

# REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

## STUDY ONE

### A Glance Back to the Future

#### *Selections from Revelation*

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*This book brings great encouragement to those who know Christ. It shows us that God keeps His word. In the end, God wins. The triumphant, supreme Lord is Jesus and none other. And by even the end of time, there will be no other one to whom every knee will bow and every tongue will confess.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**F**OR millennia, the people of God have closely held certain beliefs that puzzle our finite human minds. We worship one God, who eternally exists in three persons. Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human. God gives humans free will while remaining entirely sovereign. Yet one of the most perplexing aspects of Christian doctrine is the blend of two of God's attributes . . .

His mercy and His justice.

In essence, mercy refers to someone withholding punishment from someone who deserves it, and justice demands that everyone be held accountable, receiving equal treatment, to the same law. So how can God be merciful and just at the same time? Can a judge declare a thief both innocent and guilty? It doesn't seem to make sense.

Despite this supposed conundrum, Scripture affirms that these two qualities working in tandem make God unique. Yes, God is just, and He will hold every person accountable for his or her sins. He also is merciful, and He demonstrated that mercy through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—the spotless Lamb who knew no sin yet still became sin so that we could be called righteous.

As followers of Christ, we eagerly await the day when Jesus returns to demonstrate the fullness of His justice—to deal with evil permanently—and His mercy to free those who place their trust in Him from the ancient shackles of sin and death. In that moment, we will see God's true character on display as a perplexingly beautiful kaleidoscope of divine glory.



# A Glance Back to the Future

## *Selections from Revelation*

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### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

Before you open your Bible, write a prayer in the space below. Ask God to reveal Himself to you as you study His Word. Ask for wisdom as you seek to understand His character and to respond faithfully to His justice and mercy.



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

Because justice acts as a load-bearing pillar in the structure of God's character, Scripture shows Him releasing cataclysmic judgments upon evil at key turning points of human history. He sent the flood. He confused languages at Babel. He showered Sodom and Gomorrah with fire. He struck Egypt with deadly plagues.

Yet God didn't reserve His justice for idolaters only. God is a *righteous* judge, and His decrees are always impartial. So, when Israel's unfaithfulness reached its full measure, He sent foreign empires to assault the promised land. He allowed pagans to desecrate and destroy the temple. He sent His chosen people into exile.

Though God's acts of judgment seem like the monstrous waves of a tsunami, the storm always slows to offer quiet intervals of mercy for those who seek it. Revelation describes the final crashing waves of God's justice—that day when He will finally destroy sin and vindicate the righteous who will enjoy calm waters for eternity.



### **Observation: Three Cycles of Judgment**

As you read about each set of judgments in Revelation, use your observation skills to fill in the charts below by briefly summarizing each judgment.<sup>1</sup> Don't worry about the interpretation of each symbol or image. We'll explore the meaning of these passages in future studies. For now, focus on the thematic flow. Watch how these judgments present a perfect mix of God's mercy and justice.

# A Glance Back to the Future

## *Selections from Revelation*

<b>Seal Judgments</b> <b>Revelation 6:1–8:5</b>	
In <i>Revelation 5:7</i> , the slaughtered Lamb held the sealed scroll of the divine plan of redemption. Of all those in the throne room, only the Lamb proved Himself worthy to open the scroll. Because of His sacrifice, He offers to those who trust in Him salvation from Satan, sin, and death. As He unsealed the scroll, He enacted His judgment against these powers.	
<b>First Seal</b> <i>Revelation 6:1–2</i>	
<b>Second Seal</b> <i>Revelation 6:3–4</i>	
<b>Third Seal</b> <i>Revelation 6:5–6</i>	
<b>Fourth Seal</b> <i>Revelation 6:7–8</i>	
<b>Fifth Seal</b> <i>Revelation 6:9–11</i>	
<b>Sixth Seal</b> <i>Revelation 6:12–17</i>	
<b>Seventh Seal</b> <i>Revelation 8:1–5</i>	
Did you notice something strange occur after Jesus broke the sixth seal? Right before the completion of the judgments, John offered an interlude which sang a song of hope. Four angels held back the winds of judgment while God sealed His people for redemption. Amid this fury of justice, the redeemed praised God, saying “Salvation comes from our God” ( <i>Revelation 7:10</i> ).	

*I have wonderful news for you. Because of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we will be delivered from this wrath that is to be poured out on the earth. How great is that? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

# A Glance Back to the Future

## *Selections from Revelation*

<b>Trumpet Judgments</b> <b>Revelation 8:6–11:19</b>	
When the slaughtered Lamb opened the seventh seal, John noticed seven angels each carrying a trumpet ( <i>Revelation 8:2</i> ). This vision indicates a unique literary structure in this section of Revelation. Because these seven trumpets are nested within the seventh seal, John suggests that Jesus' execution of judgment isn't over yet. Instead, the cycle starts anew.	
<b>First Trumpet</b> <i>Revelation 8:6–7</i>	
<b>Second Trumpet</b> <i>Revelation 8:8–9</i>	
<b>Third Trumpet</b> <i>Revelation 8:10–11</i>	
<b>Fourth Trumpet</b> <i>Revelation 8:12–13</i>	
<b>Fifth Trumpet</b> <i>Revelation 9:1–12</i>	
<b>Sixth Trumpet</b> <i>Revelation 9:13–21</i>	
<b>Seventh Trumpet</b> <i>Revelation 11:15–19</i>	
Like the seal judgments, the trumpet judgments included an interlude of hope before the end of the cycle. In this interlude, John saw a vision of two faithful prophets who died at the hands of a wicked beast. Yet, after a little while, God raised them to life again. When the onlookers saw God's mercy in action, vindicating these righteous prophets, they gave Him glory.	

*These people have been through earthquakes, plagues, and trials that we can hardly describe. Yet, even so, many of them did not repent. They did not stop their worship of demons. It's heartbreaking. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

# A Glance Back to the Future

## *Selections from Revelation*

<b>Bowl Judgments</b> <b>Revelation 16:1–21</b>	
Just as the seventh seal had contained the seven trumpets, so also did the seventh trumpet contain the seven bowls ( <i>Revelation 15:5–7</i> ). These bowls act as visual representations of God’s wrath against evil, which each angel poured upon the earth as the final act of judgment against a world corrupted by evil.	
<b>First Bowl</b> <i>Revelation 16:1–2</i>	
<b>Second Bowl</b> <i>Revelation 16:3</i>	
<b>Third Bowl</b> <i>Revelation 16:4–7</i>	
<b>Fourth Bowl</b> <i>Revelation 16:8–9</i>	
<b>Fifth Bowl</b> <i>Revelation 16:10–11</i>	
<b>Sixth Bowl</b> <i>Revelation 16:12–16</i>	
<b>Seventh Bowl</b> <i>Revelation 16:17–21</i>	
Because the cycle of judgment continued after the seventh seal and seventh trumpet, John carefully inserted interludes to offer hope to those who followed Jesus. Yet he included no such interlude before the seventh bowl. This omission doesn’t suggest a loss of hope. Rather, the seventh bowl signals the <i>completion</i> of God’s judgment—the ultimate hope!	

*Jesus is King above all who would call themselves king, Lord over all who would call themselves lord. The King of Kings, the Lord of Lords comes and, with one sweep of His sword, defeats His enemies. Judgment will come, but then the new heavens and the new earth will arrive. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

# A Glance Back to the Future

## *Selections from Revelation*

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### **Application: The Moral of the Story**

Reading about these three sets of judgments may feel terrifying. Yet John wrote Revelation not to paralyze his readers with fear but to spur them on in hope. For this reason, John intentionally included interludes that reflected God's mercy to followers of Jesus. These judgments teach us one essential truth . . .

*Because of God's mercy, those who place their trust in Jesus Christ, the slaughtered Lamb, will not experience God's wrath and justice against sin.*

How does the reality of God's mercy offer you comfort and relief as you follow Jesus in an evil world doomed for judgment?

In what practical ways can you anticipate Jesus' future judgment of all things evil as you presently experience the foreshadowing of these judgments—those ever-present, ever-painful realities like natural disasters, war, pain, sickness, and death?

How does the timeless truth above inspire you to share the good news of the mercy available through Jesus Christ with those who may not yet know Him?

Because Jesus can be both just and merciful, we need not fear His fierce judgment of sin. It is only through this judgment that we will be able to experience His mercy and enjoy a renewed creation with Him forever.

# A Glance Back to the Future

## *Selections from Revelation*

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### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for being both just and merciful. If You weren't just, sin would never be defeated. If You weren't merciful, I would be condemned to an eternity apart from You. I find comfort in the truth that I will be spared judgment because of Your mercy. Help me reflect that hope in everything I say and do so I can point others to You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

#### ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

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# REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

## STUDY TWO

### Let the Judgments Begin

*Revelation 6:1–8*

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*When it comes to judgment, the only way to live safe and secure is to be in Christ.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**W**AITING for a letter from someone you love dearly can feel agonizing. Day after day, you look for the mail carrier. As the truck drives away, you sprint to the mailbox hoping it finally holds the words you've waited to read. You grab the bundle of envelopes and quickly flip through them—another bill, another flyer, another magazine. No letter. You think, *Maybe tomorrow . . .*

Until one day, you pull from the mailbox an envelope with your name penned in familiar handwriting. You immediately rip it open and read the letter—once, and then again, and yet again. Joy quenches your thirsty heart as your loved one's words rise from the page.

For millennia, the people of God had waited to hear from Him—to know how He would permanently cleanse His creation from all evil. Until one day in the first century AD, seven churches in Asia Minor each received an unexpected letter from John. As they heard his words, they realized it was the message they had waited so long to hear: Jesus will soon return to defeat Satan, sin, and death. And He will establish His eternal kingdom on the earth.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will witness Jesus deliver the message of God's plan of redemption. Though the first step of this plan is judgment, followers of Christ need not fear. Instead, they can rejoice even as they wait.



# Let the Judgments Begin

*Revelation 6:1–8*

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before you search the Scriptures right now, offer to God your own prayer of expectation. Express your eagerness for Christ's return and your eagerness to know Him better as you wait.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

“Who is worthy to break the seals on this scroll and open it?” (*Revelation 5:2*). When John heard this question in God's heavenly throne room, he wept. *If no one can open the scroll of God's plan of redemption, he likely thought, then we will never be freed from evil.*

Yet, through the tears, John saw the One who *was* worthy to open the seals—the slaughtered Lamb. Because Jesus paid sin's ultimate price and died for all humanity, only He can execute God's justice that creation has awaited for so long. In *Revelation 6:1–8*, He broke the first seals of the scroll and set into motion the final stages of God's plan of redemption.



## Observation: The First Four Seals

Every time Pastor Chuck Swindoll studies a passage of Scripture, he follows the same four steps. His method allows him to come to a clear understanding of a passage's message, meaning, and application. Following these four steps always is important—especially for more difficult books like Revelation.<sup>1</sup>

As Jesus released each seal of the scroll, John simply recorded what he saw and heard in these sometimes-obscure apocalyptic visions as best as he could using the language he had. As you read *Revelation 6:1–8*, join John in this task of observation. Include as much detail as you can in your answers. This is the first step of the method. You may wonder, *What does this mean?* but we will consider that question in the next phase.

According to *6:1–2*, what did John hear when the Lamb opened the *first* seal? What did he see? What happened as a result of this seal's opening?

# Let the Judgments Begin

## *Revelation 6:1–8*

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According to *Revelation 6:3–4*, what did John hear when the Lamb opened the *second* seal? What did he see? What happened as a result of this seal's opening?

According to *6:5–6*, what did John hear when the Lamb opened the *third* seal? What did he see? What happened as a result of this seal's opening?

According to *6:7–8*, what did John hear when the Lamb opened the *fourth* seal? What did he see? What happened as a result of this seal's opening?

*God is neither inaccessible nor hard to reach. The final judgment will come, but by His grace it has not yet begun. There's still time for those who do not yet believe. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### **Interpretation: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse**

*Revelation 6:1–8* may be one of the most widely recognized passages in Revelation because it depicts what we know as the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”—riders who gallop out to bring God's justice to the four corners of the earth. In the interpretation phase of the study, we will consider the meaning of each of these images.

# Let the Judgments Begin

## *Revelation 6:1–8*

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In the space below, use your observations to show how John’s detailed descriptions of each horse and its rider represent a certain kind of judgment from God. What is the significance of each judgment? For some help, consult your Bible-study tools, like Pastor Chuck’s commentary, *Insights on Revelation*.<sup>2</sup> For a free resource, use *Constable’s Notes* online at netbible.org.

