

How long?

Psalm 4:2 (ESV)

O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies?

Psalm 6:1-3 (ESV)

O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath. Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing; heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O LORD—how long?

Psalm 13:1-2 (ESV)

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Psalm 35:17 (ESV)

How long, O Lord, will you look on? Rescue me from their destruction, my precious life from the lions!

Psalm 62:3 (ESV)

How long will all of you attack a man to batter him, like a leaning wall, a tottering fence?

Psalm 74:10 (ESV)

How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever?

Psalm 79:5 (ESV)

How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever? Will your jealousy burn like fire?

Psalm 80:4 (ESV)

O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?

Psalm 90:13 (ESV)

Return, O LORD! How long? Have pity on your servants!

Psalm 94:3 (ESV)

O LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult?

Psalm 119:84 (ESV)

How long must your servant endure? When will you judge those who persecute me?

Revelation 6:9-10 (ESV)

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

We know what this feels like... don't we? ... How long must I suffer this painful disease? ... How long until God remakes the world so no more babies die of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome)? ... How long until no more babies are born with heart defects? ... How long until no more young wives die of tragic diseases? ... How long must we struggle with this temptation? ... How long until redemption comes? How long until the suffering ends? ... How long until God shows His glory and puts those who mock Him to shame?

How long? ... That question has been ringing through the prayers of God's people for thousands of years now. ... What do you think it's going to look like when God decides it's time? ... In 6:11 the martyrs are told to "rest a little longer"... then what we are about to see in chapter 8 today... their prayers come before God... and he answers those prayers.

For centuries, God's people have been praying, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done!" and now those prayers are about to be answered.

Many of you here have experienced the peace and joy which God gave you in the midst of the struggles and trials of your life. ... He does that by grace... by the offer of total forgiveness of sin. ...But to a world that rejects grace... God can only bring peace through judgment. ...That is what we are seeing in this book. ...Six of the seven seals have already been opened when we come to Chapter 8... and we have watched the waves of successive judgments roll across the earth. ...We learn from the prophet Daniel that these cover a seven-year period in the last days of this age.

Like it or not... the prayers of God's people are involved in the judgments that He sends. ... The purpose of prayer... it has often been said... is not to get man's will done in heaven... but to get God's will done on earth — even if that will involves judgment.

To pray for Christ to come... is to pray for the Lord's name to be upheld in the judgment of all those... who have stood against Him and His people.

Christians in the twenty-first century are often so afraid of mentioning judgment... that they would rather forget its existence. ... But it is our duty to be concerned with the Lord's justice in judgment... as well as in salvation. ... In our prayers we must ask that God will defend His utter holiness and justice. ... Praying '*thy kingdom come*' is asking God to come in judgment on evil... not just that He speed us along to more joy-filled days.

That judgment comes in response to prayer may not seem high on our priority list of prayer requests. “*Lord... Please bring Your judgments of suffering to this earth...*” ... But for suffering... persecuted people... judgment on the world that represses them... is a sign of hope... a signal that God will not wait only until the Second Coming to begin vindicating them. ... God will complete His judgment on that Day... but He is Lord of history even now... and He is judging the earth... even now.

So the main point of this study is this: the trumpet blasts of Revelation chapter 8... depict the completion of God hallowing His name... in response to the prayers of His people... and the holiness of God being brought into sharp focus.

Or more simply... God is answering the prayers of His people by hallowing His name... and judging the world. And one day He will do it to completion.

Now let me unpack it bit by bit before we go forward. The next two chapters in Revelation are about the trumpet judgments. The four trumpet blasts that we will see today in chapter 8... are accompanied by judgments that fall upon the natural world—the land, the sea, the rivers, and the lights in the heavens (sun, moon, and stars). ... Then next week when we get to chapter 9... those two trumpet blasts... are accompanied by judgments that affect humanity.

So in chapter 8 the created world is affected; in chapter 9 humanity is affected.

The seal judgments now over... the trumpet judgments are about to begin. These will be followed by the bowl (vial) judgments. Each series of seven

judgments... gets increasingly severe... These are terrible things that are coming !

J Vernon McGee writes:

It may deceive you to have Him presented as the gentle Jesus who went about doing good -- which He did, but we are also going to see the wrath of the Lamb some day. The Lamb is the One of whom John the Baptist said, "...Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Men are not lost because they are sinners; they are lost because they have rejected Jesus who died for them. Even if you go into a lost eternity and have not accepted Christ, He died for you, and you simply made His sacrifice for you of no avail. You have trodden underfoot the blood of Christ when you take that kind of attitude and position toward Him.

