

# REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

## STUDY ONE

### The Apocalypse in Panorama

*Revelation 1:1–3, 9–19; 22:6–10, 16–21*

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*The book of Revelation is the answer to the gospel's hope. It provides the solution to the problem encountered from Genesis all the way through Jude. Revelation says, "Good ultimately triumphs." It is the message of God to His people. It is indeed the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

As you read a new book, excitement pulls you into the story. The plot grips you. The characters compel you. The themes challenge you. You can't resist the urge to turn the page . . . again and again. As you approach the end of the book, your heart drops as you discover the true tragedy. *Someone has torn the story's final chapter right from the book's binding.*

Questions start flying through your mind. *What will happen to the characters? How will they resolve the conflict? What's the ultimate point of the story?* Without the final chapter, you will find no ending, no resolution, no closure.

Sadly, many read their Bibles this way—as though the story's final chapter is entirely absent.

Scripture's final chapter, the book of Revelation, certainly is one of the most exciting and cinematic portions of Scripture. But it also is one of the most perplexing. Many see the vibrant images of scrolls and trumpets and bowls and scratch their heads thinking, *I have no clue what this means.* So they turn to a more familiar or more accessible portion of Scripture.

Others, however, behold the vivid images of frightening creatures, violent battles, and natural disasters and feel *terrified* at the thought of God's judgment. They wonder, *Am I doomed to face this kind of gruesome suffering?* So they flip the pages to softer passages that speak of God's tenderness.



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Both responses effectively tear out the Bible’s final chapter. All the while, they miss the most beautiful conclusion of any story ever told. No, Revelation is not intended to confuse or to frighten you. Its purpose is to give you *hope*. Consider these words from Pastor Chuck Swindoll:

God promises great blessing to those who study the book of Revelation and heed its message (Rev. 1:3; 22:7). In fact, in the midst of the sometimes perplexing details of the visions, God’s final message to humanity remains clear: In the end, good will triumph over evil, wickedness will be judged, and the righteous will receive their rewards.<sup>1</sup>

This *Searching the Scriptures* study kick-starts an in-depth study of Scripture’s final chapter to discover how every page of the Bible finds its resolution in the book of Revelation. When Jesus returns and sits enthroned over creation, His followers will be neither perplexed nor terrified.

*They will rejoice!*



## PREPARE YOUR HEART

We cannot accurately understand or effectively apply any book of Scripture—including Revelation—without the help of the Holy Spirit. Ask God to open your eyes to see what He wants to teach you as you study the Bible’s final act. Write your prayer below.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The opening line of Revelation literally reads, “The *apocalypse* of Jesus Christ” (*Revelation 1:1*). Our modern-day vernacular associates the term “apocalypse” with the end of the world—with war, disaster, death, and judgment. While Revelation addresses these end-of-the-world topics, they are not the central focus of the book.

The very first Greek word of *Revelation 1:1* is *apokalypsis*, and this noun is derived from the verb *apokalypso*, meaning “to reveal.” Not only does this term give us the book’s title, but it also provides the interpretive key that unlocks the meaning of the narrative. Through these prophetic visions, Jesus pulls back the curtains of creation, not simply to *reveal* what will happen in the future but also to *reveal* present realities.

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In fact, the book of Revelation belongs to a unique genre aptly called apocalyptic literature. Look up *apocalyptic* in a Bible dictionary (like *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* available for free at biblestudytools.com), and write down what you learn. What are the unique features of this genre? How can we accurately interpret its seemingly complex message?

John is our backstage tour guide of the dramatic past, present, and future of the cosmic battle between Jesus and Satan, between God's family and His enemies, between good and evil. *Now, let's step behind the curtain!*



## Observation: The Ending of the Story

Opening the book of Revelation might feel intimidating. Thankfully, Pastor Chuck offers some ground rules that will ease the process of studying the final chapter of God's great story:

1. **Expect the unusual.** Colorful language, vivid images, and complex symbols appear on every page. Jesus intentionally revealed these things to John and to us with the purpose of communicating and clarifying, not concealing and confusing.
2. **Restrain your imagination.** Many have attempted to set dates and correlate visions with current events. These predictions always come up short. Resist excessively detailed interpretation and, if needed, suspend interpretive judgments.
3. **Follow basic Bible-study methods.** Even though the apocalyptic genre is unique, we can still make sense of it! We must approach it the same way we read any other book of the Bible. Observe what the words say. Interpret the text's meaning. Correlate the passage with other truths from Scripture. Finally, apply the message to your own life.<sup>2</sup>

Keeping these parameters in mind, turn to the first chapter of Revelation. With what promise did John open the book in *Revelation 1:3*?

