

# REVELATION UNVEILING THE END, ACT 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

Revelation 1–5

SEARCHING  
THE  
SCRIPTURES  
BIBLE STUDIES



INSIGHT FOR LIVING MINISTRIES

The Bible-Teaching Ministry of Pastor Chuck Swindoll



INSIGHT FOR LIVING MINISTRIES

# REVELATION: Unveiling the End, Act 1

## *The Heavenly Stage*

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### Welcome to Our Biblical Kitchen!

#### *Studying God's Word for Spiritual Nourishment*

People hunger for spiritual truth, but they often have trouble finding it. Pastor Chuck Swindoll counts it his profound privilege to offer spiritual nutrition found only in God's Word—nutrition every soul needs and craves. Solid Bible-teaching stirs people to follow Jesus, praise God, trust in God's plan, and rest in His care. A constant supply of such spiritual nourishment is vital for walking with Christ.

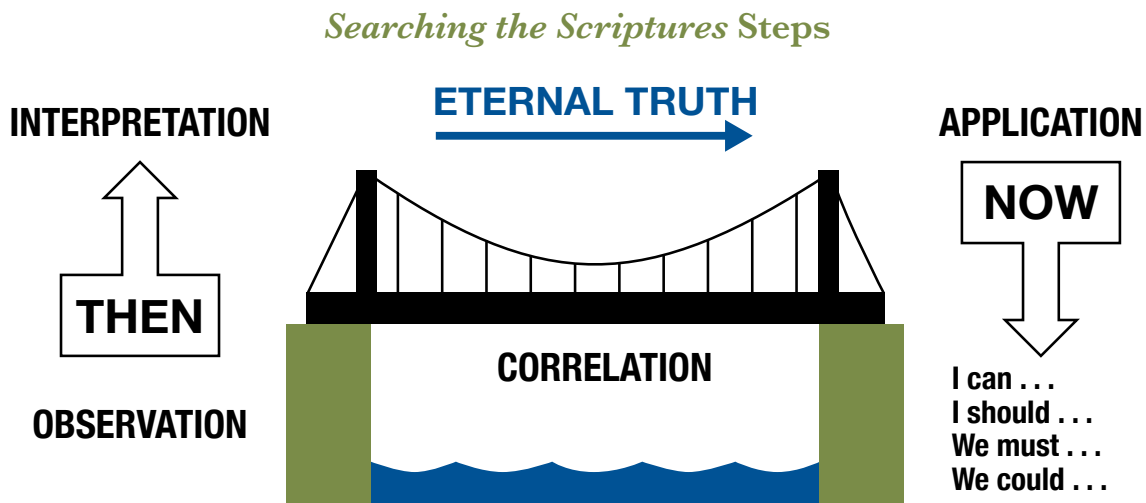
But wouldn't you like to cook up your own biblical meals?

It's easier than you think! Don't be intimidated. You can become your own spiritual chef, and Insight for Living Ministries wants to help you in this journey. The first thing you need is the right method. In his book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck helpfully explains his simple and reliable Bible-study process, which he learned in seminary and cultivated through his decades of ministry.

In the book, he explains four steps to always use to study a passage from God's Word:

- 1) **Observation:** Thoroughly reading the passage to discover what it says
- 2) **Interpretation:** Deeply understanding the passage to determine what it means
- 3) **Correlation:** Carefully comparing multiple passages to know how they relate
- 4) **Application:** Personally applying the passage to live by its truth

It's important to follow these steps without skipping or rushing. Would a chef leave out an ingredient in his recipe, skip a step in the cooking process, or cut the required bake-time short? No. The meal wouldn't taste as good. Likewise, it's important to perform all four steps to really grasp a biblical passage and incorporate it into your life. Here's a diagram to illustrate the process, and on the next page is a chart to summarize how you can apply each of the four steps.



# REVELATION: Unveiling the End, Act 1

## *The Heavenly Stage*

### SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

#### *Bible-Study Review Chart*

#### OBSERVATION

**Read the passage thoroughly.**

Observe the passage by examining:

- 1) The who, what, where, when, why, and how components
- 2) What you can see, touch, taste, hear, and smell
- 3) The logical connections, flow of thoughts, and range of subjects
- 4) What's repeated, emphasized, related, alike, and unlike
- 5) What's written before and after

#### INTERPRETATION

**Understand the passage deeply.**

Interpret the passage by studying:

- 1) The cultural, biblical, and historical context
- 2) The literary genre and use of language
- 3) The author's intent for writing
- 4) The author's beliefs, assumed and stated, about God and life

#### CORRELATION

**Compare the passage carefully.**

Correlate the passage by comparing it with:

- 1) Scriptures that correspond in historical events
- 2) Scriptures that correspond in theological principles
- 3) Scriptures that correspond in application points

#### APPLICATION

**Internalize the passage personally.**

Apply the passage by:

- 1) Reflecting on your daily habits, attitudes, and relationships
- 2) Inviting the Lord to reveal what you should stop and start
- 3) Asking specific questions about how you should respond
- 4) Pursuing new paths that lead to wholeness and spiritual health
- 5) Aligning your beliefs, desires, thoughts, and actions with God's truth and way

*I have rejoiced in your laws as much as in riches.  
I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways.  
I will delight in your decrees and not forget your word.  
(Psalm 119:14–16 NLT)*

# REVELATION: Unveiling the End, Act 1

## *The Heavenly Stage*

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### **What Are *Searching the Scriptures* Bible Studies?**

Insight for Living Ministries creates *Searching the Scriptures* studies using the Bible-study methods from Chuck's book. These studies accompany each of Chuck's sermons, focusing on the same Bible passages Chuck focused on, and are like recipes for using your biblical cooking skills. They help you navigate your way through God's Word so that you can better understand God's truth and deepen your relationship with Jesus.

Each study follows this path:

- 1) **Introduction**—learn the topic and relevance of the study
- 2) **Prepare Your Heart**—open yourself to God to receive His Word
- 3) **Turn to the Scriptures**—step into the context of the passage
- 4) **Observation**—look at what the passage says
- 5) **Interpretation**—determine what the passage means
- 6) **Correlation**—compare the passage to other passages
- 7) **Application**—respond to the truth you learned
- 8) **Final prayer**—pray to conclude your time in His Word

### **How Can You Use *Searching the Scriptures* Studies?**

Insight for Living Ministries creates these studies to be used in a variety of ways. They are free, downloadable PDFs available at [insight.org/studies](https://insight.org/studies) and through our mobile app. You can type your notes directly into the digital file, or you can print them if you prefer, pen in hand. Here are the ways folks like to use these resources:

- 1) **Overview.** In 15 minutes, you can read through a *Searching the Scriptures* study to glean Chuck's key points from his sermon and the biblical passage.
- 2) **Deep Study.** You can spend 2–3 hours, all at once or across a few days, digging into the biblical verses and consulting our recommended resources.
- 3) **Small Groups.** These studies ask questions focused on the biblical text as well as on life application. They're perfect for guiding and fostering a small group discussion.
- 4) **Sermon Preparation.** Pastors and teachers can use these studies for generating ideas during their sermon preparation.
- 5) **Bible-Study Training.** Those who are preparing for ministry can learn how to study the Bible and use these studies for practice or for help delivering a devotional.

### **Download the Digital File of this Study Guide**





INSIGHT FOR LIVING MINISTRIES

# REVELATION: Unveiling the End, Act 1

## *The Heavenly Stage*

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### Twelve Studies on Revelation 1–5

Join Pastor Chuck Swindoll for a deep-dive into the final book of the Bible, starting with his sermon series, *Revelation—Unveiling the End, Act 1: The Heavenly Stage*.

While Revelation explains the end of the story, it also provides guidance and encouragement for your journey today. Gain a clearer understanding of this enigmatic book as Pastor Chuck walks you through each passage. Blending weighty truths along with uplifting takeaways, you'll see Revelation like never before.

Like John on the island of Patmos, you'll be left in awe of our great and sovereign Lord!

1. **The Apocalypse in Panorama**  
*Revelation 1:1–3, 9–19; 22:6–10, 16–21*
2. **Prelude to the Unveiling**  
*Revelation 1:1–8*
3. **The Curtain Rises, the Drama Begins**  
*Revelation 1:9–20*
4. **The Church with Everything but the Greatest Thing**  
*Revelation 2:1–7*
5. **The Suffering Church under Attack**  
*Revelation 2:8–11*
6. **The Church That Compromised the Truth**  
*Revelation 2:12–17*
7. **The Church Where Tolerance Went to Seed**  
*Revelation 2:18–29*
8. **Autopsy of a Dead Church**  
*Revelation 3:1–6*
9. **Little Strength, Open Door, Awesome God**  
*Revelation 3:7–13*
10. **The Church That Nauseates God**  
*Revelation 3:14–22*
11. **Standing before God's Awesome Throne**  
*Revelation 4:1–11*
12. **Worthy Is the Lamb**  
*Revelation 5:1–14*



INSIGHT FOR LIVING MINISTRIES



# REVELATION UNVEILING THE END, ACT 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

**Revelation 1–5**

SEARCHING  
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INSIGHT FOR LIVING MINISTRIES

# 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*

*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.



# The Apocalypse in Panorama

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

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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.

