

REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

STUDY TWO

Prelude to the Unveiling

Revelation 1:1–8

The events unfolding on planet earth seem maddening. And because they are confusing to us, we assume they are confusing to God too. No, it's not like that. God doesn't need help. Everything with God is a forethought . . . everything! Nothing surprises Him. Nothing shocks Him. Nothing panics Him. It's unfolding exactly as He's planned.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

MANY of the greatest symphonies welcome their listeners with an *overture*. This opening section of music introduces the audience to the piece by hinting at the melodies that will resound throughout the performance. These overtures tune ears, minds, and hearts to prepare them for the music ahead.

Like these renowned symphonies, the book of Revelation is a masterpiece . . . a *literary* masterpiece. Just as Beethoven, Bach, and Mozart carefully composed each part of their symphonies, so also did John the Revelator. He thoughtfully pieced together each paragraph, sentence, and word of his *magnum opus*.

Naturally, Revelation begins with a beautiful overture. These opening lines introduce truths that will echo throughout the entire book. These words sing a chorus of comfort that will resonate in our hearts today.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

God is the composer of creation. With His sovereign baton, He has conducted events of history from the beginning . . . and will continue to do so to the end. Nothing happens without His purposeful cue. Say this prayer to your sovereign Father before you open your ears to the song of Revelation:

Father, I admit that I am not in control of my life. As I look around me, I see pain and suffering, sickness and death. As I experience the music of Revelation, give me hope. Remind me that You are the King of creation. In Jesus' name, amen.



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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Just as there is a wide variety of musical *genres*—from classical to jazz, from rock and roll to rhythm and blues—so also is there a wide variety of *literary genres*. Revelation’s vivid imagery and colorful language place it in a unique genre called “apocalyptic.”

Writers composed apocalyptic pieces to *reveal* a message of hope during times of great distress. John most likely wrote Revelation during the rule of the Roman emperor Domitian. This cruel and bloodthirsty Caesar launched one of the earliest empire-wide persecutions of Christians. Understandably, followers of Jesus throughout Rome feared for their lives.

So John wrote to remind them that King Jesus sits on heaven’s throne—even though Domitian seemed to rule the entire earth with an iron fist. John sang a simple refrain of hope: *Jesus wins*. Evil states, Satan, and sin lose. You can hear this song of hope from the very first words of Revelation’s overture.



Observation: Purpose and Promise

When Pastor Chuck Swindoll studies the Bible, he always follows the same method. He introduces the importance of this method in his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*.¹ This method follows four steps, each answering an important question:

1. **Observation:** What does the passage *say*?
2. **Interpretation:** What does the passage *mean*?
3. **Correlation:** How does the passage *compare* with other passages?
4. **Application:** How do I respond to the passage?

When reading a unique book like Revelation, it is *imperative* to follow these steps in order. After all, you can never discern a text’s meaning without a crystal-clear understanding of what the words actually say. Use the following questions to guide your observation of [Revelation 1:1–8](#).

The opening verses of Revelation function like a descending staircase. God gave the message of the book to Jesus, who gave it to the angel, who gave it to John, who gave it to his original readers (and by extension, to us). According to [1:1](#), why did God hand down this revelation?

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According to [Revelation 1:3](#), what promise does God give to those who read Revelation and heed its message?

John took an interesting turn in [1:4](#) when he showed his writing to be more than an apocalyptic piece. It is also a letter. Who is the audience of this letter?

Many letters in the New Testament open with a doxology of praise to God for what He has done through Jesus Christ. According to [1:5b–6](#), what three things did Jesus do for those who put their faith in Him? Read these verses in a more word-for-word translation—like the New American Standard Bible—and look carefully for the word *us*.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

In what ways did “the Lord God” describe himself in [1:8](#)?