**The White Horse**—*Revelation 6:1–2*

**The Red Horse**—*Revelation 6:3–4*

**The Black Horse**—*Revelation 6:5–6*

**The Pale Green Horse**—*Revelation 6:7–8*

*There is no hope for deliverance apart from faith in the Savior. Many hang on to a false religion that gives a sense of false peace because they think they can work their way toward some means of pleasing God and gaining His approbation. They try to somehow get there on their own by their works. They miss the beauty of God’s grace. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

# Let the Judgments Begin

*Revelation 6:1–8*

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## Correlation: Horses and Hope

John's vision of the four horses and their riders parallels a vision from the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. By correlating these two passages, we will be able to better understand each of their messages. According to [Zechariah 1:8](#), what did the prophet observe in his vision? In what ways was his vision similar to John's? In what ways was it different?

After seeing this vision, Zechariah asked an angel a question that John didn't: "My lord, what do these horses mean?" ([Zechariah 1:9](#)). The angel replied, "I will show you." In your own words, summarize the explanation of the vision recorded in [1:10–11](#).

As these horsemen patrolled the earth, they discovered that the pagan nations had enjoyed peace for several decades while God's chosen people of Israel endured exile and turmoil. Even the angels couldn't understand this reality. What message of hope did God offer in response in [1:14–17](#)?

How does this message from Zechariah help us better understand the meaning of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse? How can we see hope amid the chaos?

# Let the Judgments Begin

*Revelation 6:1–8*

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In the opening verses of Zechariah, God said, “Return to me, and I will return to you” (*Zechariah 1:3*). In these words lies the essential message of these passages describing God’s judgment. *Anyone* can avoid God’s judgment. The path is repentance and faith.



## **Application: Coming to Terms with Judgment**

As we take the first steps in this journey of God’s redemption of creation, we must come to terms with what seems like a very grim reality: judgment. Pastor Chuck offers two suggestions as we seek to apply *Revelation 6:1–8*:

1. Praise God for delivering you from the coming judgment.
2. Urge others to come to faith in Christ.

God not only delivers you from His coming wrath, but He also delivers you from the power of sin in the present. *What a gift!* In what ways can you respond to this gift and express your gratitude to Him this week? Write down some practical ideas in the space below.

Write down the names of two or three non-believers in your life. As you do, consider what their future would look like if they continue to live without Christ. How do you sense Him leading you to declare and demonstrate the good news of Jesus Christ to them?

For John’s original readers, they knew well the forces of conquest, war, famine, and death. Perhaps you do too. In what ways can followers of the worthy, slaughtered Lamb find hope when they hear the distant trot of these horsemen today?

# Let the Judgments Begin

*Revelation 6:1–8*

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God's judgment is coming. Though it will cause many to tremble in their bones, this truth plays an essential part in the good news of the kingdom of God. Without judgment, God cannot eradicate evil from His precious creation. So when the slaughtered Lamb returns, we will rejoice because He will bring the final word of hope we've awaited for so, so long.



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for sending Your Son Jesus Christ to die for my sins. Thank You for showing me that He will come as the righteous judge. Thank You for reassuring me that I will be spared His most fearsome judgment. Fill me with hope as I anticipate His return and equip me to point others to You so that they, too, can enjoy eternity with You. In Jesus' just name, amen.*

## ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

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Study 2 • Page 7





# REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

## STUDY THREE

### More Seals Broken . . . More Lives Shaken and Taken

*Revelation 6:9–17*

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*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God if you are without Christ. So who is able to stand? Those who know the Lord Jesus. It doesn't mean they won't die, but it does mean they will receive their eternal rewards in glory.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**I**N the centuries following the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, many who chose to follow Him endured some of the worst persecution the world has ever known. They were whipped and beaten, enslaved and imprisoned, fed to lions and sawed in half. Their opponents thought they could stomp out the movement while it remained small.

Yet these efforts proved futile. The fires of persecution only refined the faith of believers and emboldened them to rely on the Holy Spirit as they proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ. In the first few centuries AD, the kingdom of God exploded in growth throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe.

This reality led the early church father and theologian Tertullian to make this observation: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Remarkably, the more Christ’s enemies tried to stamp out His church, the more it flourished. It’s amazing to see God work in such upside-down ways! After all, the life-through-death principle is the heart of the gospel.

Even though the cruel deaths of martyrs serve the greater purpose of the kingdom of God, they are still unjust. In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we will listen to a chorus of martyrs begging for justice. God’s response will reveal His righteousness and offer hope to believers—especially those who suffer because of their faith.



# More Seals Broken . . . More Lives Shaken and Taken

*Revelation 6:9–17*

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

You may not live in a context where Christians face overt, violent persecution, but it's vital to remember that, even today, countless believers suffer for their faith. We must continuously intercede for them and engage in the same mission of boldly declaring and demonstrating our faith in Jesus Christ. Take time to consider this truth and pray as you prepare to study God's vindication of those who suffer for Him.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

John wept when he saw the sealed scroll of God's plan of redemption. Like us, he longed for the day when pain, death, and injustice would cease. Yet an angel comforted John and showed Him the slaughtered Lamb—the One who endured the most unjust death ever. He stepped forward to receive the scroll, to open it, and to carry out God's plans for justice.

In *Revelation 6:9–17*, the Lamb opened the fifth and sixth seals to vindicate those who died serving Him.



## Observation: The Fifth and Sixth Seals

As you read *Revelation 6:9–17*, place yourself in the sandals of one of these martyrs. Think of the stories you've heard about those who've suffered for Christ, or simply recall your own seasons of persecution. Then, as you observe the verses, pay special attention to the emotion in the voices of these martyrs.<sup>1</sup>

### The Fifth Seal—Revelation 6:9–11

According to *Revelation 6:9*, whom did John see under the heavenly altar after the Lamb opened the fifth seal? According to *6:10*, what did this group say?

# More Seals Broken . . . More Lives Shaken and Taken

*Revelation 6:9–17*

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What did each member of this group receive in *Revelation 6:11a*? \_\_\_\_\_

What message did this group receive in *6:11b*?

## The Sixth Seal—Revelation 6:12–17

The martyrs learned that more persecution awaited their brothers and sisters, yet this season of suffering would soon come to an end with the breaking of the sixth seal. According to *Revelation 6:12–14*, what happened in nature when the Lamb broke the sixth seal?

What groups of people did John notice in *6:15*? According to *6:16*, what did they say in response to the series of seal judgments?

“For the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to survive?” (*Revelation 6:17*). The unstated answer? *No one!* No human being—no matter his or her rung on the social ladder—can endure God’s wrath against sin . . . unless he or she repents and turns to Jesus Christ in faith. For those who trust Him, there is no wrath—only hope and deliverance.

# More Seals Broken . . . More Lives Shaken and Taken

*Revelation 6:9–17*

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## Interpretation: The Blood of the Martyrs

The Greek term we translate as “martyr” has an interesting history that provides some insight into the meaning of *Revelation 6:9–17*. Look up the term *martyrs* in the free lexicon available at [billmounce.org](http://billmounce.org). What is the original technical definition of this term? How does this definition compare to the way we use the term “martyr” today? What does this development of meaning reveal about the lives of the ancient believers who suffered for their faith in Jesus Christ?

Martyrdom seems like one of the most devastating realities a Christian can face. Yet this passage suggests otherwise. How does the opening of the fifth and sixth seals offer hope to Christians who endure persecution because of their commitment to Jesus? Feel free to consult your Bible-study tools like Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Revelation*.<sup>2</sup> For a free resource, check out *Constable’s Notes* at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).

What does *6:15–17* reveal about the extent of God’s judgment against those who reject Jesus Christ as Lord over creation?

*We need to pause out of honor for those who have been martyred—for those who paid the ultimate price. Grave markers across lands like Scotland, Germany, Switzerland, and the Far East remind us of those who followed the name of Christ and paid the price. The nations will give an answer for martyring these great men and women. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

# More Seals Broken . . . More Lives Shaken and Taken

*Revelation 6:9–17*

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## **Correlation: The Day of the Lord**

The sixth seal may seem similar to the first four seals—just another depiction of disaster that awaits those who have turned their backs on God. Yet the images of *Revelation 6:15–17* closely match Old Testament prophecies about “The Day of the Lord” (see *Joel 2:1*)—the time when God will judge the wicked and vindicate the righteous.

Though *Joel 2* depicts intense forms of judgment, the middle of this chapter contains a message that offers a way for the wicked to avoid this frightening fate. Summarize the message of *Joel 2:12–14* in your own words.

Read the conclusion of this prophecy in *Joel 2:28–32* and, in the space below, note the parallels between these verses and *Revelation 6:15–17*.

Though these images might worry readers, the purpose of these prophecies is to encourage the righteous and repentant. How does *Joel 2:28–32* offer hope to those who remain faithful to God?

*The persecuted are always eager for God’s vengeance. Don’t you do your own avenging. “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.” This is not popular preaching. God is the God of mercy and goodness and grace and love and forgiveness. But He also is holy and just. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

# More Seals Broken . . . More Lives Shaken and Taken

*Revelation 6:9–17*

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## **Application: A Divine Balance and a Human Reality**

*Revelation 6:9–17* deals with some heavy topics. Yet it teaches us important lessons about a *divine balance* and a *human reality*.

First, there is a *divine balance* in God's character. He acts with both mercy and justice. He extends both grace and wrath. He shows both love and vengeance. These traits might feel like opposites, but they work in perfect harmony in God.

Do you tend to see Jesus more as a loving friend—who extends grace and mercy—or as a just king—who brings wrath and justice? What might your walk with Him lack if you neglect one of these equally true aspects of His character? What steps can you take to understand and embrace God in His fullness?

Second, there is a *human reality* that people will suffer at the hands of fellow humans. How does your cultural context encourage you to respond when another person causes you to suffer? How does the truth of this passage differ from the message you receive from the world?

Even if you haven't endured physical persecution for following Jesus, you likely have faced some kind of opposition for your faith. How does the message of this passage allow you to understand this opposition from God's perspective? How has this study equipped you to endure future persecution faithfully?

Persecution and martyrdom represent frightening realities for Christians. Yet Jesus taught that we would suffer for following Him . . .

# More Seals Broken . . . More Lives Shaken and Taken

*Revelation 6:9–17*

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So when—not *if*—you face opposition for your faith, remember this: you face persecution *because* you live as a faithful witness to the good news of the life-giving death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He sees you suffering, and He will reward you for your faithful service when He welcomes you into His presence.



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for giving me assurance through Your Word—confidence that I will, in fact, be able to withstand that great day of wrath when You will judge evil. I rejoice because I will not only simply endure. Rather, I will join You in Your eternal presence. Remind me of the presence of Your Holy Spirit to help me endure as I seek to be a faithful witness. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

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# REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

## STUDY FOUR

### An Interlude: Earthly Restraint and Heavenly Worship

*Revelation 7:1–17*

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*In this passage, there's no crying out, no judgment. There is, in fact, a holding back of judgment. There's a deliberate pause in this interlude. This is mercy amid the wrath. This is an interlude at its best.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**E**VERYONE needs a break every now and then. Students need weekends to rest and play after a week of hard learning. Employees need vacations to let their bodies and minds recover after months of focused labor. Parents need child-free date nights to get away to spend some time enjoying one another without interruption.

Even God takes breaks. After six days of active creation, He stopped and rested on the seventh day, and He commanded the people of Israel to emulate Him through the weekly Sabbath.

In the book of Revelation, amid the fury of judgments, God included interludes—just as a playwright writes in an intermission that allows the audience to pause and reflect on the key moments of the previous act.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will join John as he experienced the first of three heavenly interludes in Revelation. This break from God's series of righteous judgments allows us to stop and reflect on the past, present, and future mercy of the slaughtered Lamb, Jesus Christ.



#### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Say this prayer as you prepare to engage with God through His Word today:

*Father, it sometimes feels impossible to escape the hustle-and-bustle. Calm my mind and quiet my heart so I can receive what You want to teach me through the Scriptures today. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*



# An Interlude: Earthly Restraint and Heavenly Worship

*Revelation 7:1–17*

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## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Conquest. War. Famine. Death. Natural Disaster. These grim experiences describe the judgment God leveled against the world as the slaughtered Lamb opened the first six seals of the scroll of God’s plan.

As this cycle of judgment reached its conclusion, *all* the people of the earth—from slaves to kings—cried out for mercy from God. Those experiencing this global judgment then asked an essential question for understanding the message of Revelation. According to [Revelation 6:17](#), what did they ask?

Before this cycle of judgments reached its conclusion, John’s vision included a temporary pause from the chaos. In this interlude in [7:1–17](#), we discover the answer to the question posed in [6:17](#).



## Observation: The Sealed People of God

Whether you engage with a familiar or unfamiliar passage of Scripture, you should always begin with the same step: *observation*.<sup>1</sup> As you work through these verses, simply ask yourself, “What does this passage say?” The theology and practical matters will come later.

Start by reading [Revelation 7:1–17](#), and in the space below, record any words or phrases that are repeated and stand out from the rest.

### The 144,000—Revelation 17:1–8

After the conclusion of the sixth seal judgment, what did John see, according to [Revelation 7:1](#)?