# The Apocalypse in Panorama

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

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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*?

# The Apocalypse in Panorama

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

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" (REV. 1:19)	
	Revelation 1	Revelation 2–3	Revelation 4–22	
"I AM THE ALPHA..." (REV. 1:8)	Christ's revelation to John	Christ's letters to the seven churches	Christ as Judge (ch. 4–5) The Tribulation (ch. 6–18) The return of Christ (ch. 19) The Millennium (ch. 20) The eternal state (ch. 21–22)	"...AND THE OMEGA." (REV. 22:13)
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 (Rev. 19:11–20:6).			

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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?

# The Apocalypse in Panorama

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

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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; contemporaneous to the time of John; *and* in the future. 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*

# The Apocalypse in Panorama

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

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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.



# The Apocalypse in Panorama

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

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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 maligned 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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# 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

**M**ANY 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.*



# Prelude to the Unveiling

## Revelation 1:1–8

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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*.<sup>1</sup> 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?

# Prelude to the Unveiling

## *Revelation 1:1–8*

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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

# Prelude to the Unveiling

## *Revelation 1:1–8*

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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](http://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](http://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*.<sup>2</sup>

*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

# Prelude to the Unveiling

## *Revelation 1:1–8*

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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.

# Prelude to the Unveiling

*Revelation 1:1–8*

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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.



# Prelude to the Unveiling

*Revelation 1:1–8*

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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).

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

## STUDY THREE

### The Curtain Rises, the Drama Begins

*Revelation 1:9–20*

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*If Revelation teaches us nothing else, it teaches us to place in highest regard and respect the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the risen, glorious, magnificent, matchless, sovereign Savior of the world. When He speaks, we have nothing to say. And when we see Him, we will fall at His feet and cast our crowns before Him. What a moment that will be!*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**D**o you ever think about the day you when you will finally stand face-to-face with Jesus? Imagining this meeting with the risen Lord stirs up a wide array of emotions in the hearts of believers.

For some, the thought of standing in the physical presence of the Savior fills them with excitement. They wait with eager anticipation, like the child who buzzes with delight on the day Mom or Dad is to return from a weeklong business trip.

Yet others might be a little more apprehensive. They feel intimidated by the idea of witnessing our Lord's greatness, like the avid fan who timidly stands in line for an autograph from his or her all-time favorite athlete, artist, or actor.

We can't know for certain what we will see or how we will feel on that future day when we behold Jesus in all His glory, but we can *imagine* that hour because of John's testimony. He stood before Jesus' glorious presence and recorded for us what He encountered so that we can anticipate meeting Him with excitement as we faithfully live the rest of our days on earth.



# The Curtain Rises, the Drama Begins

*Revelation 1:9–20*

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Even though we do not yet rest in the physical presence of Jesus, we can commune with Him through the power of the Holy Spirit. *What a gift!* Say this prayer to prepare your heart to engage with God's Word today:

*Father, I don't know what to expect on that day when I finally arrive before the throne of King Jesus. I do know, however, that I want to lead a life that glorifies You as I wait. Equip me to do so as I study Scripture today. In Jesus' name, amen.*



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

God didn't simply hand down the book of Revelation directly to earth from heaven. Rather, He used a mediator. According to [Revelation 1:9](#), who was the author of Revelation? From where did he write?

This context is essential for understanding the broader message of Revelation. Most likely, John was exiled on an island called Patmos as a prisoner because he was faithfully “preaching the word of God” even during the empire-wide persecution of Christians under the reign of Roman emperor Domitian. John wrote to his readers as their “brother” and “partner in suffering.”

John knew enduring this suffering while awaiting a glorious future with Jesus would be no easy task. So he shared a message of comfort and hope. At the heart of this message sits enthroned the glorious, risen Christ.



## Observation: A Vision of the Risen Christ

The day started out just like any other day for John. He was alone, perhaps saying a prayer or singing a song of praise. Suddenly, he heard a loud noise right behind his head. At first, it sounded to him like a crisp, clear trumpet blast. *Who is playing a trumpet?* As he listened more closely, he realized the noise didn't come from a horn. It was a voice.

# The Curtain Rises, the Drama Begins

## *Revelation 1:9–20*

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According to [Revelation 1:11](#), what did this voice say?

Using a Bible atlas (or the map “[Paul’s Missionary Journeys](#)” available for free at [insight.org](http://insight.org)), find the location of the seven cities listed in [1:11](#). These cities were situated in a region on the east side of the Mediterranean Sea called “Asia Minor.” Then, identify the island of Patmos. What observations do you make as you look at the map?

John turned his head to see where the voice originated, and as he moved, he was transported to a new, otherworldly realm, and his eyes beheld a scene unlike anything he had ever seen.

According to [1:12–16](#), what specifically did John see and hear? Remember, observation requires *careful* reading, so pay special attention to John’s use of metaphors and similes.<sup>1</sup> John, in his humanity, couldn’t totally comprehend everything he witnessed, so relied on earthly comparisons to describe heavenly realities.

According to [1:17a](#), how did John react to this vision of the risen Christ?

# The Curtain Rises, the Drama Begins

*Revelation 1:9–20*

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According to [Revelation 1:17b–18](#), how did Jesus respond to John? How did Jesus comfort John both through His actions and His words?

*John fell because he had witnessed unveiled deity. He had seen the living Christ face to face. He had walked with Him, but he had never seen Him like this—not even at His transfiguration. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Interpretation: Understanding the Glory of Christ

Interpreting Revelation's imagery can feel like an impossible task. Some of John's visions feel too outlandish to accurately understand. Some details in Revelation are more important than others, and thankfully, when John composed this book, he made sure his readers wouldn't miss what matters *most*.

In this passage, John doesn't leave us scratching our heads. He offers an interpretation of some of the previous images! According to [Revelation 1:20](#), what do the seven stars represent? What do the seven lampstands represent? How does knowing these representations help us make sense of the meaning of the preceding verses?

What characteristics or attributes do John's descriptions reveal about Jesus? (Pay special attention to [1:17–18](#).) Why do these attributes make Jesus worthy of total submission and praise?

*There's a contrast here between this magnificent presence and this tender touch. I love that about Christ. Though he deserves our highest praise and greatest respect, in our deepest need, He touches us and understands us. The most wonderful response is falling at His feet in humility. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

# The Curtain Rises, the Drama Begins

*Revelation 1:9–20*

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## Correlation: Another Divine Encounter

John's record of his meeting with Jesus Christ in *Revelation 1:9–20* looks familiar to a central event from the Old Testament. In fact, these verses closely parallel the prophet Isaiah's encounter with Yahweh in *Isaiah 6:1–8*.

How is the description of God in His throne room in *Isaiah 6:1–4* similar to John's vision of the risen Christ in *Revelation 1:12–16*?

How was Isaiah's reaction to God's presence in *Isaiah 6:5* similar to John's reaction to Christ's presence in *Revelation 1:17*?

According to *Isaiah 6:8*, how did Isaiah respond when God directly addressed him?

When John walked with Jesus, he beheld the glory of Christ every day. At one point, he had an epiphany, and he realized that what he experienced wasn't new. In fact, hundreds of years ago, Isaiah "saw the future and spoke of the Messiah's glory" (*John 12:41*). Isaiah anticipated the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, who would restore creation to God's ideal design.

When John and Isaiah each encountered the divine glory of Christ, they had one simple response: *worship*. Yet their song of praise moved from their hearts to their hands as they carried out their worship through humble obedience. Today, we can respond to our Lord in the same way.

# The Curtain Rises, the Drama Begins

*Revelation 1:9–20*

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## Application: Responding to Christ's Glory

Though we will not see the risen Christ the way John did until another point in the future, this account from Revelation offers practical guidance on how we can live as we await that glorious day. Pastor Chuck Swindoll identifies two points of application.

First, *the better we understand who Christ really is, the quicker we'll respond in submission and obedience*. Even though you can't talk with Jesus face-to-face, you still can maintain a healthy, vibrant relationship with him. What practical steps can you take to understand Him better and to deepen your relationship with Him?

When John beheld the risen Christ in all His glory, he fell to the floor like a dead man. In this instance, John demonstrated the fear of the Lord—to see Him as He truly is and to respond in awe, submission, and worship. In what ways does having a healthy understanding of Jesus' glory, holiness, and righteousness lead to a disposition of joyful obedience and trust?

Second, *the greater our willingness to submit to Christ, the deeper the truths He reveals to us*. Though we might not see dreamlike visions as John did, God still teaches us as we follow Jesus. Think back on your life. What did God teach you in your most faithful moments of obedience? What might He want to teach you today?

What a day it will be to stand face-to-face with Jesus in all His glorious splendor! Casting our eyes to this magnificent future gives us a vision for the present. Submit your will to His. Obey His commands. Lean on Him when you feel weak. Embrace the love, joy, peace, and hope only He offers, knowing that He will one day look into your eyes and say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant” ([Matthew 25:23](#)).