Maybe you don't like the fact that the gentle Jesus is going to judge. We have already seen that the wrath of the Lamb will be terrifying to those on earth. My friend, when you talk about the gentle Jesus, you had better get acquainted with Him. He died for you, He loves you, and He wants to save you, but if you will not have Him, I tell you, there is waiting ahead of you a terrifying judgment. Someone will say to me, "You are trying to frighten people." I would like to scare you into heaven if I could, but I know you are too sophisticated and cynical for that. But, my beloved, judgment is coming on this earth. I say, Hallelujah! I am glad that it is coming and that God is not going to let the world go on like it is now. It has gone on long enough.

One more thing... and then we will get to the text. ... The trumpet judgments... and the subsequent bowl judgments... significantly parallel the plagues that God sent on the land of Egypt. All of these judgments are very similar. ... And why not? ... After all... the whole world will be saying... just as Pharaoh did... "*Who is the Lord that we should serve Him?*" So the trumpet and the bowl judgments are reenacted judgments of the

Egyptian plagues... recorded in Exodus 7–12. ... Both will show the people of this world their helplessness and hopelessness without God.

1 When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

This silence comes as a dramatic contrast to the shouting of praise and the playing of harps that has been going on in heaven up to this point. Do you remember what we saw in last week's text...? ... Millions of angels... hosts of redeemed humans... and other heavenly creatures have been crying out before the throne of God... and singing praises to Him. ... But now suddenly everything ceases. ... When the seventh seal is opened there is total silence. ... It is a most dramatic pause. ... This is the silence of mystery... a silence of intense anticipation of what is about to happen. ... It communicates in a dramatic way the full and awesome authority of God. Everything must wait for his kingly move.

This heavenly hush or celestial calm was the calm before the storm. It was an ominous silence that says something dreadful is about to happen. The world is noisy. In fact, it is so noisy that it cannot hear God. *"Be still, and know that I am God"* (Psalm 46:10) is not the world's way of doing things. But heaven was *"still"* to know what God will do next in judgment.

They knew something of what lay ahead, though they may not have known all... but this they knew - they were about to witness the greatest time of sorrow the world had seen.

The hosts of Heaven are sobered in silence and stand breathless in wonder. The silence shows the seriousness and gravity of the situation which has been brought about by man's sinfulness and defiance toward God.

2 Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.

These angels were near God in their location. ... Now stop and think... these angels would best understand the holiness of God... which motivates the oncoming judgment upon the wickedness of men. ... God is holy and will punish evil.

The seven angels were given trumpets... which are significant to John... because he was a Jew... and understood the place of trumpets in Israel's national life. ... According to Numbers 10... trumpets had three important uses... they called the people together (Num. 10:1-8)... they announced war (Num. 10:9)... and they announced special times (Num. 10:10).

The trumpet sounded at Mount Sinai when the Law was given (Ex. 19:16-19), and trumpets were blown when the king was anointed and enthroned (1 Kings 1:34, 39). Of course, everyone familiar with the Old Testament would remember the trumpets at the conquest of Jericho (Josh. 6:13-16).

Sounding seven trumpets certainly would announce a declaration of war... as well as the fact that God's anointed King was enthroned in glory... and about to judge His enemies. ... As trumpets declared defeat to Jericho... they will ultimately bring defeat to the world's system ... which is symbolically described as "Babylon."

3 And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne,

The sweet smelling incense informs us that the prayers of God's people are a pleasant fragrance to God. These are prayers from the saints who are experiencing persecution and other difficult times on the earth... because of their faith. ... Their prayers are especially important to God.

These verses return us to the scene at the opening of the fifth seal in 6:9-11, where John saw "*under the altar*"—probably the same altar that he now sees in 8:3—and under the altar in 6:9 were "*the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.*" They were crying out, "*how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?*" (6:10). ... Then they were given white robes and told to rest a little longer until the number of martyrs would be complete (6:11).

Notice the association of the incense with "*the prayers of all the saints*" in verse 3... then again in verse 4...

4 and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.

God is a God of justice... Who does acknowledge that one side can be right... and another wrong in a situation. Aren't you tired of all the moral relativity that we see in the world today? "*There really is no right and*

wrong... Right is whatever the majority believes it is... ... No! There is right! And there is wrong! ... Furthermore... God is a God of wrath... Who provides us the necessary "moral clarity" to take sides when clear examples of oppression are taking place. ... We are to pray for those who are suffering... all over the globe today.