# An Interlude: Earthly Restraint and Heavenly Worship

## *Revelation 7:1–17*

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These four angels held back the winds of God’s judgment for a moment of time so another angel could demonstrate God’s mercy. According to *Revelation 7:2–3*, what object did this angel carry? What did he intend to do with this object?

In *7:4*, John heard that this angel marked 144,000 “from all the tribes of the people of Israel.” Read *7:5–8*, and then name each tribe and note how many Israelites from each tribe received the seal.

### **The Vast Crowd—Revelation 17:9–17**

In *Revelation 7:4*, John *heard* the number of those Israelites who received the mark from God’s seal. What group did he then *see* in *7:9*? How did John describe the appearance of this group? What did this group say in *7:10*?

After seeing this vast crowd, one of the twenty-four elders asked John, “Who are they, and where have they come from?” (*Revelation 7:13 NASB*). Naturally, John’s response sounded like this: “How am *I* supposed to know? *You tell me!*” According to *7:14–17*, how did the elder answer his own question? Who was included in this group? What did God offer to them?

# An Interlude: Earthly Restraint and Heavenly Worship

*Revelation 7:1–17*

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So who can withstand the fearsome judgment of God? Those who receive His seal and those whom He dresses in pure white robes of righteousness. That is why the heavenly host sang,

*“Blessing and glory and wisdom  
and thanksgiving and honor  
and power and strength belong to our God  
forever and ever!” (Revelation 7:12)*

*In eternity, worship will never cease. That’s our future. And it will be ours only by His grace. Not one of us deserves to be there. We all are there because of the Lamb. And as a result, we extol the One who made it all happen.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## Interpretation: Sealed with God’s Promise

The Greek term translated “seal” carries important imagery that modern language sometimes misses. This term depicts a signet ring bearing a wholly distinctive engraving that identified important figures, like kings. Often, these kings would pour hot wax on a closed scroll or envelope and press the ring into the wax to “seal” it with the unique, identifying image. Since only the king held the ring, this seal represented the ultimate mark of authenticity.

In light of this context, what does it mean that each of these 144,000 Jews carried “the seal of the living God” (*Revelation 7:2*)? For some help answering this question, feel free to consult your Bible-study tools, like Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Revelation*, or *Constable’s Notes*, available for free at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).<sup>2</sup>

Thousands of years before John received this vision from Jesus, God made a promise to Abraham. God said, “I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you” (*Genesis 12:2–3*).

During John’s lifetime, many Jews didn’t feel blessed because they lived under the occupation of the cruel, pagan Roman Empire. Naturally, many assumed that God had given up on His people and promises.

# An Interlude: Earthly Restraint and Heavenly Worship

*Revelation 7:1–17*

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Yet the message of *Revelation 7:1–17* suggests otherwise. How does this passage reveal that God has kept His covenant with Abraham? What is the true blessing God promised? In what ways does this passage present the blessing to those outside Abraham’s family? For some additional context, see *Romans 11:1–7*.

*Salvation is only through the blood of the Lamb. It is the blood of Christ that cleanses the soul from sin—past, present, and future—and brings us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. These saints have endured suffering and death, and now, their reward is theirs to enjoy.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## **Correlation: The Servant of Israel**

When the elder described the vast crowd to John, he said,

*“They will never again be hungry or thirsty;  
they will never be scorched by the heat of the sun.”* (*Revelation 7:16*)

John quoted these words directly from *Isaiah 49:10*—a portion of Scripture written during a time when Israel had strayed from God and needed a firm reminder of hope only He could offer amid the threat of conquest and exile. This chapter opens with the announcement of the arrival of God’s servant. According to *49:6*, what essential roles did God call this servant to carry out?

According to *49:8–12*, what would be the results of the work of this servant?

# An Interlude: Earthly Restraint and Heavenly Worship

*Revelation 7:1–17*

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Sadly, this servant would later be rejected by His own people. Read [Isaiah 53:3–9](#) and explain how the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ serve as the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy. How does knowing the context of the allusion in [Revelation 7:16](#) help you better understand the message of the whole passage?

Jesus didn't save us *despite* His death. Rather, His followers receive the white robe of righteousness *because* of His death. He died so that you may live, and when you finally go to be with Him, He will wipe the last tear from your eye.



## Application: A Personal Interlude

Pastor Chuck identifies three timeless lessons from this interlude from [Revelation 7:1–17](#):

1. *This interlude reaffirms for us who is first.* Jesus . . . only Jesus.
2. *This interlude reminds us of what's important.* Keep Him the top priority.
3. *This interlude refreshes us on what's worthwhile.* It helps us make sense of suffering.

Which of these three points resonate with you most right now? How can you take a personal interlude to reconnect with Jesus and instill this truth into your mind and heart? Remember, an interlude isn't a vacation. Rather, it creates deliberate space and allows time for prayer, Bible reading, worship, and fellowship for the purpose of connecting with God.

Why is it important to remember that God is faithful and keeps His promises? Which of God's promises do you find most difficult to embrace?

# An Interlude: Earthly Restraint and Heavenly Worship

*Revelation 7:1–17*

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Does life feel chaotic right now? Do you feel like you need a break? Pause and reread the words of hope in *Revelation 7:1–17*. Then prayerfully look ahead to that day when you will enter God’s eternal Sabbath rest.



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for preserving this hopeful interlude in Your Word. Even though I may feel strained and worried right now, I can have peace because You keep Your promises. Help me not lose sight of that day when You will clothe me in Christ’s spotless righteousness and wipe the tears of loss, pain, and death from my eyes. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

## ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

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# REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

## STUDY FIVE

### First Blasts of the Trumpet Plagues

*Revelation 8:1–13*

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*Here is an opportunity to be quiet. The hour of God’s final judgment is coming—the hour when all God’s faithful will be vindicated, when all wrongs will be punished, when all sins will be exposed and judged. Satan will be ultimately vanquished along with his ugly host of demons. Humanity will be humbled, and Christ will be exalted. And all of heaven now waits in suspenseful expectancy.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**T**HINK about the patient parent who’s spent the whole day listening to his or her children bicker. Or the loving spouse whose partner constantly complains about a nagging knee pain but refuses to visit a doctor. Or the caring person whose sibling maintains an unyielding addiction that’s caused so much damage. Each of these people likely want to scream the same thing . . .

“I’ve had *enough!*”

The book of Revelation portrays God expressing a similar feeling. For millennia, He has watched evil damage His beloved creation. He has listened closely to the cries of His children. He hears them share their fears, their pains, their losses—and His heart is filled with compassion. All the while, He’s upholding perfect patience and acting with perfect timing.

This world will not always be as it now is. A day will come when God decides that enough is *enough!* Enough of Satan harming His children. Enough of sin tearing families apart. Enough of death stealing the abundant life He wants everyone to enjoy. In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we will see what happens when God offers the final response to all our prayers.



# First Blasts of the Trumpet Plagues

*Revelation 8:1–13*

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Is something in your life making you want to say, “I’ve had enough”? Express your need to God in prayer as you prepare to learn about His intention to restore you and the rest of His creation.

*Father, sometimes I can't help but feel like I've had enough with the brokenness of this world. Yet I find comfort in Your promise that You will repair Your creation to a state of perfection. As I study Your Word today, give me patience and hope as I await this day. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Revelation contains a series of visions in which God carries out His cyclical judgment against Satan, sin, and death. The first cycle began as the slaughtered Lamb unfurled a scroll closed with seven seals. As He opened each seal, a new form of God’s judgment reached the earth. According to [Revelation 8:1–2](#), what happened when the Lamb broke the seventh and final seal? What did John see?

Nested within this seventh seal were the seven trumpets—the next set of judgments. By framing the vision this way, God revealed that the cycle of judgment wasn’t yet completed but starting anew. For this second cycle, though, John included some interesting details about the motivation behind God’s action. What image did John see in [8:3–5](#)? What did this image represent?

Turn now to [8:6–13](#) to see what happened when the angels blew these horns of judgment in response to the cries of God’s people.

# First Blasts of the Trumpet Plagues

*Revelation 8:1–13*

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## Observation: The First Four Trumpets

Like warriors preparing to lead a battle march, the seven angels lined up with their trumpets in hand (*Revelation 8:6*). In succession, each sounded a horn whose music announced God's judgment against evil. As you read about these first four judgments, use your observation skills to keep track of how John described each judgment.<sup>1</sup>

According to *Revelation 8:7*, what did John see when the *first* angel blew his trumpet?

According to *8:8–9*, what did John see when the *second* angel blew his trumpet?

According to *8:10–11*, what did John see when the *third* angel blew his trumpet?

According to *8:12*, what did John see when the *fourth* angel blew his trumpet?

An eagle suddenly appeared to John, circling overhead as it cried out a foreboding message: “Terror, terror, terror to all who belong to this world because of what will happen when the last three angels blow their trumpets” (*8:13*). This cycle of judgment would continue, but for now, let's stop to consider the significance of the first four trumpets.

# First Blasts of the Trumpet Plagues

*Revelation 8:1–13*

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## Interpretation: The Prayers of the God's People

The cycle of trumpet judgments began with the rising of “the prayers of God’s people as an offering on the gold altar before the throne” (*Revelation 8:3*). What truth does this passage teach about prayer? Consult your Bible-study resources, like Pastor Chuck’s commentary, *Insights on Revelation*, or *Constable’s Notes*, which is available for free at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).<sup>2</sup> Record some timeless principles about our prayers and God’s response in the space below.

Many of the seal judgments were human-on-human atrocities like war, conquest, and murder. Yet the first four trumpet judgments were natural disasters not caused by human influence. What does this observation reveal about the extent of the curse of sin? In what ways will Jesus ultimately restore this element of the curse upon His second coming?

*These are unanswered prayers of the saints that God has accumulated—if you will. They’re contained in a golden bowl. This is symbolic language, but the point is this: God values the prayers of His people. God hears those prayers. And God responds in His time. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Correlation: The Plagues of Egypt

Many of the trumpet judgments God sent in *Revelation 8:1–13* are nearly identical to the plagues He sent against Egypt when the people of Israel were enslaved there. Read the following passages and summarize how each plague parallels the trumpet judgments. Pay special attention to the last verse in each plague sequence.

*Exodus 7:14–22*

# First Blasts of the Trumpet Plagues

*Revelation 8:1–13*

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*Exodus 9:13–35*

*Exodus 10:21–27*

Each plague in Egypt ended with God hardening Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh refusing to release the Israelite slaves. How did Pharaoh's response foreshadow how others would later respond to God's judgment? What does Pharaoh's response teach about the extent of sin?

*All of this is designed to remind humankind that it is not about us. It's about our Creator. We need that reminder every day we live as we go through every accident of life, which appears to us at times to be so unfair, or so ill-timed, or so devastating. But all of it falls in the category of His plan. So don't forget it's all about Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Application: Tunes of Hope**

Have you been crying out to God in prayer about the evil of this world? This passage reveals that your prayers have risen to God like an incense offering. Though the stench of sin is foul, the aroma of trust is pleasing. Pastor Chuck Swindoll developed four timeless truths based on this passage:

- God values and responds to the prayers of His people.
- God can communicate spiritual messages through natural disasters.
- God gives His harsh judgments a holy purpose.
- God won't quit until His plan completes its course.

# First Blasts of the Trumpet Plagues

*Revelation 8:1–13*

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What kinds of injustices have you been praying about lately? Do you sometimes feel like God will never answer your prayer? How does this passage offer you a sense of hope—even as you wait for God to respond to the evil surrounding you?

Nature is a great teacher. When we experience fires and floods, earthquakes and tornadoes, disease and death, we realize how little control we have over our circumstances. Yet, God hasn't lost *any* power. How have you seen God work despite these kinds of evil for your good and His glory?

As you look to the future consummation of God's plan for creation and consider your place in this plan, do you sense the Holy Spirit urging you to say, "Enough!"? Enough of a sinful habit? Enough poor treatment of a family member? Enough of a wavering walk with Jesus? Use the space below to reflect and consider how He might be urging you to make present changes in light of God's eternal plan.

We don't need to experience a blackened sun to know that this world is a dark place. The long shadows of Satan, sin, and death touch everything around us. Sometimes it feels they will even extinguish what little light is left. Yet the Light of the World sits on the throne of creation, and the darkness cannot overcome Him. And we will all rest in the warmth of His light on that glorious day when He returns and declares, "I've had *enough!*"

# First Blasts of the Trumpet Plagues

*Revelation 8:1–13*

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## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for the reminder that You will not allow the evils of this world to persist forever. Strengthen me to join the chorus of eternal saints in prayer as I await the day Jesus Christ returns to restore His creation. Help me to say, “Enough!” to the sin in my own life as I seek to grow in Christlikeness. It’s in His patient name I pray. Amen.*

## ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

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# REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

## STUDY SIX

### Releasing Demons from the Abyss

*Revelation 9:1–12*

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*Because something is invisible is no reason to believe it isn't real. As a matter of fact, the longer I walk with Christ and the deeper I understand His Word, the more real the invisible becomes to me. The more I sense the conflict about me that I cannot see or hear or even feel, the more I want to stay away from anything that opens a door to demonic activity.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**W**E are at war. No, not at war with another nation or people group. After all, the apostle Paul said, “For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places” (*Ephesians 6:12*).