# The Curtain Rises, the Drama Begins

*Revelation 1:9–20*

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## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for preserving this image of Your Son. When I finally see Him, I too will fall on my face in worship of the one who paid the ultimate price: dying so that I could live. He deserves no other response. Give me the strength to live a life of submission and obedience to Christ as an act of gratitude for Your love for me. I pray in Jesus' glorious name. Amen.*

## ENDNOTE

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 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

## STUDY FOUR

### The Church with Everything but the Greatest Thing

*Revelation 2:1–7*

*No one suddenly wakes up one morning and says, “I don’t love Jesus anymore.” It doesn’t happen like that. It happens over the years, little by little, after hardship that doesn’t seem to have reason—loss of health, loss of hope, loss of a loved one. The love sometimes cools off, and that breaks Jesus’ heart.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**S**KILLED chefs always keep one ingredient handy: *salt*. Every recipe requires salt because it enhances the taste of the dish. Without salt, even a meal composed of the best ingredients will lack that flavorful *pop* that makes you say, “Now, *this* is wonderful!”

Yes, you can always shake some salt on your plate after the fact, but the best chefs salt their food *throughout* the process. They salt the meat before it hits the grill. They salt the boiling pasta water. They salt the vegetables sizzling in the sauté pan. They salt the sauce simmering in the pot. With a careful hand, these chefs apply salt to bring out the flavor of each ingredient and so prepare a truly delicious dish.

The salt of the Christian life is *love*.

Love is not to be an afterthought. Rather, it must saturate *everything* Christ-followers do. Love must permeate our prayer life, our study of Scripture, our gathering with fellow believers, and our interaction with the non-believing world. Without love, the Christian life is bland—just as the apostle Paul said, “If I . . . do not have love, I am nothing” (*1 Corinthians 13:2* NASB).

This *Searching the Scriptures* study sits at the table with ancient believers who had all the ingredients of a healthy Christian life . . . except for love. Jesus Himself addressed this community, and His words reveal how we can lead lives well-seasoned with love.



# The Church with Everything but the Greatest Thing

Revelation 2:1–7

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

The apostle John said, “God is love” (1 [John 4:8](#)). Love is at the center of God’s character—of His very being. He loves us incomprehensibly more than we could ever love someone, even

*Father, thank You for loving me—even during those times when my behavior wasn’t so lovely. As I study Your Word today, remind me of this great love, and equip me to show this love to You and others. In Jesus’ loving name I pray. Amen.*



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the first chapter of Revelation, John draws back the curtains and introduces us to the hero of the drama: Jesus Christ. Yet the show begins, not with visions of the future but with letters to seven churches scattered across Asia Minor.

[Revelation 2–3](#) contains the letters Jesus sent to these seven churches through John’s pen. Each letter begins by addressing a specific church and by describing Jesus in colorful language, usually referencing one of John’s apocalyptic descriptions from his vision of the risen Christ in [1:12–16](#).

According to [2:1](#), which church did Jesus address *first*? How did He describe Himself, and with what description from [1:12–18](#) does His self-description match?

The city of Ephesus likely sounds familiar. In [Acts 19:8–20](#), Paul helped establish the first church in Ephesus, and a few years later, he wrote the letter to the [Ephesians](#). Take some time to peruse these portions of Scripture and record some key takeaways. If you want to go deeper, you can read about [Ephesus](#) in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* available for free at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com).

In [Revelation 2:2–7](#), Jesus addressed Ephesian believers to offer an honest performance review addressing both the strengths and weaknesses of the church community.

# The Church with Everything but the Greatest Thing

*Revelation 2:1–7*

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## Observation: The Church in Ephesus

Each of the seven letters in [Revelation 2–3](#) follows a similar outline. After John’s lofty introduction, Jesus immediately told the church, “I know all the things you do” (Revelation 2:2). Then, He went on to *commend* their strengths, to note *concern* for their weaknesses, and to offer *correction* that would lead them back to the path of faithfulness. Keep this outline in mind as you read each letter.

These seven letters contain some of the most practical material in Revelation, but we must resist the urge to hastily jump into *application*. You can’t apply a passage of Scripture without first *interpreting* it’s meaning, and you can’t interpret without first *observing* what the passage says.<sup>1</sup>

### Commendation—Revelation 2:2–3, 6

According to [Revelation 2:2](#), what did Jesus “know” about the church in Ephesus?

According to [2:2–3](#), in what ways did these believers demonstrate their faithfulness to Christ?

What additional note of encouragement did Jesus offer in [2:6](#)? Don’t worry if you’re not exactly sure what this means. We will consider the meaning of this verse in the interpretation phase.

*The Christians in Ephesus displayed active energy, patient endurance, and doctrinal discernment. We could use more churches like that!*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

# The Church with Everything but the Greatest Thing

*Revelation 2:1–7*

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## Concern—Revelation 2:4

According to [Revelation 2:4](#), what was Jesus’ central “complaint against” the church in Ephesus?

## Correction—Revelation 2:5, 7

According to [Revelation 2:5](#), what correction did Jesus offer? What did He say would happen if the church didn’t heed His words?

According to [2:7](#), what did Jesus say would happen to those who “listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying”? What kind of victory would they obtain?

The church in Ephesus was doing all the right things—working hard, persevering under difficult circumstances, teaching the truth. Yet these efforts lacked a love for God and love for others. Because they left out this essential ingredient, their spiritual health was at great risk.



### **Interpretation: The Necessity of Love**

Jesus’ core message to the church in Ephesus was a call to repentance. The Greek term for “repentance” refers to a person changing his or her mind, and the corresponding Hebrew term describes someone turning around.

# The Church with Everything but the Greatest Thing

## *Revelation 2:1–7*

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In what way did Jesus call the people of the Ephesian church to change their minds and to turn around? How is Jesus' message instructive for Christians today who seek to lead a life characterized by repentance?

Why is love the essential ingredient of the Christian life? In what ways did Jesus demonstrate the love that is so central to God's character?

In [Revelation 2:6](#), Jesus made the interesting comment that the Ephesians hated “the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans.” Who were the Nicolaitans? What made their behavior so abhorrent? To answer these questions, consult a Bible-study tool, like Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Revelation*.<sup>2</sup> For a free resource, look at [Constable's Notes](#) available at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).

*It is never too late to start doing what is right. That'll save you from more heartaches than you can name. Now is the time to turn. Now is the time to remember. Now is the time to do what you once did. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### **Correlation: Liturgies of Love**

On the wheel of God's character, love is the hub where the spokes of His other attributes connect. God, therefore, wants His people to be characterized by love as well.

# The Church with Everything but the Greatest Thing

## *Revelation 2:1–7*

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The law of Moses contains a summons called the *Shema* (a Hebrew word meaning “hear” or “listen”). The *Shema* represents the heart of Jewish belief, and faithful Israelites would recite these words twice daily. The *Shema* is recorded in [Deuteronomy 6:4–9](#). Read it aloud as the ancient Israelites once did. What is the central command of the *Shema* ([6:5](#))?

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, He reiterated these words when a teacher of the law asked Him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” ([Mark 12:28](#)). According to [Mark 12:29–30](#), what did Jesus consider the most important commandment? According to [12:31](#), what other commandment did Jesus discuss? Note how Jesus compares these two commandments.

To be a person of Christ is to be a person of love. Anyone who lacks a heart of love hasn’t truly experienced the love God offers His children. This is why the apostle John said, “We love each other because he loved us first” ([1 John 4:19](#)). In application, we will consider how we can extend to others the love God has given to us.



### **Application: A Well-Seasoned Life of Love**

Based on Jesus’ letter to the church in Ephesus, Pastor Chuck developed four points of application:

- *Jesus knows us completely.* Don’t bother trying to hide your sin.
- *Jesus loves us unconditionally.* You can neither earn it nor lose it.
- *Jesus rewards us abundantly.* Your faith will draw you ever closer to Him.
- *Jesus calls us tenderly.* Listen to His voice and run to His embrace.



# The Church with Everything but the Greatest Thing

*Revelation 2:1–7*

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In the space below, reflect on the ways you have experienced the unconditional love of Jesus.

In what ways can you more deeply saturate every aspect of your Christian life in love—to show God that you love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? Write down some practical steps below.

Could your life use a little more of the seasoning of love? God is like a chef who is ready to highlight the flavors and aromas of your personality with the salt of Christlike love. We simply need to receive it. When we do, He will look at our loving lives and say, “Now, this is wonderful!”



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, I confess that at times I have not loved You or others as You have called me to. Help me in my journey of repentance. I want to show love the way You love me in Christ—unconditionally. Thank You for loving for me and caring for me throughout my life. 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 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

## STUDY FIVE

### The Suffering Church under Attack

*Revelation 2:8–11*

*No one suddenly wakes up one morning and says, “I don’t love Jesus anymore.” It doesn’t happen like that. It happens over the years, little by little, after hardship that doesn’t seem to have reason—loss of health, loss of hope, loss of a loved one. The love sometimes cools off, and that breaks Jesus’ heart.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**H**UMAN innovation has made mundane what once seemed unthinkable. In a few hours, airplanes can take us to regions of the world our ancestors hardly knew existed. Smart phones allow us to carry around a universe of knowledge everywhere we go. Modern medicine has lowered the infant mortality rate and increased life expectancy. *What a time to be alive!*

Though these inventions might make us believe we are superhumans who can accomplish the impossible, no technology has ever—nor will ever—eradicate the ever-present problem of *pain*. Anesthetics may numb physical pain. Entertainment may distract from emotional pain. But those nagging aches in the body and soul will always return. When they do, we realize just how fragile and needy we truly are.

