
But:
Transform who I am:
Becoming.

13. Repentance Is the Road Home

That is why repentance can eventually become:
Joy.
Not because sin is:
Small.
But because grace is:
Greater.
The prodigal turns toward:
Home.
And discovers the Father already:
Watching.
Repentance is not:
Humiliation.
Not:
Self-hatred.
Not endless:
Condemnation.

It is:
Return.
Come:
Home.
Sin is:
Serious.
But failure need not receive the final:
Word.
A fall can become a place where grace meets:
Us.
A wrong can be:
Confessed.
A relationship may begin to:
Heal.
A heart can:
Turn.
Truth creates space for:
Grace.
Denial keeps the wound:
Closed.
Repentance exposes it to:
Healing.
Sometimes grace begins with:
Truth.
This is what I did.
No:
Excuse.
No:
Blame.
No:
Deflection.
No:
But you also...
Simply:
Truth.
Then:
Grace.
The tragedy of Verse 21 is not merely that these people have:
Sinned.
The tragedy is that grace's invitation to turn is:
Refused.
They do not:
Repent.

They continue.
The road home remains:
Open.
They refuse to:
Take it.

14. Their Response Is Given; Ours Is Not

And now Chapter 9 reaches its:
End.
John does not give us a sudden:
Reversal.
No last-minute:
Change.
No comfortable:
Resolution.
They did not:
Repent.
Sometimes Scripture ends a scene without resolving:
It.
We want:
Closure.
John gives us:
Warning.
And the unresolved ending turns toward the:
Reader.
Their response is:
Given.
Ours is not.
That may be why this ending is so:
Powerful.
The question John leaves in the room is not:
Can you identify the:
Locusts?
Can you calculate the:
Army?
Can you identify the four:
Angels?
Can you determine precisely what every image:
Means?
But:
Will you repent?
That question makes Revelation:
Pastoral.
It moves from curiosity toward:

Discipleship.
From speculation toward:
Formation.
From information toward:
Transformation.
We have done the:
Homework.
We have studied:
History.
Imagery.
Structure.
Symbolism.
Theology.
Interpretive possibilities.
But the homework must eventually serve:
Life.
Otherwise we have missed the:
Point.
The goal is:
Faithfulness.
Not prophetic:
Mastery.
Not winning:
Arguments.
Not possessing secret:
Knowledge.
Faithfulness to:
Christ.
And so Chapter 9 ends with a:
Mirror.
The monsters have:
Passed.
The smoke begins to:
Clear.
The armies recede from:
View.
And standing in the mirror is:
Humanity.
The question is not whether humanity needs:
Repentance.
John has answered:
That.
The question is whether humanity will receive the invitation to:

Turn.
Whether:
We—
will come:
Home.
Because the tragedy of Revelation 9 is not simply that judgment:
Comes.
The deeper tragedy is that even judgment does not necessarily produce:
Repentance.
The abyss can:
Open.
The smoke can:
Rise.
The locusts can:
Come.
The Destroyer can:
Appear.
The trumpet can:
Sound.
The cavalry can:
Ride.
The fire can:
Burn.
The smoke can:
Spread.
The brimstone can:
Kill.
And still—
the human heart can say:
No.
That may be the most frightening power displayed anywhere in the:
Chapter.
The power to resist:
Grace.
But Chapter 9's warning reaches us while there is still:
Time.
We are reading the:
Words.
We are hearing the:
Warning.
Christ is still:
Speaking.
And as long as Christ is speaking—

the invitation to respond remains.
So perhaps the proper response to Revelation 9 is not:
Lord, help me understand every symbol.
Perhaps it is:
Lord, keep my heart soft enough to hear You.
Keep me humble enough to admit when I am wrong.
Keep me courageous enough to turn.
And keep me faithful enough that, when the darkness has passed, I still look like the Lamb.
That is:
Repentance.
That is:
Endurance.
And that is the road:
Home.

Pastoral Reflection

There is a strange thing about being:
Wrong.
Sometimes the longer we defend ourselves—
the harder it becomes to:
Turn.
We have invested too much in the:
Explanation.
Too much in the:
Argument.
Too much in proving that someone else was:
Wrong.
And eventually repentance feels more expensive than continuing in the:
Mistake.
So we:
Defend.
Explain.
Rationalize.
Blame.
And sometimes—
double:
Down.
Verse 21 is frightening because humanity has reached precisely that:
Place.
The consequences are:
Visible.
The destruction is:
Visible.

The warning has been:
Given.
And still:
They did not:
Repent.
There is a lesson here far beyond the particular sins John:
Lists.
Never allow pride to make repentance too expensive.
If you were:
Wrong—
say:
So.
If you hurt someone—
acknowledge:
It.
If you need forgiveness—
ask.
If God is correcting you—
listen.
There is tremendous freedom in no longer having to prove that you were:
Right.
Our identity does not rest upon our ability to win every:
Argument.
It rests in:
Christ.
Therefore we can say:
I was wrong.
I am sorry.
Forgive me.
Lord, change me.
Those are not the words of a defeated:
Christian.
Those are the words of a Christian who knows where home:
Is.

Something Worth Pondering

Revelation 9 begins with a star falling from:
Heaven.
A key is:
Given.
The abyss is:
Opened.
Smoke:
Rises.

Locusts:
Emerge.
People are:
Tormented.
The Destroyer is:
Named.
A trumpet:
Sounds.
Four angels are:
Released.
An army beyond ordinary imagination:
Appears.
Fire.
Smoke.
Brimstone.
Death.
And after all of that—
the chapter ends with words more disturbing than any:
Monster.
They did not repent.
Perhaps that tells us what Revelation 9 was really about all:
Along.
Not satisfying curiosity about:
Monsters.
But awakening the human:
Heart.
Perhaps the greatest danger is not that we fail to understand every:
Symbol.
Perhaps the greatest danger is that we understand the:
Warning—
and refuse to:
Turn.

Ask Yourself This:

After walking through all twenty-one verses of Revelation:
9—
am I more interested in explaining the darkness around:
Me—
or allowing Christ to expose and change what is within:
Me?
When I am hurt, corrected, afraid, or proven:
Wrong—

can I still say:
I remained His—
or have pride, fear, or my wounds begun teaching me another kingdom's:
Ways?
And when Christ tells me the truth about:
Me—
will I defend:
Myself—
or will I:
Repent.
Turn.
And come:
Home?