Many refuse to believe it. They say, “If I can't see it, then it can't be real.” Yet every day, Satan and his minions terrorize people across the world—including the very people who deny their existence.

So how do we fight an invisible enemy?

Thankfully, Scripture affirms that we aren't alone in the battle. Jesus fights with us . . . fights for us. And He assures us that His victory is already secure. Yet we must live in the tension of the already-but-not-yet of Jesus' triumph over Satan.

This *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study will look at the book of Revelation's introduction to the topic of spiritual warfare. Though we may not be able to see Satan physically, Scripture indeed affirms he is at work. As we witness the enemy working, we will equip ourselves to defend against his attacks in the war zone of life.



# Releasing Demons from the Abyss

*Revelation 9:1–12*

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Spiritual warfare may feel foreign to you. It may even make you feel uncomfortable or anxious. Offer these feelings to God as you prepare to engage with this challenging topic. Ask Him to open your mind so you can learn what He wants to teach you.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the second cycle of judgments in Revelation, seven angels obtained trumpets. As each angel blew his horn, the sound of God’s justice echoed across the earth. The first four trumpets brought *natural* disasters like hail and fire, blood-filled seas, and blinding darkness.

Yet even with such miraculous events, the people of the world still refused to turn to God in repentance. In fact, they made the choice to continue to “belong to this world” rather than join the family of God (*Revelation 8:13*).

So, in response, God continued with the fifth trumpet judgment. This time, the judgment took on a *supernatural* flair.



## Observation: The Fifth Trumpet

As you read the account of the fifth judgment in *Revelation 9:1–12*, do your best to restrain your imagination. The judgments of Revelation sometimes push us toward speculation, but for now, focus on observation—what the text *says*.<sup>1</sup> Try to imagine John’s vision exactly as he described it.

According to *9:1–2*, what did John see when the fifth angel blew his trumpet? What did the heavenly star receive? What did it do with this object? What were the results of these actions?

Like exhaust pouring out of the tailpipe of an old truck, black smoke clouded the air when the angel opened this bottomless pit. Yet the smog signaled the arrival of something far more sinister. According to *9:3*, what came out of this pit next?

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These grasshopper-like insects may seem harmless at first, but locusts can devastate a local community. These creatures reproduce rapidly and abundantly, and the swarms can migrate by the *millions*. As a blanket of locusts falls over a field, they can consume an entire season’s worth of crops in just a few hours.

# Releasing Demons from the Abyss

*Revelation 9:1–12*

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John's readers would have been familiar with the horrors of swarming locusts. The locusts in his vision, however, were different than the ones he and his readers knew so well. According to [Revelation 9:4](#), what were these locusts authorized to do and *not* to do? See [7:1–3](#). How is this function different from their normal behavior?

According to [9:5–6](#), how did people react to the presence of these locusts?

In the space below, summarize how John described the appearance of these locusts in [9:7–10](#). Remember, God gave John this vision, so he had to use natural language to describe supernatural images.

According to [9:11](#), who was the king or ruler of this swarm of locusts? Check out this verse in several Bible translations to get a sense of the meaning of his name.

*What a horrifying picture!* Torture, pain, and devastation, yet no release of death. But God was not yet done. John noted that two more “terrors” were yet to be unleashed upon the world ([Revelation 9:12](#)). The final two angels would each blow their trumpets, but not all hope would be lost. In fact, even in these dark verses, we can see some light shining through.

# Releasing Demons from the Abyss

*Revelation 9:1–12*

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## Interpretation: A Swarm of Demons

The most pressing interpretive question [Revelation 9:1–12](#) raises is, “What do these locusts represent?” While many people have offered various interpretations, most scholars see these locusts as demonic beings.

What details in the passage help us see that these destructive creatures are demons rather than something else? What attributes do these demonic beasts share with locusts? Identify specific phrases from the passage. For some help, feel free to consult a commentary, like *Insights on Revelation* by Pastor Chuck or [Constable’s Notes](#) at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).<sup>2</sup>

What does this passage reveal about the *extent* of demonic power? What does it reveal about the *limits* of demonic power?

How can a follower of Jesus Christ maintain a disposition of hope despite the fact that spiritual warfare is a true—and often frightening—reality?

*Demons have supernatural power because they are supernatural creatures, meaning the normal weapons of war will not hurt them. Their ability to move and to bring destruction is greater than you and I have seen with the human eye because they are not human. They are superhuman. They have a power from Satan himself. Yet they are not to hurt believers. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

# Releasing Demons from the Abyss

*Revelation 9:1–12*

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## Correlation: Visions of Locusts

Throughout Scripture, locusts represent God's judgment. Early in Israel's history, God sent a plague of locusts against the Egyptians prior to the Israelites' deliverance (*Exodus 10:1–20*). Several centuries later, the prophet Joel announced a prophecy that would foreshadow this apocalyptic vision in Revelation.

Read *Joel 2:1–11* and summarize how this prophecy compares with *Revelation 9:1–12*. What is similar? What is different?

In Joel's prophecy, God leads this army of locusts against Jerusalem—toward His own people (see *Joel 2:1* and *2:11*). Yet He later balances His omen of judgment with a refrain of hope. Summarize the prophecy from *2:18–27*. How does this promise reverse the effects of the earlier locust judgment?

While Joel addressed the people of Israel, both he and John foresaw the locusts assaulting those who refused to repent. How does this correlation help us understand the purpose of these visions of locusts?

*Horrible setting, isn't it? Dreadful. How wonderful it is for the child of God to know that, in trusting Christ, there is not only instantaneous forgiveness, but there is also the deliverance from the dominion and authority of Satan and sin over us. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

# Releasing Demons from the Abyss

*Revelation 9:1–12*

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## Application: The Spiritual War

*Revelation 9:1–12* teaches difficult truths about demons and about spiritual warfare. It's natural to feel afraid about demonic activity in this world. Yet we must never forget that, though Satan is the ruler of this world, Jesus is the King of creation. The truth of that hope eclipses our fears. In light of these realities, Pastor Chuck shares four points of application:

1. Though invisible, demons are real and aggressive.
2. Though innumerable, they are organized and committed to our destruction.
3. Though intimidating, they have limitations and can be restrained.
4. Though insidious, they bow before the sovereign Lord Jesus Christ.

How does your culture view the spiritual realm? What do you think about it? Do you tend to downplay the presence of demonic and angelic activity? Or do you think you might overemphasize its impact on your personal walk with God?

As you think back on your life, have you ever had a supernatural encounter with a demon? Remember, demons are subtle and insidious. You may not have noticed in that moment, but that attack may very well have been a *spiritual* attack. As you reflect on this moment, how do you sense God protected you from harm?

As a follower of Jesus, what role do you play in the age-old battle against Satan? What does it look like to “put on all of God’s armor” as you exist in enemy-occupied territory and await Christ’s return (*Ephesians 6:11*)?

# Releasing Demons from the Abyss

*Revelation 9:1–12*

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Every day, we engage in a conflict with Satan and his army of locusts. These demons may seem to have claimed a foothold on this world—and indeed their forces will only get stronger. Yet Revelation reminds us that Jesus—our redeemer, our protector, our King—will return to reclaim His creation. Indeed, we may be at war, but Jesus has already claimed the victory.

And we claim that same victory through faith in His name.



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, help me to remember that we are engaged in a spiritual war—even though I cannot see it. When I feel like I'm losing the battle, remind me that I do not fight against flesh and blood. Remind me that You fight for me and that You've already won the war. Give me the strength and courage to live boldly for You in this needy, hostile, and desperate world. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

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Study 6 • Page 7





# REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

## STUDY SEVEN

### More Demons, More Deaths, More Defiance

*Revelation 9:13–21*

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*Though God’s judgment will be awful, its purpose is to bring humanity to its knees. Not only to fulfill what God has predicted but to give people a final opportunity to turn their lives over to the Lord Jesus Christ so that they might know peace and relief and forgiveness throughout eternity.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**I**N the eighteenth century, the good news of Jesus Christ swept across the US in a movement known as The Great Awakening. People flocked to open fields by the thousands to hear of the grace of God, and the masses turned to Him in sincere repentance and joyful worship.

A key player in the drama of this nationwide revival was pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards. On July 8, 1741, this serious and earnest man delivered one of the most iconic sermons ever preached: “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”

*That doesn’t sound like good news.* Yet Edwards understood that you cannot experience the life-changing truth of the gospel without first knowing the *bad* news—the depth of the sinful human condition. Listen to Edwards’ warning and feel the fire of the message he delivered on that warm summer day:

O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: ’tis a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you as against many of the damned in hell; you hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder.<sup>1</sup>

Edwards’ strong words are accurate. God will carry out His judgment against the wicked. Yet no one is without hope. This *Searching the Scriptures* study explores this urgent theme. Though the fire of God’s wrath burns hotly, there still is time for the unrepentant to experience His grace and mercy.



# More Demons, More Deaths, More Defiance

*Revelation 9:13–21*

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Many struggle with the topic of God’s wrath. Take a moment to quiet your heart of worries and clear your mind of distractions as you prepare to engage with this challenging aspect of God’s character. Write a prayer asking Him to teach you life-changing truth as you study His Word.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

“Terror, terror, terror to all who belong to this world because of what will happen when the last three angels blow their trumpets” (*Revelation 8:13*). Each of the final three trumpet blasts represents a unique terror that would fall upon the wicked world. The first terror looked like a swarm of demon-locusts released from the bowels of the earth.

Then, the second terror, recorded in *Revelation 9:13–21*, released another demonic plague. While the first fleet of demons only harmed humans, this new army could commit far greater horrors.



## Observation: The Sixth Trumpet

As you read of the terror-inducing results of the sounding of the sixth trumpet in *Revelation 9:13–21*, pay attention to what the text says.<sup>2</sup> Your patient and careful observation of the passage will act as the foundation upon which you build your solid interpretation and timely application.

When the sixth angel blew his trumpet, John heard a voice rising from the altar in God’s throne room (*Revelation 9:13*). According to *9:14*, what did this voice say?

# More Demons, More Deaths, More Defiance

## *Revelation 9:13–21*

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According to [Revelation 9:15–16](#), what emerged from the Euphrates River upon the sounding of the sixth trumpet? What additional details did John include about this moment?

In [9:16](#), John *heard* that this demonic army contained a nearly unimaginable number of *200 million* mounted troops. Then, in [9:17](#), he *saw* the force. Summarize the appearance of these armed riders in the space below.

According to [9:18–19](#), how did these demonic horses and riders harm humanity?

The first six of the seven trumpet plagues devastated the earth and destroyed more than one-third of the human population. According to [9:20–21](#), how did those who survived these horrors respond to what they had endured? Did these events harden or soften their hearts toward God?

*What's the purpose of these judgments? To the skeptic it sounds like God is a sadist—smiling as He unloads His cruel judgments on helpless humanity. Don't believe that for a moment. Since the beginning of sin, God has promised there will be consequences. But His longsuffering and mercy have been in place often through the process. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

# More Demons, More Deaths, More Defiance

*Revelation 9:13–21*

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## Interpretation: Divine Judgment, Human Rejection

As you read about the horrors of the judgments in Revelation, it may feel like God is absent amid the chaos. Yet John suggested the opposite. Jesus Christ, the slaughtered Lamb, was the one who was worthy to open the scroll of God’s plan of redemption and to carry out God’s judgment against the powers of evil (*Revelation 5:1–8*).

John affirmed this truth when he noted that the four angels who led the demonic parade of the sixth trumpet judgment “had been prepared for this hour and day and month and year” (*9:15*). What does this verse reveal about God’s sovereignty? For some help grappling with these challenging truths, consult your Bible-study tools, like Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Revelation*, or *Constable’s Notes* at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).<sup>3</sup>

You may read about humanity’s response to these extraordinary plagues that represent the first six trumpet judgments and wonder, *How could you not turn to God after experiencing these realities?* But even today, people experience the evils of this world and still refuse to place their lives in God’s hands.

Why might someone choose not to repent after experiencing the greatest calamities that accompany the powers of sin and death? How should this perspective affect the way followers of Jesus approach evangelism and share the good news of His kingdom?

*Never think that life is sort of a haphazard set of events tossed on the chessboard and left for you to work out. We are moving through life precisely as God planned. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

# More Demons, More Deaths, More Defiance

*Revelation 9:13–21*

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## Correlation: The Euphrates River

The Euphrates River represents a key landmark in the setting of the story of the people of God. Because [Revelation 9:14](#) associated it with judgment, let's explore the significance of this river.