So when it comes to pain, we need a *divine* solution.

Thankfully, Scripture offers a heavenly answer to the earthly problem of suffering. Jesus never promised to take away the pain of this life, but He does offer hope that, one day, He will return to give us a new life and to eliminate the problem of pain for good. That promise strengthens us to endure even when we frail humans feel like breaking.



#### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Say this prayer to prepare your heart to search the Scriptures today:

*Father, the suffering I endure in this life often feels unbearable. Before I study Your Word today, I acknowledge I cannot solve this problem of pain by my own human strength. Sustain me with your divine strength and lead me to trust You more and more—even when life hurts most. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.*



# The Suffering Church under Attack

*Revelation 2:8–11*

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## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In Jesus' letters to the seven churches in [Revelation 2–3](#), He moves quickly from congregation to congregation, city to city, addressing specific issues. According to [Revelation 2:8](#), which church did Jesus address *second*? How did He describe Himself, and with what description from [1:12–18](#) does His self-description match?

The New Testament says little about the city of Smyrna. The key point of note, however, is that this metropolis was loyal to the Roman Empire. In fact, early in the first century AD, Smyrna won a bid to build the temple for Caesar Tiberius. If you want explore these details further, you can read about [Smyrna](#) in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* available for free at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com).

Why might Christians who were committed to worshipping Jesus as Lord struggle in a culture like Smyrna's?

In a city full of people saying, "Caesar is lord," committed followers of Jesus had a target of treason painted on their backs. Yet it wasn't the *Romans* who turned against them . . . it was the local *Jews*. We discover why in [Revelation 2:9–11](#).



## Observation: The Church in Smyrna

In most of these letters, Jesus offered a commendation, a concern, and a correction. When the text differs from this pattern, it is *intentional* and *important*! In the letter to the church in Smyrna, Jesus exchanged His words of concern and correction for a refrain of *comfort*. Keep this in mind as you observe Jesus' words in [Revelation 2:9–11](#) to this impressive church.<sup>1</sup>

According to [Revelation 2:9](#), what two things did Jesus "know" about the church in Smyrna?

# The Suffering Church under Attack

## *Revelation 2:8–11*

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What paradoxical observation did Jesus make in [Revelation 2:9a](#) about the state of the believers in Smyrna?

According to [2:9b](#), who was the *immediate* cause of this state of the church in Smyrna? Who was the *ultimate* cause? What is ironic about this reality?

What exhortation in [2:10a](#) did Jesus offer the believers in Smyrna?

According to [2:10b](#), what reward awaits those who “remain faithful even when facing death”?

According to [2:11](#), what did Jesus say would happen to those who “listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying”? What kind of victory would they obtain?

# The Suffering Church under Attack

*Revelation 2:8–11*

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*It must have given these struggling believers a sense of relief to remember that the Lord Jesus Christ had tasted death for them. No one could be more understanding or comforting to a suffering church. There's something about having gone through the depths that gives you an understanding of someone else when they go through it too. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Interpretation: Making Sense of Suffering

Jesus framed His message to this suffering church in Smyrna with two similar statements about death—which may be the truest expression of pain. What did Jesus say about death in [Revelation 2:8 and 2:11](#). How do these words offer comfort to suffering Christians—both then and now?

This refrain of comfort contains a puzzling statement: “I know about your suffering and your poverty—but you are rich!” ([Revelation 2:9](#)). In what sense can suffering believers (who often lack material wealth) be considered rich? What do they have in abundance that others lack?

What does [2:9–10](#) reveal about Satan’s role in human suffering. Some parts of these verses may feel confusing, so be sure to consult your Bible-study tools, like Pastor Chuck’s commentary, *Insights on Revelation*, or the free online resource [Constable’s Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#).<sup>2</sup>

*Satan isn’t a little ugly red character with a pitchfork. He is the most attractive and winsome and alluring and appealing of all the creations. He is brilliant and deceptive. He motivates people in ways they don’t realize. Very few are Satan worshipers, but he is the ultimate cause of a great deal of suffering in this world. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

# The Suffering Church under Attack

*Revelation 2:8–11*

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## Correlation: A Divine Perspective

Long ago, a man named Joseph endured a great deal of suffering, and his story offers a divine perspective on the reality of human pain.

Jacob, Joseph's father, loved Joseph more than his other brothers, which caused the brothers to feel jealousy and anger toward Joseph. They *hated* their brother. So, one day, they decided to dispose of him . . . for good. They trapped him, beat him, and sold him to a band of traveling merchants who brought him to Egypt as a slave. *Talk about suffering!*

Yet God was with Joseph, and shortly after his arrival in Egypt, Joseph succeeded in whatever he did. Several years later, he found himself working closely with Pharaoh as a personal advisor and vice-regent. During this time, God gave Joseph wisdom that allowed him to anticipate and prepare for a great famine. If Joseph had held this position that allowed him to help Pharaoh, people across the known world would have died from starvation.

As Joseph reflected on these events in [Genesis 50:20](#), what theological principle did he discover? How could these words be comforting to the believers in Smyrna thousands of years later?

Read the following New Testament verses and describe how they offer a uniquely divine viewpoint on human suffering: [Romans 8:26–30](#); [James 1:2–4, 12](#); and [1 Peter 1:3–7](#).

Until Satan, sin, and death are eradicated, human beings will suffer, but God—in His sovereignty—can take even the most horrible circumstances and use them for our good and for His glory.

# The Suffering Church under Attack

*Revelation 2:8–11*

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## Application: Enduring Suffering with Christ

As Pastor Chuck Swindoll reflected on Jesus' message of comfort to the suffering church in Smyrna, he developed three personal points of application:

- *My Lord knows every detail of my circumstances*—no matter how bad they are.
- *If my situation remains the same, I don't need to fear*—no matter how scary it's been.
- *If things get worse for me, He will see me through*—no matter how long it takes.

The language of pain is one of the few dialects every person can understand with absolute fluency. What experiences with pain have you had in the past? How did God bring you through these times of suffering? In what ways have you seen Him use something evil for your good and His glory?

Are you enduring a painful trial right now? How do Jesus' words, "I know about your suffering . . ." offer you comfort ([Revelation 2:9](#))? What practical steps can you take to trust Him amid this difficult time and to allow Him to use the fiery trial to refine you?

You may not experience the same kind of persecution that the believers in Smyrna did, but Jesus said that His followers should expect to be hated by the world (see [John 15:18–20](#)). How has learning about the ancient church in Smyrna equipped you to stand strong for your beliefs when you endure mistreatment or even full-blown persecution because of your faith in Jesus?



# The Suffering Church under Attack

*Revelation 2:8–11*

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Pain is a companion that will follow and assault you until it lands its final, fatal blow. Yet we follow the one “who was dead but is now alive” ([Revelation 2:8](#)). When we finally meet Him at heaven’s gates, He will give us new bodies that are forever freed of the shackles of sin, death, sorrow, and *pain*. *What a day that will be!* Until then, we wait and, if needed, endure.



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, I find comfort in the truth that Your Son has conquered Satan, sin, and death. Though I feel the effects of these evil powers each day, I rejoice in the hope that You will one day defeat them for good. I eagerly await that day when I can fully share in Christ’s victory. As I wait, remind me that You are always with me—even in the pain. In Jesus’ victorious 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 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

## STUDY SIX

### The Church That Compromised the Truth

*Revelation 2:12–17*

*Doctrinal compromise—it'll ruin you every time. Moral compromise—it'll always take you down. Now's the time to repent. I point you to Christ. There's no one else who can help you. No other one can make things right. No other one is able to forgive you and give you a whole new story—a whole new beginning.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**T**HE art of compromise. It's a necessary skill. Compromise is essential, for example, in marriage. Spouses will naturally disagree with one another: on which home to purchase, on where to celebrate the holidays, on how to spend money.

Yet any spouse who thinks his or her own personal opinions are always divinely inspired is doomed to have a miserable marriage. Any thriving relationship requires mutual, willing sacrifice—each individual setting aside personal desires for the sake of the other. That is *healthy* compromise.

Not all compromise is healthy, though. Spouses can compromise on what to share for dinner, but no spouse should *ever* compromise with whom to share a bed. That's why compromise is an *art*. What's true and right should take precedence over opinion, preference, and taste. The Christian life requires the same kind of discerning dance.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study looks to the ancient church in Smyrna that had gradually lost its footing and slipped into a state of unhealthy compromise. Their example and Jesus' call offer just what we need today for cultivating discernment, avoiding similar stumbles, and living faithfully as the beautiful bride of Christ.



# The Church That Compromised the Truth

*Revelation 2:12–17*

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Spending time with God is a *must* for all of us—like breathing air, drinking water, and eating food. Long to-do lists and packed schedules threaten to keep us from this vital time and distract us when we do make time for it. Quiet your heart and still your mind as you offer this prayer before you explore God’s Word.

*Father, I know You will never make compromises on the love, grace, and compassion You have for me. Help me understand the depths of Your character as I study Your Word today, so I can reflect to the world what You’re really like. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.*



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

When Jesus transitioned from addressing the second to the third of the seven churches in Asia Minor in [Revelation 2–3](#), His tone changed from tender and soft to terse and severe. According to [Revelation 2:12](#), which church did Jesus address *third*? How did He describe Himself, and with what description from [1:12–18](#) does His self-description match?