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According to Revelation 1:19, what three matters did Jesus command John to write about?

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

Now, look at Pastor Chuck’s chart below, and see how your answer fits in the chart’s top row.

## REVELATION OVERVIEW BIBLE CHART

	“WHAT YOU HAVE SEEN . . .”	“ . . . THE THINGS THAT ARE NOW HAPPENING . . .”	“ . . . THE THINGS THAT WILL HAPPEN” <i>(REV. 1:19)</i>	
	Revelation 1	Revelation 2–3	Revelation 4–22	
“I AM THE ALPHA...” <i>(REV. 1:8)</i>	Christ’s revelation to John	Christ’s letters to the seven churches	Christ as Judge ( <i>ch. 4–5</i> ) The Tribulation ( <i>ch. 6–18</i> ) The return of Christ ( <i>ch. 19</i> ) The Millennium ( <i>ch. 20</i> ) The eternal state ( <i>ch. 21–22</i> )	“...AND THE OMEGA.” <i>(REV. 22:13)</i>
PERSPECTIVE	History: looking back		Prophecy: looking ahead	
STYLE	Messages		Observations and questions	
SETTING	On earth		Shifts between earth and heaven	
THEME	Christ’s future triumph over the forces of evil and His re-creation of the world for the redeemed			
KEY VERSES	Revelation 1:7, 19; 22:12–13			
CHRIST IN REVELATION	Jesus is the coming King of all kings and Lord of all lords, who will return as Judge and King to usher in the Kingdom of God on earth ( <i>Rev. 19:11–20:6</i> ).			

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Chart taken from *The Swindoll Study Bible*. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers.

How does *Revelation 1:19* preview the content and themes of Revelation?

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With what promise did Jesus conclude the book of Revelation in [22:7](#)? What similarities do these words share with John's opening promise in Revelation in [1:3](#)?

*The book of Revelation is a divinely inspired drama of good engulfed by evil until the King of kings appears and leads good's conquest to triumph over evil. But the wonderful thing about this book is that it's not fiction . . . it's reality. It's not fantasy . . . it's truth. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Interpretation: The Purpose of the Story**

The book of Revelation refers to historical people, places, and events prior to the time of John; during John's day; and at the end of time. This means that the Revelation doesn't depict *only* past, *only* present, or *only* future events. Instead, it depicts all three at different points in the account. How does knowing this point affect how you approach the book as a whole?

John promised that those who read and heed the words of Revelation will be blessed. In what ways can a follower of Jesus who puts in the effort to understand and apply this unique book experience blessing—both in the present and in the future?

*Revelation is not designed simply to satisfy idle curiosity. This is a book that—if kept close and held fast—will result in a life of blessing. The promise is right there for us. We're not only gathering prophetic facts. We're hunting for truth to embrace, truth to live by. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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## **Correlation: The Beginning of the Story**

No good story is complete without an ending, and every good story has the end in sight from the very beginning. The Bible tells the greatest story ever, and God, the divine author of history, knew the end from the beginning. Read the following parallel passages and discuss how the plot points introduced in *Genesis 1–3* find their resolution in Revelation.

*Genesis 1:1–2 and Revelation 21:1*

*Genesis 2:9 and Revelation 22:2*

*Genesis 3:14–19 and Revelation 20:1–2, 10; 22:3*

The drama of Scripture unfolds in four acts: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Today, we live in the third act as we experience the redemption found in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So what do we do as we await the final restoration promised in Revelation?



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

This glimpse behind the curtain of Revelation reveals three truths valuable for followers of Jesus who eagerly look for His glorious return.

1. God's Word is a reliable map to take us through all storms.
2. God's plan is a sovereign arrangement that imparts hope.
3. God's Son is the glorious Lord worthy of our allegiance.

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Throughout your life, what have you thought about the book of Revelation? How has this study affected how you view this often misunderstood and ignored book? What do you hope to gain from your study of Revelation?

In what ways has this overview of Revelation already provided you with future hope? In what ways can you practically respond to this future hope in the present?

The apocalypse of Jesus Christ is not an omen to fear nor an encryption to decode. Instead, it is a picture of *hope*. The world today doesn't feel very hopeful. We see violence, pandemics, and famine. More personally, we experience fear, shame, and guilt. Though it seems like the world is fully under Satan's control, the story isn't over yet. Good will conquer evil. Jesus will return. And we will live with Him in His restored creation forevermore.

*What a beautiful conclusion!*



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for revealing to me the end of the story. Even though it feels like Satan, sin, and death are winning the battle, I know You have already won the war through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thank You for giving me hope as I wait for His return. Help me live a life that glorifies You in light of this hope. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 7.
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](#)."

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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