[Genesis 2:10–14](#) identified the Euphrates as one of the four rivers that fed the garden of Eden. After sin banished humanity from paradise, God chose to include this river as a key part of His plan. According to [15:18](#), what land did God promise to give to Abraham as a part of His creation-redeeming covenant?

Now, take a look at a Bible map (like “[Deportations and Returns under Assyria and Babylon](#)” at [insight.org/general/bible-maps](http://insight.org/general/bible-maps)) and identify these boundaries. The generations of Abraham's descendants who inherited this covenant didn't hold up their end of the deal, so God sent foreign nations to conquer this land and send the people of Israel into exile (see [Deuteronomy 28:15–68](#)).

[Isaiah 7:18–25](#) records a prophecy that foretold God's response to Israel's unfaithfulness. According to these verses, how would God judge Israel? Whom would He send against them? From where would this force arise?

In the Old Testament, the Euphrates River is associated with both blessing and judgment. How does this context help you better understand the meaning of [Revelation 9:13–21](#)? Where is there blessing amid the judgment in these verses?

God's judgment arises from the Euphrates River, which flows with both His justice *and* His mercy. Once the tide of God's wrath washes away sin and its pollution from creation, eternal springs of life will well up for those who drink of His grace and forgiveness.

# More Demons, More Deaths, More Defiance

*Revelation 9:13–21*

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## Application: Truths of Hope

*Revelation 9:13–21* offers wisdom regarding difficult realities and hopeful truths. Consider these points of practical application from Pastor Chuck.

First, *no matter how impressive human strength may be, the presence of supernatural activity is overpowering. Without divine protection, we're helpless.*

Satan and his horde of demons do rule this world. Yet, though they are strong, Jesus is stronger. He has claimed authority over both heaven *and* earth (*Matthew 28:18*). In what ways do you feel threatened by evil spiritual forces today? What practical steps can you take to claim divine protection from the King of creation?

Second, *no matter how extensive human suffering might be, the curse of spiritual depravity is overwhelming. Without eternal salvation, we're hopeless.*

Only some will turn to Jesus amid their suffering. Believers who have eternal hope in Jesus Christ can endure—and even *grow*—through suffering. How has the good news of Jesus Christ offered you hope in your life even as you have experienced some of the worst consequences of the curse of sin?

Judgment and hope are not contradictory ideas. Indeed, we have hope only because of God's judgment. As you conclude your time in God's Word today, prayerfully reflect on these final words of hope from Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon:

And now you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has flung the door of mercy wide open, and stands in the door calling and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners; a day wherein many are flocking to him, and pressing into the kingdom of God; many are daily coming from the east, west, north and south; many that were very lately in the same miserable condition that you are in, are in now an happy state, with their hearts filled with love to him that has loved them and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.<sup>4</sup>

# More Demons, More Deaths, More Defiance

*Revelation 9:13–21*

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## A FINAL PRAYER

Father, before I came to faith in Jesus Christ, I was indeed a sinner in the hands of an angry God. Yet You are the God of justice and mercy. And while You carry out Your wrath against sin, You have shown great love to me—a sinner. Thank You. Help me live well in light of this truth today as I seek to extend Your grace to those around me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

## ENDNOTES

1. Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” *Sermons and Discourses, 1739–1742*, online vol. 22, ed. Harry S. Stout, 412, Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, [edwards.yale.edu/archive/path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwGlSby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy4yMTo0Ny53amVv](https://edwards.yale.edu/archive/path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwGlSby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy4yMTo0Ny53amVv).
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*.”
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).
4. Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” 416–417.

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# REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

## STUDY EIGHT

### A Strong Angel, A Strange Assignment

*Revelation 10:1–11*

*Much of God's truth is full of hope and promise and forgiveness and grace and relief and joy and love—the things we feed on as His children. Yet much of His truth is still very hard to accept.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**T**HERE is no experience quite like enjoying a delicious meal. The smell rising off the plate causes you to salivate in anticipation of the dining experience. As you chew, flavor explodes in your mouth. You swallow and then prepare to repeat the experience with another bite.

Yet some meals—no matter how delicious in the mouth—don't sit well in the stomach. Some people have sensitivities to certain meats, dairy products, or spicy foods. For these people, a sweet culinary experience can turn sour in an instant.

God's truth sometimes is like a meal that is delightful in one moment and difficult in the next. This *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study will explore one man's encounter with a revelation from God that was both sweet and sour. This passage will reveal how we can enjoy the most wonderful portions of Scripture while embracing the most challenging aspects of God's will.



#### PREPARE YOUR HEART

In the space below, write your own prayer. Before you open God's Word, thank Him for it—all of it. Ask Him to give you the courage to listen to His Word even when you find it difficult to accept.



# A Strong Angel, A Strange Assignment

*Revelation 10:1–11*

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## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Before the conclusion of the first cycle of judgments in Revelation, John experienced an interlude between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals. This intermission offered a refrain of hope before the Lamb opened the last seal and began a new cycle of judgments.

The second cycle follows the same pattern: six trumpet judgments, an interlude, then a seventh trumpet announcing a new cycle of judgment. *Revelation 10:1–11* opens this interlude with a vision of a strong angel who gives John a very strange assignment.



## Observation: An Interlude amid the Fanfare

Some portions of Scripture leave you scratching your head and wondering, *What is going on here?* This passage may feel perplexing at moments, but don't let that send you running. Start with a small step: observation. As you read *Revelation 10:1–11*, pay careful attention to each word, each phrase, each sentence. For now, don't ask, "What does this *mean*?" Instead focus first on answering, "What does this *say*?"<sup>1</sup>

### A Strong Angel—Revelation 10:1–7

According to *Revelation 10:1*, how did John describe the appearance of the "mighty angel"? According to *10:2*, what did this angel hold?

When this strong angel spoke, the "seven thunders" responded (*Revelation 10:3*). We do not know what this thunderous chorus said because John didn't write down what he had heard. In fact, God commanded him to "keep secret" what these seven thunders conveyed (*10:4*).

Remember, John wrote down his vision *exactly* as God wanted it recorded. Every sentence of Revelation is included for a reason—both the encouraging and the challenging.

Yet John did still record some of the conversation. In your own words, summarize the main point of this angel's message in *10:6–7*.

# A Strong Angel, A Strange Assignment

*Revelation 10:1–11*

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## A Strange Assignment—Revelation 10:8–11

What did the voice from heaven command John to do in *Revelation 10:8*?

What then did the angel command John to do in *10:9*? What did the angel say would happen when John carried out this command?

What happened in *10:10* when John obeyed the command of the angel? Was the angel's prediction correct or incorrect?

*From the outpouring of judgment and wrath on unbelievers, we come to a brief reprieve of consolation and encouragement. Here, we learn that there will be no further delay. The judgments will run their course, and they will finish with the triumphant presence of Christ who will come to deliver His people.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

# A Strong Angel, A Strange Assignment

*Revelation 10:1–11*

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## Interpretation: Sweet and Sour Truth

This vision begins with an extraordinary—and perhaps frightening—image of a mighty angel. Reread John’s description of this angel in [Revelation 10:1](#). Pick one or two of these descriptions and consider what they might represent. If you need help, use your Bible-study tools, like Pastor Chuck’s commentary, *Insights on Revelation*, or *Constable’s Notes*, which is available for free at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).<sup>2</sup> In what way does the angel’s appearance enhance his message?

While students of Scripture debate what exactly this small scroll represented, we know that it contained—at least in part—God’s divine revelation because it was passed down to earth from heaven. In what sense is God’s revelation “sweet as honey” ([Revelation 10:9](#))? In what sense is it “sour” after consumption?

*This passage clues us into the whole unfolding of God’s plan and an understanding of why He does what He does. We realize how wrong and right work together for our good and ultimately for God’s glory. All of that will be finished and unfolded and unveiled when Jesus returns.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## Correlation: A Feast of Scrolls

Believe it or not, this isn’t the first time in Scripture that God commanded someone to *eat* a scroll. When God called Ezekiel to prophesy against the people of Israel, the prophet saw “a hand reaching out” that “held a scroll” ([Ezekiel 2:9](#)).

According to [Ezekiel 3:1](#), what two-part command did the voice from heaven give Ezekiel?

# A Strong Angel, A Strange Assignment

*Revelation 10:1–11*

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After Ezekiel ate the scroll, he observed that “it tasted as sweet as honey” (*Ezekiel 3:3*), just like John observed. Yet, unlike John, Ezekiel did not say it felt sour in his stomach.

In *3:4–10*, God gave Ezekiel a glimpse of what His prophetic ministry would hold for him. How would the people of Israel respond to Ezekiel’s call to repent and turn back to God? Why would they react this way? How does this predicted reaction reveal the “sour” nature of this particular scroll? How does it help us understand the purpose of John’s scroll?

Why is it significant that God told both Ezekiel and John to “eat” His message? How is this metaphor instructive for Christians today who seek to read, understand, and apply the Bible?

Often, we read God’s Word and feel encouraged by its truth and excited to follow Jesus. Yet after the message settles in our soul, we realize that Jesus’ call to self-denial is never easy. And, just like that, the sweet truth turns sour. Yet in application, we will see how embracing the entirety of Jesus’ call works for both God’s glory and our good.



## **Application: Embracing the Sweet and the Sour**

Though John received a strange assignment from this strong angel, he still recorded this moment in his account of his vision from Jesus. That means these words will always be valuable for Jesus’ followers—including us! As you consider the personal implications of this vision, reflect on these three timeless truths.

1. Much of God’s truth tastes sweet and is pleasant to hear.
2. Some of God’s plans turn bitter and are hard to accept.
3. All of God’s ways are right and reliable and deserve our complete respect.

# A Strong Angel, A Strange Assignment

## *Revelation 10:1–11*

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Which aspects of God’s revelation taste like sweet honey to your soul? Who in your life needs to experience this truth? Write some names in the space below. What steps can you take to offer a morsel of this truth to these people?

What aspects of Jesus’ calling are most difficult for you to accept? Remember, He referred to His way as the “narrow” way—a path with difficult, rocky terrain that few dare to walk (*Matthew 7:13–14*). How can you embrace these truths and put them into action in your own life?

Right now, what does it practically look like for you to trust God with both the comforting and challenging truths from the Scriptures as well as during seasons of blessing and trial?

John’s vision was not yet over. After John ate the scroll, the angel said, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings” (*Revelation 10:11*). In the following verses, John will announce a message to all humanity—one that will be both sweet and bitter. We will look at this complex truth in the next study, but until then, we can reflect on God’s faithfulness and His Word’s truthfulness.

# A Strong Angel, A Strange Assignment

*Revelation 10:1–11*

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## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, I confess that I sometimes like to treat Your Word like a buffet. I take what I like and leave the rest behind. Yet You have assured me that You have breathed out all Scripture, and therefore, all Scripture is useful for my own growth (2 Timothy 3:16). Remind me of this truth when I struggle to accept the more difficult aspects of Your revelation. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

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# REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

## STUDY NINE

### Two Fearless, Future Witnesses

*Revelation 11:1–14*

*God transforms tragic situations into triumphant events. Isn't that great news? He will use what seems like our most insignificant moments to launch significant events yet future.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**F**ROM the earliest days of the church, followers of Jesus have suffered and died because of their allegiance to Him. Wicked regimes despise Christians' single-minded commitment to God over government. And wicked individuals deride those who extend Jesus' call to repentance and self-denial. So they desire to silence these prophetic voices.

For this reason, the hall of faith is lined with the corpses of those who have been crucified, beheaded, stoned, and fed to wild beasts because of their commitment to Jesus.

The great faith of these believers surprises us, inspires us, challenges us. We wonder, *Would I stand strong for Jesus if I were in their shoes?* Then, we try to discern how we can strengthen our trust in God Almighty and increase our boldness for His kingdom.

This *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study will look to the example of two fearless witnesses to uncover a belief that every martyr for Jesus Christ holds in common—a timeless truth that can carry any believer through even the most tragic of circumstances.



#### PREPARE YOUR HEART

No one can suffer for Jesus without prayer. Prayer keeps you connected to the Father, the true source of our life—both in the present and in eternity. Say this prayer as you prepare to open His Word today.

*Father, thank You for the example of those who willingly give up their desires, comforts, and even their lives for Your sake. They make Your name known to the world, and they encourage their fellow believers—like me. Help me learn from their example as I study Your Word. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*



# Two Fearless, Future Witnesses

*Revelation 11:1–14*

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## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In an interlude between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets of God’s judgment, a strong angel appeared and gave John a strange assignment: eat a scroll. So John, being a man of great faith, heeded the angel’s puzzling words and consumed the heavenly scroll. According to *Revelation 10:10*, how did John describe the experience of eating this scroll?