The city of Pergamum was a religious epicenter for the Roman Empire. People came from all over to pay homage to the statues of the gods and the Caesars and to offer sacrifices to them at the many ornate temples. If you want to explore these details further, you can read about [Pergamum](#) in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* available for free at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com).

Jesus called Pergamum “the city where Satan has his throne” ([Revelation 2:13](#)). Why might Christians living in this satanic city have been tempted to compromise their commitment to Jesus?

If a spotless white lamb rolls around in the mud, it’s going to get dirty. So in [2:13–17](#), Jesus offered a strong word of warning to His beloved church in Pergamum to help them stay clean of its moral and spiritual pollution.

# The Church That Compromised the Truth

*Revelation 2:12–17*

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## Observation: The Church in Pergamum

Jesus knows each of us intimately. Like a loving parent, He celebrates what we do well, and He corrects us in our areas of struggle. In the letters of [Revelation 2–3](#), Jesus lovingly addressed gatherings of believers in seven separate cities in Asia Minor to offer commendation, concern, and correction. Look for each of these elements as you observe [2:13–17](#).<sup>1</sup>

### Commendation—Revelation 2:13

According to [Revelation 2:13a](#), what did Jesus “know” about the church in Pergamum?

What word of affirmation did Jesus offer in [2:13b](#)? What were these believers doing well despite their challenging circumstances?

### Concern—Revelation 2:14–15

Jesus then altered His tone with the transition word *but*. According to [Revelation 2:14–15](#), what were Jesus’ “complaints against” this church? (If some of what Jesus said here is unclear, don’t worry! We’ll explore these verses further in correlation.)

# The Church That Compromised the Truth

*Revelation 2:12–17*

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## Correction—Revelation 2:16–17

According to [Revelation 2:16](#), what correction did Jesus offer? What did He say would happen if the church didn't heed His words?

According to [2:17](#), what did Jesus say would happen to those who “listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying”? What kind of victory would they obtain?

*In matters of character, there's no wobble room. There's no option to compromise. Every time you compromise in character or in your principles, you lose. And there are real consequences that follow. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Interpretation: The Dangers of Compromise

The essential problem with the church in Pergamum was their willingness to compromise their Christian convictions. Look up the term [compromise](#) in a dictionary. What is the difference between healthy and unhealthy compromise? In what ways did the Christians in Pergamum demonstrate *unhealthy* compromise in their commitment to Jesus?

# The Church That Compromised the Truth

*Revelation 2:12–17*

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Jesus' promise of victory in [Revelation 2:17](#) contains three symbols. What do the “manna that has been hidden away in heaven,” the “white stone,” and the “new name” represent. Why should each of these be considered a worthwhile reward? To help you interpret the meaning of these expressions, reference Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Revelation*.<sup>2</sup> For a free resource, visit [Constable's Notes](#) available at [netbible.org](#).

Each of these seven letters is a literary masterpiece, with each component carefully fitting together to create a beautiful mosaic. How does Jesus' self-identification as “the one with the sharp two-edged sword” in [2:12](#) help us better understand His message in this letter as a whole? [See 1:16 and 2:16](#).

*Filter everything you hear through the Scriptures. Don't let the suave presentation of our times dull your edge. Don't be afraid to think alone and to be the only one in the group that doesn't buy it. The Lord admires that.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## **Correlation: Compromise in the Community of Israel**

In [Revelation 2:14](#), Jesus explained that the church in Pergamum was guilty of similar sins as the community of Israel in the days following the exodus from Egypt. As the Israelites moved closer to the region of Moab, the Moabite king Balak called upon the prophet Balaam for help. According to [Numbers 22:5–6](#), what request did the king make?

# The Church That Compromised the Truth

*Revelation 2:12–17*

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Despite Balaam's awareness of the greatness of the God of Israel, he still gave Balak advice on how to lead "the people of Israel to rebel against the LORD" (*Numbers 31:15*). According to *25:1–3*, how did Balak ultimately nudge the people of Israel into joining in Baal worship? How did God respond to these events in *25:4*?

How does this context help you better understand Jesus' strong words to the church in Pergamum?

In the Old Testament, idolatry and adultery are close acquaintances. By worshiping false gods, the Israelites essentially were cheating on their faithful God. Likewise, the same stark analogy applies to those in the church today who compromise their faith in Christ. Thankfully, Christ's strong and loving call to return never quiets.



## **Application: Realities Regarding Compromise**

The key to avoiding compromise is to understand its nature. Pastor Chuck identified four realities regarding compromise:

1. Compromise never occurs quickly.
2. Compromise always lowers the original standard.
3. Compromise is seldom offensive.
4. Compromise is often the first step toward disobedience.

God's central desire for His people is, "You must be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (*Leviticus 19:2*). To be holy means to be set apart—to be separate, unique, distinct. Why is God's holiness so central to His character? Why must we model this behavior (see *Genesis 1:26*)? What does it look like practically for you in this season of life to reflect His holiness?



# The Church That Compromised the Truth

*Revelation 2:12–17*

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How would you describe the context in which you live? How is it similar to Pergamum? How does this examination of your context help you guard against unhealthy compromise?

Has an area of unhealthy compromise in your own life come to your attention in this study? If so, what would it look like for you to return to obedience in Jesus? Consider how you might be making compromises in the way you spend your time and money, in the kinds of entertainment you consume, in the way you treat others, or in the way you view Scripture.

Have you ever heard these messages? “This sin isn’t as bad as some others.” “If it feels good, do it!” “It’s not wrong if you aren’t hurting anyone.” When these seemingly harmless ideas take seed in the soul, then the weeds of compromise spread and choke out your healthy and growing relationship with Christ. Fertilize your soul with Jesus’ truth. Kill those weeds with consistent repentance. And watch your spiritual life flourish!



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, as a member of Your church, I want to remain faithful to You no matter what. I don’t want to make any compromises. Help me guard against unhealthy compromise and keep me pure. I can only do this through Your wisdom, strength, and grace. 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](#).”
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 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

## STUDY SEVEN

### The Church Where Tolerance Went to Seed

*Revelation 2:18–29*

*It's easy to think tolerance of sin happens only in large places and sprawling megalopolises like New York City or Los Angeles. And it's easy to think it would never happen in a local church. Wrong, wrong, wrong! It even happened in a first-century church, of all places. The church at Thyatira was guilty of tolerance that had gone to seed.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EVERY garden has its weeds. These unwelcome intruders often appear harmless, especially at first, when the soil is speckled with little green sprouts. Some weeds even look nice and occasionally blossom with an eye-catching bloom or two. Yet any experienced gardener knows that weeds cause major problems for the rest of the plants.

If weeds linger too long, they will grow far faster than the planted seeds, and in a matter of weeks, they can completely overtake the plot of land. Their roots will invade the soil and steal nutrients from the rest of the plants. Ultimately, weeds halt the garden from producing a healthy, beautiful, and nourishing harvest.

Many local churches are like gardens filled with both healthy plants and dangerous weeds. Those who follow false teachers, who neglect Scripture, and who love the world's enticements more than Christ's presence cause major problems for the community and hinder its fruitfulness.

Thankfully, Jesus, like a master gardener, helps the church identify these intruders and prevent them from causing too much damage. This *Searching the Scriptures* study explores Jesus' words to a church that let the weeds of tolerance take root. His rebuke is every bit as urgent for us right now as it was back then.



# The Church Where Tolerance Went to Seed

*Revelation 2:18–29*

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Sin always saps the life of a spiritual community. Likewise, sin always harms the follower of Christ. So Christ calls us to examine our own lives before scrutinizing others. Remember His question in [Matthew 7:3](#)? “Why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own?” Use this time for a prayer of confession as you open your heart to receive His Word.

*Father, I confess that I have sinned against You. My thoughts, words, and actions have not honored You and have harmed others. Please, forgive me. Spur me on to repentance as I study and embrace Your Word today. In Jesus’ merciful name I pray. Amen.*



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus continued His series of messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor in [Revelation 2–3](#) by addressing a church that might look remarkably similar to many churches across the world today. According to [Revelation 2:18](#), which church did Jesus address *fourth*? How did He describe Himself, and with what description from [1:12–18](#) does His self-description match?

The city of Thyatira was not as impressive as other cities in Asia Minor, but people from across the region still came through it because local trade guilds specialized in producing impressive textiles, leather, and metal goods. If you want explore these details further, you can read about [Thyatira](#) in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible*, available for free at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com).

How might living in a city like Thyatira—one that saw so many people coming and going—have created problems for Christians who lived and worshiped there permanently?

In a city known for producing impressive works of bronze, the one “whose feet are like polished bronze” stepped down from His heavenly throne to address a community that had grown far too comfortable with sin’s impurities ([2:18](#)).

# The Church Where Tolerance Went to Seed

*Revelation 2:18–29*

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## Observation: The Church in Thyatira

Each of Jesus' letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor roughly follow the same basic outline:

- Commendation
- Complaint
- Correction

Read [Revelation 2:19–29](#) and, as you read, mentally separate the passage into these three sections to guide you as you make observations.<sup>1</sup>

### Commendation—Revelation 2:19

According to [Revelation 2:19](#), what did Jesus “know” about the church in Thyatira? What kinds of behavior had He “seen”?