The picture here is that the prayers are coming up to God as the smoke of the incense is ascending upward. These prayers get through to God... they get His attention and prompt judgment upon the evil doers.

Pray that God would either save his enemies... those who oppose the gospel and the people of God... that He would bring them to repentance... or if He is not going to do that... that He would thwart all their efforts to keep people from worshiping God by faith in Christ. ... Pray that God would either save those who destroy families and hurt little children... or thwart all their efforts and keep them from doing further harm. ... Those prayers will be heard.

We simply cannot miss the connection here... between the prayers of God's people... and the outworking of God's purposes to save and judge. These events go forward precisely in response to the prayers of God's people.

Remember that before God appeared to Moses to send him back to Egypt, we read in Exodus 2:23-25...

Exodus 2:23-25 (ESV)

During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their

groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.

God judged Egypt in order to deliver Israel... and in doing so God was responding to the prayers of his people. ... The book of Revelation is showing us the ultimate exodus... but this time it is not a mere nation that God is judging... but the wicked world system that is ranged against God and his people. ... As at the exodus from Egypt... God is going to judge the wicked world and deliver his people in response to their prayers.

5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

Casting the censer filled with fire to the earth was symbolic. It pictures the rage in heaven over the wickedness on earth which is meted out against God's people. You attack God's people and you are attacking Him.

The trauma of thunder, lightning and earthquake were simply a precursor of the coming storms of judgment from the trumpets. God is upset and woe on the wicked earth.

6 Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them. 7 The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were

burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

The first trumpet judgment resulted in the earth being scorched.

You know... as a college professor... I hear a lot of student speeches about the supposed global warming... and its destruction of our planet. The students accept it as fact... and many have no idea that there are so many meteorologists and scientists who dispute the claims... and just as easily prove global warming is a myth. After I hear such speeches... I sometimes will hand the student a sheet of information and say... *"Don't worry... it will not hurt your grade... but perhaps you should consider what these credible sources have to say..."* Personally, I am very skeptical of global warming which has become so politicalized. ... But I have no doubts about the reality of this global warming!

Hail and fire mingled with blood" reminds us of the seventh plague that God sent against Egypt (Ex. 9:18-26). ... Since this is a supernatural judgment, it is not necessary to try to explain how hail, fire, and blood become mingled... or to try to explain it away as not literal... but somehow symbolical. It is quite reasonable and logical to conclude that if the plagues of Moses were literal... then the plagues that are coming in the Great Tribulation period are going to be literal.

The target for this judgment is green vegetation, the trees and the grass, one third of which is burned up. One can well imagine how this would affect not only the balance of nature, but also the food supply. The Greek word for *trees* usually means "fruit trees"; and the destruction of pasture lands would devastate the meat and milk industries.

8 The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. 9 A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

Turning water into blood reminds us of the first Egyptian plague (Ex. 7:19-21). ... Note that John did not say that an actual burning mountain was cast out of heaven... but that the fiery object was like a great mountain. ...A triple judgment resulted... a third part of the saltwater turned to blood... a third part of the marine life died... and a third of the ships were destroyed. This will be an ecological and an economic disaster of unprecedented proportions.

The supernaturalness of the judgment is evident in that only a third part became blood. That the other part was not blood is a miracle of mercy. God is giving people a chance to repent.

"The third part of the ships were destroyed." This would really hurt commercial business in the oceans. A tidal wave will probably happen when (what is probably a meteor) will hit the ocean... When I Googled it this week... I read that by 2015 there were 50,420 ocean-going merchant ships registered. ... So try to imagine the shock waves that would hit the shipping industry if 16,638 valuable ships were suddenly destroyed! And what about their cargoes!

10 The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. 11 The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.

Like the meteorite of the previous trumpet judgment... this judgment also affected a third part of waters—the waters here were not the oceans but the inland waters e.g. the rivers and springs.

God's wrath next reaches *inland* and touches the rivers and fountains of water (wells and sources of the rivers)... making the fresh water taste bitter like wormwood. ...One third of these rivers... and their sources... will become so bitterly polluted that drinking their water could produce death.

If the people who *drink from* these waters are in danger of dying... what must happen to the fish and other creatures that *live in* these waters?
...And what would happen to the vegetation near these rivers?

12 The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.

This reminds us of the 9th plague (of darkness) that came to Egypt during Moses' time (Exodus 10:21-23).