In *11:1–14*, John reveals the message of this scroll—one that is indeed both sweet and sour.



### Observation: Two Witnesses

It often feels like the book of Revelation would be much easier to understand if John simply *told* us what he wanted us to know. He could have done this, but instead, he chose to *show* what God revealed to him. By doing so, John presented layers of truth that believers in any generation can peel back to reveal morsels of nourishing truth.

As you work through *Revelation 11:1–14*, start simply by observing what John said.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of this vision, John received a measuring stick—a piece of wood that worked like a modern-day ruler or yardstick. What did the heavenly voice command him to do with this stick in *11:1–2*?

During this three-and-a-half-year period, the nations would “trample the holy city”—Jerusalem (*Revelation 11:2*). God promised to send two witnesses during this trying time to carry out His purpose with His power (*11:3*). What two metaphors did John use to describe these two witnesses in *11:4*?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

## Two Fearless, Future Witnesses

*Revelation 11:1–14*

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According to *Revelation 11:5–6*, how would these witnesses demonstrate their God-given power? What would happen to those who would oppose them?

Despite the sweet, miraculous power of these witnesses, their ministry eventually would come to a seemingly sour end. According to *11:7–10*, what would happen to these two witnesses after the completion of their testimony (*11:7*)?

Though the wicked onlookers might have thought the beast had disposed of these witnesses for good, God would later shock them. According to *11:11–12*, what would happen after three-and-a-half days? How would the crowd react to these events?

According to *11:13*, what would happen at the conclusion of these events? How would the people watching respond to this whole sequence of events?

*God always works through a remnant. I hope you'll never forget that. The Lord seems to do His best work through a small, relatively insignificant group rather than through the great majority and the big splash. And His plan for the future is no exception. Sometimes He carries out His most significant accomplishments through what seems like the least likely instruments. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

# Two Fearless, Future Witnesses

*Revelation 11:1–14*

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## Interpretation: A Prophetic Ministry

The two witnesses of *Revelation 11:1–14* stand in the tradition of Old Testament prophets. They prophesy during a time of tribulation (see *Revelation 11:3*). Like Elijah, they call down fire from heaven (see *2 Kings 1:10–12*). They also halt the rainfall, just as Elijah did—for three-and-a-half years (see *1 Kings 17–18*). They follow Moses in turning water into blood and sending a variety of other horrific plagues (see *Exodus 7:14–25*).

Though these figures had a prophetic role, John chose to call them *witnesses* (see *Deuteronomy 19:15*). To what reality were they witnessing? How did their prophetic ministry validate their message? Feel free to consult a commentary like Pastor Chuck’s *Insights on Revelation* or *Constable’s Notes* at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org) to help you answer these questions.<sup>2</sup>

This scene contains three sets of characters. The conflict takes place between the witnesses and a satanic beast. The third group, however, plays an equally essential role for the purpose of the vision. Reread *Revelation 11:9–11, 13*, and in the spaces below, record how the bystanders responded to this conflict:

11:9 \_\_\_\_\_

11:10: \_\_\_\_\_

11:11: \_\_\_\_\_

11:13: \_\_\_\_\_

What does this progression of responses reveal about how the faithful ministry, unjust death, and miraculous resurrection of the two witnesses affected the onlookers? How is this sequence of events instructive for followers of Jesus who desire to serve as faithful witnesses today?

*You know what I think this passage is saying to us? During difficult times, we are to focus deliberately on what God is doing—not on what’s happening around us. Remarkable things happen when we do that. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

# Two Fearless, Future Witnesses

*Revelation 11:1–14*

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## Correlation: Measuring the Temple

John's call to measure the temple feels out of place in this narrative about these two witnesses—as if John left out some details that connect *Revelation 11:1–2* with *11:3–14*. Well, that's because he did! John wanted us to connect the dots on our own using *Zechariah 2:1–13* as a guide.

According to *2:1–2*, what did the man with the measuring line do? What were the results of this act in *2:3–5*? What then does the measured temple represent?

How does the prophecy in *2:6–13* about Israel's return from exile in Babylon foreshadow what God will do in and through the two future witnesses of *Revelation 11:3–14*?

God's people and God's plans rest under His divine protection. Nothing can stop them—no matter how hard Satan and his beastly horde of demons may try. Let's consider how we can respond to this truth.



## Application: Transforming Tragedies into Triumphs

The fearless ministry of these two faithful witnesses demonstrates one essential timeless truth:

*God transforms tragic situations into triumphant events.*

From this principle, we can develop these practical points of application:

1. Underdogs become overcomers.
2. Weakness becomes strength.
3. Obstacles become opportunities.

# Two Fearless, Future Witnesses

*Revelation 11:1–14*

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What other triumphant transformations can God produce through tragic situations? Use the following template to write a few of your own application points: \_\_\_\_\_ become(s) \_\_\_\_\_.

How does the truth that God can change tragedies into triumphs offer you encouragement in your current situation right now? What does it look like practically to trust God in the tragedy as you await His transformation?

How do you sense the Holy Spirit leading you to serve as a witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in your own context? You may feel nervous or apprehensive, and that's normal! How can you find courage through the example of the fearless witnesses of *Revelation 11:1–14*?

The image of two faithful servants of Jesus Christ lying dead in the street is truly tragic, sickening, and frightening. Yet people suffer for His name around the world every single day. This does not give us reason to fear, though. It instead offers us hope because we know that all of us who follow Jesus will be vindicated through our faith in Him.

Remember that truth and go with boldness as His witness.

# Two Fearless, Future Witnesses

*Revelation 11:1–14*

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## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for reminding me that You transform tragedies into triumphs. You did it with Your Son. You will do it with these future witnesses. And You can do it in my life. I give my doubts, my pains, and my fears over to You today. By Your grace, transform them and transform me to look more like Your Son. It's in His triumphant name I pray. Amen.*

## ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

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# REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

## STUDY TEN

### The Sounding of the Seventh Trumpet

*Revelation 11:15–19*

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*If John were to stand here beside me today, he would describe it for you as finished. The kingdom of God exists in this ever-present “now.” This is terribly important for those of us who live the life of faith. We are to see God’s promises as fulfilled in the present, not simply as something yet future. It ought to be that certain in our minds right now.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

To those living in the ancient world, life would have felt nearly impossible without the existence of one key tool: *the trumpet*.

Before the time of smartphones, television, radio, and the printing press, mass communication posed a great challenge. So ancient cultures met this challenge by producing instruments whose bold call could travel for miles. Different cultures made these trumpets by repurposing large shells, by hollowing out animal horns, or by forging them from crude metals.

Ancient rulers would sound these horns to grab the attention of the people and to signal the arrival of important news—sometimes good, sometimes bad, sometimes neither. A trumpet could proclaim victory in battle, warn of an approaching attack, or announce a new royal decree.

In the book of Revelation, God announces the culmination of human history through the sounding of seven trumpets. As each angel blows his horn, God sends a new judgment against the cosmic powers of evil and death.

This *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study will observe closely the announcement of the seventh trumpet. This horn warns the wicked and unrepentant, but it ultimately plays a song of good news: the kingdom of God has permanently established itself on earth.



# The Sounding of the Seventh Trumpet

*Revelation 11:15–19*

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

You don't need to come to God with pompous fanfare when you pray. In fact, Jesus Himself said, "But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you" ([Matthew 6:6](#)).

In this quiet space, offer a sincere and humble prayer to God, knowing that He hears you and will reward you for your faithfulness at the sounding of the final trumpet.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As each angel sounded his trumpet, a new form of judgment touched down to the earth. The first four brought natural disasters, and the last three brought certain *terrors*—cataclysms more intense and more frightening than anything the world had ever seen ([Revelation 8:13](#)).

The first two terrors unleashed demonic hordes upon the earth to torture and kill those who refused to repent. When all hope seemed banished, the seventh angel sounded his trumpet, which did indeed proclaim terror to Satan and his followers, and voices in heaven sang a song of hope to the people of God. Let's hear what [Revelation 11:15–19](#) has to say.



## Observation: The Seventh Trumpet

Begin by reading [Revelation 11:15–19](#) slowly and carefully two or three times. For now, your goal simply is to understand what the passage says.<sup>1</sup> Each time you read through the verses, try to pick out a word, phrase, image, or detail you didn't notice before. Record your observations in the space below.

# The Sounding of the Seventh Trumpet

*Revelation 11:15–19*

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According to [Revelation 11:15](#), what happened when the seventh angel blew his trumpet? What did John hear? Summarize this message in your own words.

How did the twenty-four elders react to this message, according to [11:16](#)?

As the elders sang a song of praise to God, they opened with a statement of gratitude. According to [11:17](#), why did these elders give thanks to God?

This passage began with the announcement of a message. Then in [11:18](#), the twenty-four elders explained the implications of this message. What would be the results of the arrival of the kingdom of God? For whom is this good news? For whom is this news bad?

According to [11:19](#), what did John see that concluded this vision of the seventh trumpet?

# The Sounding of the Seventh Trumpet

*Revelation 11:15–19*

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*This is the moment when Satan is set aside, driven away, locked up and the Lord Jesus Christ sets up His throne, righteous scepter in hand.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## Interpretation: The Kingdom of God

Although the expression “the kingdom of God” is not as common in Revelation as it is in the four gospels, Jesus’ kingdom remains an essential theme in John’s apocalypse. [Revelation 11:15–19](#) signals the significance of this theme by anticipating the full manifestation of the kingdom of heaven on earth.

To see what the New Testament reveals about this new, otherworldly kingdom, read the following verses: [Matthew 5:3–10](#); [Mark 1:14–15](#); [Luke 4:16–21](#); [Acts 1:6–9](#); and [Philippians 3:17–21](#). If you want to go deeper, feel free to consult a commentary, like Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Insights on Revelation* or [Constable’s Notes](#) at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).<sup>2</sup> You can also check out the article, “[Kingdom of God](#),” in *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*.

Based on your study, what is the kingdom of God? What are its key characteristics? Why is it significant that Jesus sits on the throne of this heavenly kingdom? In what sense is a follower of Jesus Christ a citizen of His kingdom?

Theologians often describe the kingdom of God as an “already-but-not-yet” reality. In what ways has the kingdom of God already arrived? In what ways do we not yet experience it in its fullness?

*These loud voices come telling us that the kingdom has already arrived, even though it hasn’t yet come. Because in the mind or the sight of the angelic creatures, it has already transpired. The King is already on His throne. Upon the arrival of Christ, the kingdom of the world which Satan presently rules will become Jesus’ kingdom. And He will reign forever and ever.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

# The Sounding of the Seventh Trumpet

*Revelation 11:15–19*

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## Correlation: The Presence of God

At the end of John's vision, he looked up into heaven and saw that the temple of God was open and that "the Ark of his covenant could be seen inside the Temple" (*Revelation 11:19*). This may seem like a throwaway detail, but it complements the message of the previous verses.

The ark of the covenant was arguably the most important possession of the people of Israel because of what it *held* and because of what it *represented*. According to *Exodus 25:21–22*, what did the ark hold and what did it represent?

God commanded the Israelites to keep the ark of the covenant hidden behind a curtain in the innermost room of the tabernacle (and later, the temple) called the "most holy place." Yet once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered this room to bring the sins of Israel before God. According to *Leviticus 16:2, 15–22*, what did the high priest (Aaron, in this case) do to atone for the sins of the people of Israel? What role did the ark of the covenant play in this ritual?

Considering this context, why is it significant that John could see the ark of the covenant in plain sight? What does this vision teach about the kingdom of God?

Previously, God's presence was locked away in the temple. Now, we experience His presence through the Holy Spirit. One day, He will burst wide open the gates of His heavenly temple, and the whole world will experience His presence, His mercy, and His grace.

# The Sounding of the Seventh Trumpet

*Revelation 11:15–19*

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## Application: Our Returning and Ruling God

The trumpet of *Revelation 11:15–19* announces King Jesus' return to earth. This proclamation is bad news for Satan and his minions, but it offers hope to citizens of the kingdom of God because it signals the decisive defeat of evil and death. As you apply this passage, use these two timeless truths to guide you.

First, *our Savior will return to receive us into His kingdom*. How does knowing that you are a citizen of the kingdom of God affect the way you live your day-to-day life? What does it practically look like to live faithfully as an exile away from your heavenly home?

Second, *our sovereign King reigns and will one day reward us*. Though Jesus is King of the universe, Satan will be the ruler of this world until Jesus returns. How does knowledge of your future reward encourage you as you await Jesus' second coming—even as you endure attacks from the enemy?

If you listen closely, you can hear the angel warming up, getting ready to blow the trumpet that announces the return of Jesus Christ and the glorious arrival of the kingdom of God. The wait may feel heavy on your soul. But take heart! John has assured us that we will one day hear the angel play that long-anticipated song of hope.