### Concern—Revelation 2:20–23

By using the transition word *but*, Jesus moved to discussing His concern with these believers. According to [Revelation 2:20a](#), what was Jesus' central “complaint” against the church in Thyatira?

What two things did “Jezebel” teach these believers to do, according to [Revelation 2:20b](#)?

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

# The Church Where Tolerance Went to Seed

*Revelation 2:18–29*

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According to [Revelation 2:22–23](#), what consequences did Jesus say awaited Jezebel and “those who commit adultery with her”?

## Correction—Revelation 2:24–29

According to [Revelation 2:24–25](#), what message of exhortation did Jesus offer to those who had “not followed this false teaching”?

According to [2:26–29](#), what did Jesus say would happen to those who “listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying”? What kind of victory would they obtain?

*Salvation is always according to faith. Judgment is always according to works.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## Interpretation: Tolerance in the Church

Jesus confronted the church in Thyatira because it tolerated wickedness within its walls ([Revelation 2:20](#) NASB). Look up the word *tolerate* in a dictionary. How does the technical definition of this term differ from its more conventional usage today? Why is tolerance of sin problematic for believers?

# The Church Where Tolerance Went to Seed

*Revelation 2:18–29*

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What does it mean that Jesus would give “authority” to those who are victorious (see [Revelation 2:26–28](#))? Who will receive this authority? What kind of authority will they receive? When will they receive it? For help answering these questions, look at Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Revelation*.<sup>2</sup> For a free resource, look at [Constable’s Notes](#), available at [netbible.org](#).

Why is it significant that Jesus opened this letter describing Himself as one “whose eyes are like flames of fire” ([2:18](#))? How does this description help us understand the broader message of the whole letter? Reference especially [Revelation 2:19 and 23](#).

*Jesus sees what others don’t see, and He reveals what others don’t reveal. Some shrug their shoulders and—if you will—tolerate evil teaching and behavior. He doesn’t tolerate it. He calls it what it is: sin. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Correlation: Old and New Jezebels

The central problem with the believers in Thyatira was that they allowed the weeds of “that woman—that Jezebel” to spread in the garden of their church ([Revelation 2:20](#)). Most likely, Jesus is describing a particular person who had a far-reaching negative effect on the local church, just as the Jezebel in the Old Testament led the people of Israel into idolatry and debauchery.

In the era of the kingdom of Israel, King Ahab “did what was evil in the LORD’s sight, even more than any of the kings before him” ([1 Kings 16:30](#)). Perhaps the most wicked thing he did was marry the Gentile Baal worshiper Jezebel. [First Kings 21:25–26](#) describes the problems with this union. Summarize why marrying Jezebel was so problematic for King Ahab.

# The Church Where Tolerance Went to Seed

*Revelation 2:18–29*

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Now, let's look at some of the specific details of Jezebel's wickedness. Read [1 Kings 18:4](#) and [19:1–3](#) and summarize what she did. Pay special attention to her actions toward God's prophets.

At one point, Ahab decided he wanted to purchase a vineyard beside his palace. When the owner refused to sell, Jezebel tricked him and ultimately murdered him so her husband could claim the land. When the prophet Elijah heard about this wicked act, he proclaimed God's judgment against Ahab and Jezebel in [21:21–24](#). What did God say He would do in response to their evil?

Like an adulterer, Jezebel-like figures lure people into the bed of idolatry. Yet that bed of idolatry also is a "bed of suffering" ([Revelation 2:22](#)). Jezebel's victims condemn themselves to the judgment of Christ. These strong words shout a warning to any church today that tolerates the weeds of sin.



## **Application: A No-Tolerance Policy**

Tolerance isn't always bad. Sometimes you have to agree to disagree. However, accepting sin as good is *never* right. Pastor Chuck offers four guidelines on how to handle the weeds of sin in the church.

- Big problems can occur in small, obscure places. *Don't be surprised!*
- Timely words can encourage demoralized people. *Don't be hesitant!*
- Wrong teaching can come from gifted people. *Don't be misled!*
- Deceptive actions can injure innocent people. *Don't be naïve!*



# The Church Where Tolerance Went to Seed

*Revelation 2:18–29*

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Through your reflections in this study, did the Holy Spirit reveal any weeds in your own life that need to be uprooted? Remember, weeds often start off as small sprouts. Take a moment to confess to God those specific sins—whether big or small—and claim the forgiveness that He has freely given you through Jesus’ sacrifice.

Now that you’ve examined your own life, take a look at the garden of your Christian community. Is there a demoralized person who needs encouragement? Is there someone who has been misled and needs direction? Is there someone who has been injured by deceptive actions? In what ways can you spread the truth of Christ to meet the needs of these people?

False teaching often sounds good . . . and feels even better. So, stay alert and handle the weeds carefully as you pull them from the ground. Water the soil with grace and truth, and your community will grow and flourish and teem with life like never before.



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, I want to live a flourishing life for Your glory. Though it may be painful, please uproot the weeds of sin in my soul. I also want to belong to a community of faith that serves You well. Give me the courage to confront sin with both grace and truth—just as Your Son exemplified in His life, death, and resurrection. It’s in His 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 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

## STUDY EIGHT

### Autopsy of a Dead Church

*Revelation 3:1–6*

*Like a physician, Jesus walks into an emergency room and sees the patient quickly falling into a coma. He stops immediately and begins shouting strong orders in a staccato-like manner. There's urgency here. His commands lead to change and correction that will keep the patient alive.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**I**MAGINE strolling through a farmers' market on a warm summer day. You see the vibrant colors of the fruits and vegetables shining in the sunlight. You hear voices laughing as people enjoy one another's company and the season's harvest. The place just feels so *alive*!

As you move from stall to stall, you select your produce. Some robin-red tomatoes. A cluster of fresh basil. A colorful mix of summer squash. A basket of softball-sized stone fruit. You hear your stomach growl as you think of the endless culinary possibilities.

When you arrive home, you can hardly wait to savor your selections, so you grab the plumpest peach. As its soft skin greets your lips, you anticipate a burst of juice and flavor. Instead, the flesh feels mushy. The nectar is tasteless. And the aroma just smells *off*. You look at the brown crater your mouth left and realize . . .

It's rotten.

What appeared to be healthy, vibrant, and alive actually is dead. Sadly, some church bodies become like this spoiled fruit. From an outsider's perspective, the community looks lively and attractive. Yet as you engage with the group, you realize something is terribly distasteful.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study listens to Jesus' address to a church that appeared alive but was rotten. What would He say to such a church? What should a church do if it finds itself in this predicament? Let's see!



# Autopsy of a Dead Church

*Revelation 3:1–6*

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prayer is a lifeline. It connects you to God. It forms your desires. It shapes your character. It takes you nearer to Jesus and makes you look more like Him. *It keeps you alive!* Pray right now before you open God's Word:

*Father, I don't want to have a dead relationship with You. I want to be so alive in Christ that my life shines for Your glory. As I search the Scriptures today, help me identify those areas of my soul that might be rotting. I pray in the name of the way, the truth, and the life—Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

[Revelation 2–3](#) contains the letters Jesus dictated for seven churches throughout Asia Minor. Some of these letters feel warm and affectionate as they commend faithfulness and endurance. Others, however, are more severe as Jesus sharply rebuked churches that had strayed. This study focuses on a letter that falls into the latter category.

According to [Revelation 3:1a](#), which church did Jesus address *fifth*? How did He describe Himself, and with what description from [1:12–18](#) does His self-description match?

For centuries, Sardis stood tall as one of the most vibrant cities in the region. Due to its central location, it welcomed trade from all corners of the world. Yet, after a devastating earthquake in AD 17 that damaged much of the city, Sardis' prominence faded away. By the time John wrote Revelation, the city was living in the past. If you want to dive deeper into these details, you can read about [Sardis](#) in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* available for free at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com).

How might living as a Christian in a city with wounded pride and humble surroundings affect your walk with Christ?

The church labored to appear worthy of esteem, but it really was all a show. So Jesus confronted the believers in Sardis and painted a vision of what this church could be—truly *alive*.

# Autopsy of a Dead Church

*Revelation 3:1–6*

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## Observation: The Church in Sardis

Jesus' seven letters to the churches in Asia Minor each contain a commendation followed by a concern and a correction . . . *usually*. When He altered this general content of the address, it was for emphasis. In His address to the church in Sardis, He skipped the commendation and went straight to the concern. Take note of this detail as you observe [Revelation 3:1b–6](#).<sup>1</sup>

According to [3:1b](#) what did Jesus “know” about the church in Sardis? What kind of reputation did it have? What was the true condition of the church despite this shining reputation?

In a surprise twist, Jesus revealed that His estimation of the believers in Sardis was far different from popular opinion. Yet He didn't scold them like an angry schoolteacher. Instead, like a loving shepherd, He pointed His aimless sheep back to better pastures.

Jesus offered this correction through five imperatives—or commands—in [3:2–3a](#). These imperatives are easiest to identify in a more word-for-word translation (like the New American Standard Bible). List Jesus' five corrective commands below:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

According to [3:3b](#), what would happen to believers who did not heed Jesus' commands?