In God’s timetable, the ends are pushed out. There is no beginning, and there is no ending. It’s very difficult for our minds to perceive this, but the unfolding of events on this little globe are keeping exactly with God’s timetable.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Interpretation: Reassurance and Hope

Interpretation is the second step of the *Searching the Scriptures* method. You *interpret* a text by determining its meaning and uncovering gems of timeless theological truth of eternal value.

Revelation's overture hints that the following piece will discuss "the events that must soon take place" (*Revelation 1:1*). This particular point has led readers of Revelation for centuries to look everywhere for the "signs of the times." Some go so far as to set dates for the return of Christ, while many—both in the ancient world and today—wonder, *Are we living in the end times right now?*

The key to understanding this perplexing phrase is the word *soon*. Look up the Greek word *tachos* in the free Greek lexicon at billmounce.org. Then, list the various ways this term can be translated. Then survey the article "*Can the return of Christ truly be said to be imminent?*" at gotquestions.org, and summarize how the reality of Jesus' soon return offers hope.

While Revelation is a book of apocalyptic prophecy, it also is a letter. Like letters today, ancient letters were written to *real* people for *real* reasons. This letter discusses the future, yes, but it also spoke directly to the original intended audience's present circumstances.

How did Revelation speak into the situation of the seven churches to whom John originally wrote? How does it speak to our circumstances today as we await the imminent return of Christ? To answer these questions, feel free to consult your Bible-study tools, like Pastor Chuck's commentary, *Insights on Revelation*.²

What does this passage mean then? It means that your judgment is either behind you or in front of you. Your judgment has been taken care of at the cross when you believed, or it is in front of you at the judgment when He returns.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Correlation: The Son of Man

Correlation is Scripture in stereo. When you *correlate* passages of Scripture, you *compare* their meanings to hear the fuller sound of God’s truth. When you read passages from the New Testament, it’s always wise to correlate with the Old Testament. Interestingly, every page of Revelation is *full* of Old Testament references—both explicit quotations and implicit allusions.

In *Revelation 1:7*, John quotes the famous “Son of Man” passage from *Daniel 7:13–14* (which is another apocalyptic portion of Scripture). How do these two passages describe the Son of Man?

How does this correlation between *Revelation 1:7* and *Daniel 7:13–14* help you understand the meaning of *Revelation 1:8*?

How would seeing Jesus as the promised “Son of Man” and God as “the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come” provide hope to Christians enduring bloody persecution under the Roman Empire?

Revelation lives in the tension of King Jesus’ present rule and His future reign. Even though wicked rulers preside over the kingdoms of the earth, Jesus rules from heaven. Though He *already* offers forgiveness to His followers, He has *not yet* come in His full glory to establish His kingdom on earth. We await that day with eager anticipation and heartfelt hope.

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Application: Relief and Response

In application, you take the timeless truths you learned through the first three steps and *apply* them to your unique circumstances—as you would apply a healing balm to a painful wound or put on a shirt tailored for just you. Use the following principles to guide you as you reflect on your own life:

1. The triune God is preeminent, deserving of our praise.
2. Humanity is divided into two categories: those who are with Jesus and those who aren't.
3. The most important decision you can make is whether you choose to trust in Jesus.

Is there any aspect of your life that feels hopeless right now? An falling-apart relationship? A financial crisis? A frightening diagnosis? How does *Revelation 1:1–8* offer you hope amid your challenging circumstances?

What does it look like to praise God even when life is hard? Commit to carrying out some of these practical steps of praise this week.

Have you made the all-important decision to trust and to follow Jesus? If so, how has your life changed since you made that decision? If not, what is holding you back?

Jesus is king of creation. He always has been—even when it hasn't felt like it. The human rulers of this world seem to be leading it on a path toward absolute destruction. But we know that Jesus also is our *coming* king. When He returns, He will restore His creation and silence any echoes of suffering, sin, and death. So as we wait, we sing a song of hope and joy.

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A FINAL PRAYER

In the space below, write your own prayer, offering thanks to God for the hope He gives you through Jesus Christ.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016).
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Brad Smith, writer and content strategist, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2003, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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