# The Sounding of the Seventh Trumpet

*Revelation 11:15–19*

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## A FINAL PRAYER

As you conclude your study of God’s Word today, offer as a prayer to God the final verse of Horatio Gates Spafford’s classic hymn, “It Is Well with My Soul”:

*O Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,  
the clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
the trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend,  
even so, it is well with my soul.<sup>3</sup>*

## ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).
3. Horatio Gates Spafford, “When Peace, Like a River,” Hymnary.org, [hymnary.org, hymnary.org/text/when\\_peace\\_like\\_a\\_river\\_attendeth\\_my\\_way](https://hymnary.org/text/when_peace_like_a_river_attendeth_my_way).

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Study 10 • Page 7





# REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

## STUDY ELEVEN

### Exposing the Ultimate Evil Empire

#### *Revelation 12*

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*Satan is determined to hinder and harm and delay God's great work in whomever may be God's child. He spends his existence stealing and destroying and deceiving and killing. Yet His days are numbered. To put it bluntly, Satan is on the loose. But . . . he is a loser. Never forget it.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**S**INCE the earliest days of human history, wicked nations have opposed God, God's purposes, and God's people.

Egypt enslaved descendants of Jacob and forced generation after generation to build up the very kingdom that enslaved them. Babylon conquered the land of Judah, brought the people into captivity, and mandated that they adopt pagan practices and worship false gods. Rome hunted down the earliest followers of Jesus and compelled them to decide between bending the knee to Caesar . . . and living . . . or bending the knee to Jesus . . . and dying.

Even today, Christians all over the world face the constant threat of state-sponsored persecution. These faithful followers of Jesus meet in secret, disguise their Bibles, and live quietly among the masses as best as they can. But even so, they still die at the hands of evil regimes every day.

Sadly, such atrocities will continue, and though the nations rise and fall, there will always be those who resist God and His people—until God says, "Enough." In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll see whom Revelation presents as the king of the ultimate evil empire. Then, we'll raise a shout of victory knowing that God's kingdom will one day topple this evil ruler for good.



# Exposing the Ultimate Evil Empire

## Revelation 12

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### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Offer a prayer to God as you prepare to open His Word. Ask Him to soften your heart, to incline your ears, and to prepare your mind for what He wants to teach you. Then call to mind those who are enduring persecution—it could be people you know by name—and pray for their commitment to and comfort in Christ.



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

*Revelation 12* marks a transition in John's dramatic telling of heaven and earth's collision. For the past several chapters, we have watched in awe as God executed His justice in two cycles of seven distinct judgments against the wicked and unrepentant.

In this new scene, we witness the main conflict in the book of Revelation. And in this study, we uncover the identity of God's true enemy: a fierce *dragon*.



### Observation: The Woman, the Dragon, and the Child

*Revelation 12:1–18* tells the story of the struggle between good and evil using vivid “signs” (*Revelation 12:1, 3* NASB). In this context, this term refers to symbolic imagery that depicts true realities. We will look more closely at these pictures and what they represent in the interpretation section. For now, though, our focus is *observation*. As you read this epic drama, pay close attention simply to what the words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs say.<sup>1</sup>

#### An Ancient Conflict—Revelation 12:1–6

This narrative focuses on three main characters, each of whom we meet in *Revelation 12:1–6*. In the spaces below, record how John described each character and note what happened to each of them.

*The Woman* (*Revelation 12:1–2, 6*)

# Exposing the Ultimate Evil Empire

## *Revelation 12*

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*The Dragon (Revelation 12:3–4)*

*The Child (Revelation 12:5)*

### **A Heavenly War—Revelation 12:7–12**

*Then there was a war in heaven . . . a battle between God’s army of angels and the dragon’s demonic horde (Revelation 12:7). With the stage set, the drama can begin. According to Revelation 12:8, who lost this battle? What was the result of the loss?*

In [12:9](#), John did some of the interpretive work for us and revealed the dragon to represent “the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world.” As a result of his defeat, the heavens rejoiced in God’s victory. According to [12:11](#), how did the “brothers and sisters” in Christ (see [12:10](#)) participate in causing the “defeat” of the dragon?

# Exposing the Ultimate Evil Empire

## *Revelation 12*

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### An Earthly Battle—Revelation 12:13–18

Though God cast the dragon out of heaven, he still prowled the earth seeking to bring “terror” to humanity (*Revelation 12:12*). According to *Revelation 12:13–16*, what did the dragon seek to do to the woman and the male child? What happened during each attempt?

In *12:17*, the dragon redirected his anger from the woman and the male *child* to “the rest of her *children*” (emphasis added). Whom did John identify as the true children of this woman?

“Then the dragon took his stand on the shore beside the sea” (*12:18*). This story isn’t over yet. In fact, it’s just getting started. Before we can continue in the story, however, we must stop to make sure we understand the reality behind these symbols.



### **Interpretation: Battling the Enemy**

Nearly every sentence of this vision contains an image whose meaning we can debate. For now, we are going to focus on the main symbols and themes that John highlighted most prominently.

As we already saw, John identified the dragon as Satan in *Revelation 12:9*. But He left the identity of the woman and her child unstated. Use your Bible-study tools to help you interpret these images. You can look at Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Revelation*.<sup>2</sup> If you’d prefer a free, online resource, check out *Constable’s Notes* at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).

What or whom does the woman represent? What or whom does the child represent? Be sure to identify specific details from the passage that help you interpret the meaning of the images. What does God’s interaction with these figures reveal about His character?

# Exposing the Ultimate Evil Empire

## *Revelation 12*

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As this passage reveals, God's chief rival goes by many names. The name Satan means "adversary." In *Revelation 12:10*, John referred to him as the accuser. Elsewhere, he is called the devil, which means "slanderer" (see *Matthew 4:1*). And Jesus Himself calls His enemy a murderer and the father of lies (see *John 8:44*). How do each of these titles highlight a different aspect of Satan's activity in the world against humankind? How does this behavior counteract God's work in creation?

Many feel ill-equipped to engage in battle against Satan. Yet John offers the only weapons followers of Jesus need: the blood of the slaughtered Lamb and their testimony (*Revelation 12:11*). How do these rather unusual weapons allow the people of God to overcome Satan?

*How magnificent a scene is that? Remember, when the child of God in Christ claims the blood of the Lamb and stands against the powers of the enemy, the believer in Christ wins. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### **Correlation: The Ancient Serpent**

In *Revelation 12:9*, John identified the dragon as "the ancient serpent." By making this connection explicit, John nudged his readers to the book of Genesis to see the origins of this conflict.

In *Genesis 3:1–7*, the shrewd, dragon-like serpent subverted the created order. Though God commanded the humans to rule the animals (see *Genesis 1:26–28*), this particular creature made himself a god over humanity when he tricked them into rejecting the Creator. By this act, Satan introduced sin into God's good world and claimed temporary rule over the earth.

Yet God wouldn't allow this rule to persist, and He proclaimed a curse against the serpent in *Genesis 3:14–15*. Summarize this curse in your own words.

# Exposing the Ultimate Evil Empire

## *Revelation 12*

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*Genesis 3:15* foreshadows the entirety of the story of Scripture by introducing the generational conflict between the people of God and the serpent. What does this verse reveal about the nature of this conflict? How does it point to the resolution of the conflict?

How does understanding the context of *3:15* help you see the past, present, and future components of the conflict between the woman and the dragon in *Revelation 12:1–18*?

*There is continual, spiritual warfare going on. You don't see it. You don't hear it. But you witness the results of it, and at times, you feel the impact of it—especially when you are in regions that are dark, where the gospel has not penetrated. But Satan's days are numbered. His ability is limited. And no one knows it better than Satan himself. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### **Application: Overcoming the Dragon**

The conflict between the dragon and the woman along with her children offers gems of timeless truths valuable to any Christian in any circumstance:

- God's people may face trials and opposition, but God's people are not forgotten.
- Satan may be a powerful and aggressive enemy, but he will not ultimately triumph.
- Christ-followers may be an open and assaulted target, but we need not fear.

Which of God's promises do you find yourself having a hard time believing? How has this passage reassured you of His faithfulness? In what ways can you remind yourself that God keeps His promises—even when it feels like He doesn't?

# Exposing the Ultimate Evil Empire

## *Revelation 12*

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How does it feel to know that you—as one who strives to keep God’s commandments and to maintain a testimony for Jesus (see [Revelation 12:17](#))—are a target of Satan’s angry attacks? More specifically, how does it feel to know that he may have been behind some of the chaos in your life, in your family, or even in your nation?

What does it look like practically for you to overcome Satan in the present through the blood of the slaughtered Lamb and your testimony?

Satan, that angry dragon, rules the ultimate evil empire—the empire from which every wicked earthly kingdom and nation takes its cues. And just as Egypt, Babylon, and Rome fell, so too will Satan and his wicked minions. The slaughtered Lamb has slain the dragon by *dying* for those trapped in Satan’s fierce clutches.

This isn’t nonsense. It’s the way of Jesus. So walk in Jesus’ way today.



### **A FINAL PRAYER**

*Father, thank You for the difficult reminder that Satan is on the loose in this world. Give me the strength to stand strong against his angry attacks. But thank You also for reminding me that he is a loser. You have already won the war. Help me trust You in the battle. In Jesus’ victorious name I pray. Amen.*

### ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

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# REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

## STUDY TWELVE

### Antichrist: The Beast Out of the Sea

*Revelation 13:1–10*

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*What is true in the realm of good unfortunately also is true in the realm of evil. We should not be at all surprised to learn that the great usurper of this world, the devil himself, in his quest to hold full dominion over the earth, uses very carefully chosen vessels to do his evil work.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**P**OWER isn't a bad thing. Those in positions of authority can and *should* use their reach to do good things not only for themselves, but for everyone within their sphere of influence.

A president should use his position to protect his people and his land during a war or a natural disaster. A business executive should use her authority to cut costs, maximize sales, increase wages, and boost morale. A coach should use his influence to push, motivate, and inspire his players to play their best. These leaders have power, and that power is best used to serve others.

Though power isn't always a bad thing, we sinful humans far too often misuse it. And sadly, many who have wielded great power have abused it to serve themselves, to harm others, and to oppose God.

In fact, some of the most powerful people throughout history have actively worked to thwart God's plans and those who carry them out. This isn't likely to change anytime soon. Scripture warns us of the coming arrival of one particularly cruel figure—a beast whose purpose is singularly united with Satan.

Yet this beast's time is limited, and its earthly might is microscopic compared to the divine strength of our Lord.



# Antichrist: The Beast Out of the Sea

*Revelation 13:1–10*

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before you search the Scriptures today, take a few moments to speak with God. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you and to transform you through His Word. Pray that He will lead you to a clearer understanding of His power, glory, and majesty because of your time with Him.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In Revelation, the red, seven-headed dragon whom John identified as Satan plays the role of main antagonist (see [Revelation 12:9](#)). After God cast the dragon out of heaven, the creature began to prowl the earth in an attempt to upend God’s good work for humankind. John observed, “Then the dragon took his stand on the shore beside the sea” ([12:18](#)).

This may seem like a strange detail, but for John’s ancient readers, the sea was a place of evil. In the beginning, God demonstrated His rule over creation by calming the dark, chaotic waters and by raising up safe, dry land (see [Genesis 1:1–10](#)). Yet many still considered the frightening sea to be the abode of evil spirits who dwelled in its mysterious depths.

So John harnessed this symbol of evil in [Revelation 13:1–10](#) to describe the Satanic dragon summoning a terrifying beast out of the sea.



## Observation: A Wicked and Powerful Beast

Reading the book of Revelation has historically led readers into a frenzy of speculation—an attempt to connect any and every image with a current event or living person. Yet such speculation rarely finds its foundation in solid observation.<sup>1</sup> Take some time to slowly and carefully read [Revelation 13:1–10](#). Then read it again. The better you understand what the text says, the more easily you will be able to discern what the passage *means*.

According to [13:1–2](#), how did John describe the beast that rose up out of the sea? Include as much detail as possible. In what source did this beast find its power, throne, and authority?

# Antichrist: The Beast Out of the Sea

## *Revelation 13:1–10*

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What happened when this beast appeared to be “wounded beyond recovery” in *Revelation 13:3a*? According to *13:3b–4*, how did this event cause the people of the world to view the beast? How did this event cause the people of the world to view the dragon?

John described the activity of this beast in *13:5–7*. What kind of authority did the beast have? How did he treat God? How did he treat God’s people?

In *13:8*, John identified two sides of this earthly conflict. What were the two sides? How did he describe those on each side?

John concluded this vision with a pointed message to “anyone with ears to hear” (*Revelation 3:9*). According to *13:9–10*, to whom did John address this message? Summarize the message in your own words.

Though the imagery of this vision may feel cloudy, John’s message is clear: “This means that God’s holy people must endure persecution patiently and remain faithful” (*13:10*). The satanic beast may blaspheme God and target God’s people, but John’s call is a call to perseverance and faithfulness.