# Autopsy of a Dead Church

## *Revelation 3:1–6*

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Though Jesus' message started strong, He quickly acknowledged that not all members of the church were as dead as the rest of the community. How did Jesus describe these faithful believers in [Revelation 3:4](#)?

According to [3:5–6](#), what did Jesus say would happen to those who “listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying”? What kind of victory would they obtain?

*Jesus promises that your name will not be erased from the Book of Life. That's eternal acceptance, identity, security. Eternal righteousness clothed in white. Imagine hearing the Lord Jesus call you by your name before the Father! Isn't that great? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### **Interpretation: Living versus Dying Churches**

In His letter to the believers in Sardis, Jesus explained why He considered them to be a dead church. Write out His reasons in the space below. What might be some other signs of a dead or dying church?

How can a church appear alive yet truly be dead? *By defining a church's success using the culture's definition.* How does your culture define success? What are the true signs of a living church? In what ways does cultural success overlap with true biblical success for a church, and in what ways does it depart?

# Autopsy of a Dead Church

## *Revelation 3:1–6*

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The theme of *names* pops up throughout Revelation, and it plays a key role in this letter to the church in Sardis. Reread [Revelation 3:1–6](#) in a more word-for-word translation (like the New American Standard Bible), and take note of each time Jesus uses the word *name*.

Why did Jesus place so much emphasis on the “names” of these believers? What does this theme reveal about the contrast between a human perspective and God’s perspective? Feel free to look at Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Revelation*, for help answering these questions.<sup>2</sup> For an online resource, [Constable’s Notes](#) is available for free at [netbible.org](#).

*Dead churches often have all the trappings of a healthy church—great music, impressive buildings, and even the finest leaders. But it doesn’t take very long before the deadness wraps its clammy fingers around the community. Then, there’s a lack of the life, enthusiasm, and electricity that the Holy Spirit brings when He ignites the Word of God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### **Correlation: Clean People, Living Communities**

In Scripture, prophetic literature moves like the waves of the sea. A warning of God’s coming builds like a wave until it crashes down on those who look away. Then, in the calm of its wake, God offers a message of hope—that He will one day vindicate the righteous and eradicate evil from His cherished creation.

Jesus rode this wave in His letter to the church in Sardis, and His message of hope ripples out from a prophecy in Isaiah. Read [Isaiah 4:2–6](#). Who will ultimately receive this promise of restoration? How do these verses describe this blissful state of glory on Mount Zion?

In what ways do these verses correlate with [Revelation 3:1–6](#)? What themes overlap? How do they both provide hope to churches who fight to live rather than allow themselves to die?

# Autopsy of a Dead Church

*Revelation 3:1–6*

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A dead church allows itself to be stained by the complacency, the frivolity, the worries of the world. A living church, however, recognizes that only God can make us clean. Let's now consider what practical steps we can take to foster life in our Christian communities today.



## **Application: Marks of a Dead Church**

Like a master physician, Jesus deftly performed an accurate autopsy of the dead church in Sardis. As we read the report, we can learn important lessons on avoiding their same demise. Consider the following marks of a dead church.

1. A dead church worships its past.
2. A dead church is inflexible and resistant to change.
3. A dead church has carnal and lazy leadership.
4. A dead church neglects children and youth.
5. A dead church lacks evangelistic and missionary zeal.

Do any of these marks plague your Christian community? If yes, what might be causing these problems? How can you pray for restored health?

Look back at Jesus' five commands from [Revelation 3:2–3a](#). Do you sense Him leading you to heed one of these commands today?

What practical steps can you take to inject a new sense of life into your church? Remember, it only takes a spark to ignite a warm, bright fire.



# Autopsy of a Dead Church

*Revelation 3:1–6*

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After diving into this passage, it's understandable to ask ourselves, *Am I a rotten fruit in God's garden?* Your very concern suggests otherwise. The Holy Spirit is working in you to lead you to heed Jesus' message and display what true life really tastes like. Stay alert and keep yielding to Christ in everything you do.



## A FINAL PRAYER

Offer your own prayer as you conclude your time in God's Word today:

## 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 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

## STUDY NINE

### Little Strength, Open Door, Awesome God

*Revelation 3:7–13*

*We all are faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**I**MPossible is some people's favorite word. Like the skeptic who denies a friend's exaggerated story about the size of that fish he caught. Like the critic who refuses to believe the underdog team has a shot at winning the championship. Or like the cynic who can't accept that a philanthropist would give away so much money with pure motives. *Impossible!*

Yet the skeptics, critics, and cynics don't own the word. *Impossible* can easily sneak its way into anyone's personal lexicon. Like the parent who just received the cancer diagnosis. Like the business owner whose ledger sits in the red for the second straight quarter. Or like the once-dear loved ones who seem to drift further apart with each passing day. *Impossible . . .*

Sadly, the small human imagination too often fails to look at difficult circumstances from a *divine* perspective. Faithful followers of Jesus know that our God is the God of impossibilities. After all, Jesus Himself pointed out, "What is impossible for people is possible for God" ([Luke 18:27](#)).

The members of the ancient church in Philadelphia recognized the absolute power of God. This small church trusted God to handle what seemed to be an entirely impossible situation revealing their impressive vision for God's perspective and their faith in His perfect plan.



#### PREPARE YOUR HEART

When you face an impossible situation, what's your first impulse? Do you panic? Run? Hide? Fight? These reactions are natural, but God offers us peace through His perspective, and we can claim that peace through prayer. Offer the following prayer to prepare your heart for what God wants to teach you today:

*Father, it sometimes feels difficult to see life from Your perspective. As I study Your Word today, give me the vision and the faith to see the opportunities despite my impossible situations. I pray in Jesus' powerful name. Amen.*



# Little Strength, Open Door, Awesome God

*Revelation 3:7–13*

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## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The letters Jesus sent to the seven churches in Asia Minor in [Revelation 2–3](#) addressed some of the Roman Empire’s most important cities. Yet one of these cities stood out from the rest. According to [Revelation 3:7](#), which church did Jesus address *sixth*? How did He describe Himself, and with what description from [1:12–18](#) does His self-description match?

Philadelphia was the youngest and least impressive of the seven cities addressed in the opening act of Revelation. In fact, rulers from the city of Pergamum established it. Just a couple hundred years after its founding, a series of intense earthquakes caused so much destruction that a large portion of the population fled. To learn more about this ancient city, you can read about [Philadelphia](#) in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible*, available for free at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com).

How would living as a Christian in a small, insignificant, tumble-down city like Philadelphia have challenged your faith in Christ?

Life didn’t come easily for the believers in Philadelphia. Yet, regardless of their impossible circumstances, they clung to their hope in Christ and remained faithful to Him. So He honored them for their devotion.



## Observation: The Church in Philadelphia

Most of the seven churches in [Revelation 2–3](#) had both strengths and weaknesses. In these cases, Jesus commended the strengths and offered concern and correction for the weaknesses. Yet the church in Philadelphia deserved little criticism, so Jesus celebrated them with joyous fanfare. As you observe [3:8–13](#), take note of what Jesus said He “will” do for these faithful believers.<sup>1</sup>

# Little Strength, Open Door, Awesome God

## *Revelation 3:7–13*

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According to [Revelation 3:8a](#), what did Jesus “know” about the church in Philadelphia? What did He do with this knowledge?

In [3:8b](#), Jesus observed that these believers had “little strength.” What did they do despite their weak state? What did they *not* do?

According to [3:9](#), what would happen to “Satan’s synagogue”—to those Jews who mistreated the followers of Jesus in Philadelphia?

By contrast, what did Jesus say He would do because the believers in Philadelphia obeyed His “command to persevere,” according to [3:10](#)?

What additional word of comfort and hope did Jesus offer to this struggling church in [3:11](#)?

# Little Strength, Open Door, Awesome God

*Revelation 3:7–13*

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According to [Revelation 3:12–13](#), what did Jesus say would happen to those who “listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying”? What kind of victory would they obtain?

*If a church has a big God, it accomplishes big things regardless of the church’s numerical size. If a church is large and impressive and even influential in the eyes of the world but has a little God, it doesn’t get a whole lot done.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## Interpretation: The God of Impossibilities

The church in Philadelphia faced *impossible* difficulties—at least impossible for humans to handle. These believers had little resources and limited influence, and they faced hostility for their beliefs. Yet they trusted God and remained steadfast in their obedience.

What timeless truths does the example of this community demonstrate about persevering amid impossible circumstances?

[Revelation 3:10](#) plays an important role in clarifying the message of this letter. Read this verse in a more word-for-word translation (like the New American Standard Bible), and notice the parallel language. Because the believers in Philadelphia “kept” Jesus’ word, He promised to “keep” them from the hour of testing.

The Greek term Jesus used in this verse is [tereo](#), and it has an elastic meaning. Look it up in the Greek lexicon, available for free at [billmounce.org](#), and consider the range of possible translations. Based on the context of this verse, what unique sense does each use of “keep” have? Write your own translation in the spaces below.

You have “kept” the word: \_\_\_\_\_

I also will “keep” you: \_\_\_\_\_

# Little Strength, Open Door, Awesome God

*Revelation 3:7–13*

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In light of this examination, what does this verse reveal about rewards for believers who remain faithful to Christ despite their difficult circumstances? Be sure to consider the contrast between [Revelation 3:9](#) and [3:10](#).