This was a supernatural diminishing of the natural light from the sky. The sun, satellite (moon), and stars grew dim and at times even gave no light as we will note next. ... Whatever the diminishing of the sky lights, involved, the result was increased darkness on the earth. This would greatly affect vegetation growth.

The darkness was fitting for it spoke of the darkness of the deeds of mankind.

This particular judgment is temporary... because the fourth bowl judgment will reverse it... and the sun's power will be intensified (Rev. 16:8-9). Then, at the close of the Tribulation, the sun and moon will be darkened again to announce the Savior's return (Matt. 24:29-30; see also Luke 21:25-28).

13 Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"

It is as though the messenger cried, "If you think this has been terrible, just wait! The worst is yet to come!" ... God warns but it is obvious that man paid no attention to the warning. ... Like Pharaoh of old... they hardened their hearts to the judgment and did not recognize God in them. ...The liberal news media would be explaining every judgment as a natural

phenomena and governments would raise taxes to help combat this so-called nature-caused disasters. ... That God was in them would not be considered by most men. ... And anyone who would dare to say that these great catastrophes were the judgment of God would be greatly scorned and ridiculed just as they are today

The eagle announces a climaxing of judgment... a crescendo that ends at last with the pouring out of the bowls of the wrath of God... the worst of all.

If I took a poll of this congregation this morning... and asked you how you felt about these horrific judgments... many would say, “*They make me very uncomfortable...*” ... Why is that? ... Why do we feel uncomfortable when we read of judgments like these? ... Let me share these words on that theme from Eugene Peterson. He says:

We do everything we can to make light of judgment. We use every stratagem we can find to avoid dealing with the consequences of sin. But God will not let us off. He will not indulge our inattention. He will be taken seriously. In a pause between trumpet blasts an eagle cries its warning. However practiced we become at tuning out sounds that we do not want to hear, including the sound of God's displeasure at sin, God finds new ways to penetrate our defensive deafness. The eagle cry catches us off guard.

But the truth is... that what we are seeing here in the increasingly intense judgments of the last days... is really nothing new. ... God has been sending judgments like this all through the history of mankind. ... There have been volcanic eruptions... meteors falling upon the earth... red rain from the skies... poisoned waters, etc. ... All these terrible disasters have struck before... but now they grow to a climax.

Yet we must not misunderstand them... for they are for our own good.

Let me list for you five effects of judgment upon us...

First of all, judgments frighten us. ... They are intended to. ... They are sent to arrest our attention. They chill our blood. They alarm us. They scare the living daylights out of us.

Like children at a horror movie we are fascinated by them but we want to hide our eyes from them and not look fully at them. That is the first effect of judgment. It arouses fear.

Then, because it terrifies us... judgment also sobers us.

How many people here in America immediately rearranged their priorities five minutes after the first airplane crashed into the first World Center tower on 9-11? ... We heard many testimonies during that time of people saying... "*I'll never take life as lightly again. That taught me a lot. I began to see what is really important.*" ... That is also what judgments do. They help us reassess our lives. They change our priorities.

C. S. Lewis well says that fear or pain or judgment is "*God's megaphone to reach a deaf world.*" ... And so judgments correct us. ... They force us to face unpleasant facts about ourselves. ... We do not like that. We do not like to be told that we are not perfect. ... We know we are not... but we do not like anyone else to say so. ... We are uneasy at having these things pointed out.

But judgment strips away our illusions. It restores us to reality. We begin to think accurately, clearly, as God thinks. We plan more carefully. We live more thoughtfully. That is why God sends judgment.

And fourth... judgment humbles us. We begin to see that we are really not in control. ... We do not run everything about our lives. We are not autonomous creatures. We are not little gods... capable of making anything we want to of ourselves... as the media keeps trying to tell us. We are not in charge.

We see how foolish we have been in the past... that we have made many mistakes when we thought we were right. We begin at last to welcome guidance... to listen to others... and especially... to seek out the wisdom of the Word of God.

Finally... judgment reassures us. It comforts us. He gives ample warnings before it gets unbearable. He sends anticipations of it, forceful reminders, that this kind of thing can happen so that we might pay attention and act before it gets out of hand.

How many times have you and I heard someone say, "*Well, the God I worship is a loving God; He would never punish this severely!*"? ... Our passage today teaches us that it is the very love of God that makes Him judge! God must judge in order to eliminate evil once for all from His creation and bring about the world of universal blessing which men have longed for throughout all of human history.