# Antichrist: The Beast Out of the Sea

*Revelation 13:1–10*

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## Interpretation: Exposing the Antichrist

Many identify this beast out of the sea as *the Antichrist*—a future ruler who, like a marionette animated by a puppeteer, takes all cues from Satan and attempts to lead the world away from Christ. Some naturally find their fingers flipping open the newspaper and their eyes looking to see which wicked leader already at work in the world today has the potential to be the Antichrist.

Sure, this wicked leader could be alive and active today, but we are wise to exercise restraint. Interpretation helps us do so by keeping us grounded in Scripture. Rather than seeking to identify this beast, start by developing a crystal-clear picture of its characteristics.

Use your Bible-study tools like Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Revelation*, *Constable's Notes* at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org), or the article, "[Who Is the Antichrist?](http://gotquestions.org)" at [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org).<sup>2</sup> Record what you learn in the space below.

It is important to note that John never used the term *antichrist* in Revelation. He did, however, use the term several times in his letters. Read the following verses and summarize what John taught about this difficult concept: *1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7*. In what ways did John define this term? From his perspective, who is an antichrist?

Apocalyptic literature often uses one vision to describe past, present, and future realities. Many of John's original readers would have found themselves facing beastly persecution as they lost their homes, businesses, and even their lives under the cruel hand of the Roman emperor, Domitian—an evil ruler who certainly stood against Christ in nearly every possible way.

How would Christians in the past have found comfort in John's vision of the beast out of the sea? How is the message of this vision instructive for Christians who presently endure similar trials because of wicked people with great authority?

# Antichrist: The Beast Out of the Sea

*Revelation 13:1–10*

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*John's message is simple: "You live for Christ one day after another. You trust Him. And if your enemies find you and bring you into captivity, you go. Because if you kill with the sword, you'll be killed in return." Here's the perseverance and faith of the saints. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Correlation: Four Other Beasts

The authors of apocalyptic literature often painted pictures of frightening beasts to depict even more frightening realities. In John's description of this particular beast in [Revelation 13:1–3](#), he intentionally made subtle allusions to another apocalyptic vision of similar beasts.

When Israel lived in exile in Babylon, the prophet Daniel witnessed a vision of four distinct beasts that signaled the God-ordained destiny of Babylon and other future empires that would oppose God and His purposes. As you read of each of these beasts in [Daniel 7:4–12](#), take note of the similarities each beast shares with the beast in [Revelation 13:1–3](#).

The First Beast ([Daniel 7:4](#)): \_\_\_\_\_

The Second Beast ([Daniel 7:5](#)): \_\_\_\_\_

The Third Beast ([Daniel 7:6](#)): \_\_\_\_\_

The Fourth Beast ([Daniel 7:7–12](#)): \_\_\_\_\_

Understandably, this vision left Daniel scratching his head in confusion. So, he asked his heavenly guide for an explanation, and thankfully, he recorded that explanation for us. According to [Daniel 7:17](#), what did each of these beasts represent? For additional explanation of the nature of these symbols, see [7:23–25](#).

While this explanation seems like bad news for the people of God, the central purpose of apocalyptic literature is to offer a clear sense of hope to its struggling readers. What hope did the angelic messenger offer Daniel in [7:13–14, 18, 26–27](#)?

# Antichrist: The Beast Out of the Sea

*Revelation 13:1–10*

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How does this correlation help you better understand the meaning and purpose of John's vision in *Revelation 13:1–10*?

*This image of the beast resembles those powerful, vast empires of ancient years: brutality, ferocity, swiftness, strength of military might, craftiness, determination, cruelty, deception. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Application: Standing Strong against the Beast**

As Pastor Chuck reflected on *Revelation 13:1–10*, he developed three timeless principles. Pause and think on these points and consider how they might apply to your life today.

- Satanic wonders are often impressive, but they are always deceptive.
- Whenever anyone or anything other than God is worshiped, Satan is pleased.
- When Satan's power is at its worst, God's power is at its best.

What or whom does your culture tend to worship? These objects, ideas, or people may appear impressive—perhaps even more impressive than God. Satan wants to deceive you and others into worshiping these idols rather than the Creator. In what ways can you resist this false worship?

You may not face overt persecution as John's original readers did, but God still is calling you, as one of His holy people, to "remain faithful" to Him (*Revelation 13:10*). What does this practically look like in your current circumstances? How can you rely on God's great power as you seek to lead a life of faithfulness?

# Antichrist: The Beast Out of the Sea

*Revelation 13:1–10*

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Satan is a powerful enemy. And he will share that power with anyone who wants to cooperate with him in his mission against God. Yet there is none greater than our God. And He has already given power to His followers through the indwelling Holy Spirit—power that can overcome Satan and sin. Remember that and use this power for good today.



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for the reminder that You are greater than anyone who resists You. It is easy to forget. Embed this truth in my mind and heart so that I can remain faithful to You—especially when it feels like Satan’s power is too great. He will never be greater than You. And for that, I praise You. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

## ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

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# REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

## STUDY THIRTEEN

### Antichrist's Lieutenant: The Beast Out of the Earth

*Revelation 13:11–18*

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*Few things please Satan more than deception. Never forget this. He's powerful. He's attractive. He's alluring. And those who work alongside him are all the same. Therefore, his deception works beautifully as he engages in his goal of moving us away from truth.*  
—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

A love-struck woman enters a relationship with a kind and caring man, only to realize—months or even years later—that he simply wore a mask around her to disguise his ugly character.

A company struggles as managers discover that a promising new hire exaggerated his experience on his resume, while another new hire in a different department learns that her manager misrepresented some of the expectations on the job description.

A young family sits in their beautiful, newly purchased house in a pool of tears because they discovered that the seller hid tens of thousands of dollars' worth of problems under the veneer of fresh paint, new fixtures, and a flashy showing.

The moment each of these people realize they have been deceived, they can't help but look back and think, *How? . . . Why?*

Deception is a terrible thing, but *spiritual* deception is a different kind of beast altogether. What *seems* to be good and right and true actually assaults your relationship with God, claws at your joy, and devours your soul.

So how can we resist such spiritual deception? Scripture offers us an essential shield to guard against this gut-wrenching reality. We will see how we can equip ourselves with this protection by looking to a time when the *whole world* faces its worst form of demonic, spiritual deception.



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*Revelation 13:11–18*

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Have you ever been deceived by someone close to you? Such experiences are painful and tempt us to harbor bitterness, resentment, and anger. If you have such feelings in your heart today, bring them to God in prayer. Acknowledge your own need for forgiveness and request His power to give you the wisdom, strength, and courage to forgive. Spend some time with Him and record a prayer in the space below.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

*Revelation 12–13* functions as a complete literary unit that presents the true antagonists of the drama. First, we meet the dragon, whom John identified as Satan (*Revelation 12:9*). Then, we encounter the dragon's two closest allies. The dragon takes his stand on the shore and summons two beasts—one from the water and the other from the land.

The dragon gave the sea-dwelling beast rule over the world (*13:7–8*). And the earth-dwelling beast, whom John would later identify as a “false prophet” (*20:10*), received demonic power to perform miracles that led humanity to worship the first beast.

These three creatures formed a sort of “unholy” trinity: an anti-Father, an anti-Son, and an anti-Holy-Spirit. This trio worked in harmony to deceive humanity and to draw them away from God. Let's turn to *13:11–18* to see what part the beast out of the earth played in this unholy song.



## Observation: Another Beast

*Revelation 13:11–18* is one of the most infamous passages in all Scripture. In fact, the imagery is familiar even to nonbelievers, and for centuries, people all over the world have wondered about its meaning. Yet before we start to speculate what these images might represent, we must first understand what the passage says. By engaging in careful observation, we will be able to determine the timeless meaning, purpose, and valuable application of John's ancient words.<sup>1</sup>

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How did John describe the beast in *Revelation 13:11*? What did John *see*, and what did he *hear*?

According to *13:12*, what was this beast's essential goal? According to *13:13–14a*, how did he accomplish this goal?

Like King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian Empire, this beast built a statue, and he dictated that all people worship it (*13:14b*). According to *13:15*, what would happen to those who refused to worship this false idol?

According to *13:16*, what other demand did this second beast make of all people? According to *13:17*, what would happen to those who defied this demand?

What exhortation did John offer in *13:18* to those struggling with the message of this passage?

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*Revelation 13:11–18*

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“Wisdom is needed here” (*Revelation 13:18*). John knew his words posed a challenge to his readers, so he reminded them to turn to God for wisdom. As you prepare to interpret this challenging passage, say a prayer, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you explore the meaning of John’s message.



## **Interpretation: The Mark of the Beast**

In your observation of *Revelation 13:11–18*, some very important questions likely flooded your mind. *What is the mark of the beast? Am I in danger of receiving it? What is the meaning of 666?* As you wrestle with these difficult questions, remember *why* John wrote the book of Revelation—not to *frighten* followers of Jesus but to *fill* them with hope.

To include a reminder of hope in this passage, John echoed a previous section of the book. Amid the series of seal judgments, John experienced an interlude in which God “sealed” 144,000 believers for protection and for ownership. Read of this seal in *7:3* and compare it to the mark of the beast in *13:16*.

In what ways are the seal of God and the mark of the beast similar? In what ways are they different? Why is this contrast important for understanding the nature of the mark of the beast? What does this connection reveal about true followers of Jesus and their protection from the beast’s deception?

For John’s Jewish readers, this picture of something on the forehead and hands would have reminded them of a very close and very personal prayer: the Shema. This prayer functioned like a pledge of allegiance for the people of Israel. They would recite these words daily to reaffirm their loyalty to God. In the Shema, God urged the Israelites to “tie [His commandments] to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders” (*Deuteronomy 6:8*).

Read the Shema in its entirety in *Deuteronomy 6:4–9*. In what ways does the message of the Shema affirm loyalty to God—and God *alone*—rather than to Satan and his wicked minions?

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*Revelation 13:11–18*

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What is the theological significance of 666—the number of the beast? Remember, John didn't say this number was cursed. Research what he wanted to communicate with this point. To discern this truth, feel free to consult your Bible-study tools like Pastor Chuck Swindoll's, *Insights on Revelation*, or *Constable's Notes*, which is available for free at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).<sup>2</sup>

*The world longs for someone who can promise relief and hope from all the torment and all the anguish the lost are going through. And Satan wants to lead us away from the hope of Christ and into the worship of another god.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## **Correlation: Deceived by the Devil**

Those who receive the mark of the beast won't be tricked into it. In fact, John affirmed the opposite. Those who receive the mark will do so only because of their willful worship of the beast. In other words, they will be *deceived* into following this evil figure. There's an important difference between trickery and deception. And there is perhaps no better demonstration of true deception than Satan's first interaction with humans.

What command did God give the man and the woman in [Genesis 2:16–17](#)? How did the serpent distort God's words when he approached the woman in [3:1](#)? To answer these questions, read these verses in a more word-for-word translation, like the New American Standard Bible, and look carefully for the similarities and differences between God's words and the serpent's.

The serpent's work of deception produced immediate results. When the woman recalled God's original command in [3:2–3](#), how did she misrepresent it to the serpent?

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How did the serpent respond to the woman in *Genesis 3:4–5*? In what ways did he lie to the woman? In what ways did he tell the truth? How did this blend of truth and dishonesty allow him to deceive the woman?

Satan didn't trick Eve into thinking the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil was something it wasn't. No, he *deceived* her by getting as close to the truth as possible. As a result, she trusted the serpent more than God, so she knowingly and willingly decided to eat the forbidden fruit.

*The adversary is like an angel of light—dazzling, eloquent, dripping with charisma! He knows exactly what buttons to push to attract us to his message. That's the way it is with deception. What appears to be true is false. What appears to be valid is invalid. And lamb-like qualities turn to beast-like savagery. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Application: Defeating Deception**

So what is the antidote to the satanic plague of deception? Pastor Chuck suggests it's *discernment*. When you cultivate discernment, you learn to . . .

- Hear what isn't said.
- See what is hidden.
- Realize what isn't obvious.
- Focus on what isn't addressed.

Have you ever experienced spiritual deception? What were the consequences of this deception? If you could go back and relive this experience, what would you do differently?

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As you reflect on a previous experience with deception, what practical steps can you take to develop greater spiritual discernment? Write down two or three action points in the space below.

No matter how discerning you are, Satan won't stop trying to deceive you and lead you away from God's truth. Now is the time to take your stand. Open your Bible. Ask God for wisdom. Seek counsel from the wisest person you know. And never stop pursuing the truth.



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, I know that I am not immune to demonic deception. Keep lies and deception far from me. Be gracious and patient with me as I seek to grow in spiritual discernment. I want to be a person of the truth—not simply someone who knows the truth but someone who lives it as well. I pray these things in Jesus' true name. Amen.*

## ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

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