*We who much prefer our plan to God's surprises often are too short-sighted to value the changes He has in mind for us, which will lead us inevitably to real contentment. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Correlation: The Key of David**

In Jesus' introduction to His letter to the church in Philadelphia, He described Himself as the One who possesses “the key of David” ([Revelation 3:7](#)). This language alludes to a prophecy from [Isaiah 22](#), in which God confronted a corrupt royal administrator named Shebna. According to [22:16–18](#), how did Shebna misuse his position of influence? How would God judge his actions?

Because of Shebna's wickedness, God would replace him with someone who better reflected the heart of God. According to [22:20](#), who would succeed Sheba as the royal administrator? According to [22:22](#), what kind of unique authority would he have?

Because Eliakim was a righteous person, God gave him the key of David—human authority to carry out royal affairs on behalf of the people of Israel. Centuries later, another would hold this same key—though He would possess eternal, divine authority.

# Little Strength, Open Door, Awesome God

## *Revelation 3:7–13*

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What unique authority did the key of David give Jesus? In other words, what door does He open and not close? Compare [Revelation 1:18](#) and [3:7–8](#). For some guidance answering this question, feel free to 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>

Only Jesus holds the keys of death and life. Anyone who wants to walk through the door of everlasting life *must* go through Him. When you walk through this door, nothing will close it and lock it again—no matter how impossible your situation may seem.



### **Application: Opportunities, Vision, and Faith**

The believers in Philadelphia made up a small community with limited resources. Yet they maintained fidelity and boldness for the gospel of Jesus. In other words, this church had *enormous opportunities* that allowed God to work in and through it.

Pastor Chuck believes everyone should learn to see their impossible situations as great opportunities in which God can do great things. He refers to these circumstances as “insurmountable opportunities,” about which he shares two application points.

First, *insurmountable opportunities turn our attention back to God, which ignites vision*. As you reflect on the most impossible moments in your life, God might have felt absent. As you look back now, how can you see that His strong, guiding hand carried you through the difficulty? How can remembering His past faithfulness give you eyes to see Him work in the present?

Second, *insurmountable opportunities force us to trust completely in God, which prompts faith*. You might be facing an impossible situation right now. What, from a human perspective, makes it feel impossible? What practical steps can you take to adopt a divine perspective and to trust God with the outcome of your circumstances?



# Little Strength, Open Door, Awesome God

*Revelation 3:7–13*

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As you look at the mountain before you, it may seem unscalable. Yet God has laid out a path for you. Trust Him to lead you over the rocky terrain—step-by-step, opportunity by opportunity. When you stand at the summit, you will look back in awe as you see how God made possible the impossible.



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, I know I cannot conquer my impossible circumstances on my own. So help me to see them as opportunities to trust You and to grow. You never promised this life would be easy, but You do offer hope that everything will be made right one day. Help me never to forget that—especially when I feel weak, small, and insignificant. In Jesus' great 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 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

## STUDY TEN

### The Church That Nauseates God

*Revelation 3:14–22*

*Does Christ live within your life or outside? If He's outside, why not open the door? If He's inside, is He enthroned? If He's not, what's keeping Him at a distance?*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**H**AVE you ever thought about what makes God sick? Have you ever considered what kind of behavior repulses Him? It's a tough and uncomfortable exercise . . . but a necessary one.

Because God is holy and righteous, loving and good, He finds all sin destructive and sickening. Yet throughout Scripture, He highlights certain actions he finds particularly problematic. In one instance, Jesus wrote a letter telling the recipients He wanted to *vomit* them out of His mouth. Shockingly, he addressed this letter not to an evil empire but to a *church*!

What would lead Jesus to say something so startling as this to His own people? This *Searching the Scriptures* study will take a careful look at exactly *why* this church made Jesus sick. These strong words warn and guide us all today into leading lives that make Jesus applaud.



#### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Because God is holy, He cannot allow sin into His presence. Thankfully, He has offered to cleanse us from our unrighteousness through the sacrifice of Jesus. Claim that forgiveness before you meet with Him through His Word:

*Father, I know that any sin—no matter how small I think it may be—upsets You. I confess I am not holy as You are holy. Forgive me today. I want to live a holy life. I want to love You well throughout my days. I don't want my impure motives, desires, or thoughts to get in the way. Guide me, now. In Jesus' name, amen.*



# The Church That Nauseates God

*Revelation 3:14–22*

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## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The seven churches that received letters from Jesus in [Revelation 2–3](#) each faced uniquely challenging circumstances—just as we each face our own difficult situations today. That’s why these ancient letters are so valuable!

According to [Revelation 3:14](#), which church did Jesus address *seventh*? How did He describe Himself, and with what description from [1:4–5](#) does His self-description match?

In the first six letters, Jesus identified Himself using descriptors from [1:12–18](#), but in this final letter, He harkened back to the beginning of the book. By structuring the account this way, John created bookends for Revelation’s introductory chapters in order to highlight one of the most important themes of the book: Jesus Christ is *the* ruler of creation. Not Caesar. Not Satan. Jesus.

The letter to the church in Laodicea comes last because it challenges anyone who serves King Jesus. Laodicea was a thriving metropolis, but it relied on irrigated water from nearby cities—specifically, the cold springs in Colossae and the hot springs in Hierapolis. To learn more, you can read about [Laodicea](#) in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible*, available for free at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com).

Based on this context, the notion of lukewarm water would have been familiar to the recipients of Jesus’ letter. Because of the many miles of irrigation, the cold water would have warmed, and the hot water would have cooled by the time it reached the lips of Laodicea’s residents. In a time that didn’t have temperature-controlled water, what separate benefits would cold and hot water provide to the Laodiceans?

Let’s now turn to [Revelation 3:15–22](#) to see how the lukewarm behavior of the Laodicean believers tasted to Jesus.

# The Church That Nauseates God

*Revelation 3:14–22*

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## Observation: The Church in Laodicea

Jesus ended His series of letters to the churches in Asia Minor in [Revelation 2–3](#) on a rather low, unpleasant note. While He tended to celebrate these churches before correcting the areas of concern, He simply confronted the sins of the Laodiceans. Because [Revelation 3:15–22](#) marks the final letter, we must listen well to Jesus’ message by *observing* carefully what He said.<sup>1</sup>

According to [3:15](#), what did Jesus “know” about the church in Laodicea? What did He desire to be different?

How did Jesus say He would respond to this knowledge, according to [3:16](#)? Be sure to read this verse in several translations to experience the full force of Jesus’ words.

According to [3:17](#), what kinds of claims did the believers in Laodicea make about themselves? What did Jesus identify, with a twist of irony, as their *true* state? Look for five identifiers Jesus listed.

Jesus addressed the *concern*, and then He moved on to provide an appropriate *correction*. According to [3:18](#), what advice did He offer this lukewarm community? What divine goods did He want them to “buy” instead of those temporary, unsatisfying human wares?

# The Church That Nauseates God

## Revelation 3:14–22

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Jesus' words may feel strong, yet He explained His reason for speaking this way in [Revelation 3:19–20](#). Why did Jesus speak to His Laodicean followers with such harsh words? What invitation did He offer?

According to [3:21–22](#), what did Jesus say would happen to those who “listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying”? What kind of victory would they obtain?

*There have been days in my life when I've been lukewarm. Yet He never threw me out. He never kicked me out the back door and slammed it shut and locked it from the inside. He talked straight to me. He gave me advice and offered solutions. But He never threw me out. And I'm glad for that.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



### Interpretation: Lukewarm Actions

When Jesus described the believers in Laodicea as “lukewarm” in [Revelation 3:16](#), He used a metaphor to describe their spiritual condition. We must always interpret such a literary device based on the context. Because the behavior of these believers wasn't refreshing like a cool glass of water or soothing like a warm mug of tea, Jesus warned He would vomit them out.

What specific actions of the Laodicean believers did Jesus find so nauseating? See especially [3:17](#). What other kinds of lukewarm behaviors likely repulse Jesus? If you want to uncover more theological truths about these verses, you can dig into Pastor Chuck's commentary, *Insights on Revelation*. Also, [Constable's Notes](#) is available for free at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).<sup>2</sup>

# The Church That Nauseates God

*Revelation 3:14–22*

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Despite these severe words of warning from Jesus, this letter ultimately offers hope—just as the entire book of Revelation sings a song of hope. What is hopeful about Jesus’ words, especially [Revelation 3:18–20](#)? In what sense did Jesus offer the solution to these lukewarm believers’ problems?

*God declares us righteous because we come to the cross naked, needy, broken, sinful, depraved creatures, and He clothes us in a righteousness that is pure—brilliantly white—for all eternity. He offers us a white garment that will cover the shame of our nakedness. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Correlation: Jesus, the “Amen”

The term *amen* usually signals the end of a prayer. It’s a term of affirmation—like saying, “So be it! I agree! That’s right!” But how is Jesus the Amen? Let’s examine this term in its biblical context to get a better sense of its dynamic meaning.

Read [Psalm 106:48](#) and [Isaiah 65:16](#) and summarize how the term “amen” is used in context. (For this second reference, the Hebrew word translated “truth” is “amen.”) How do these verses help you better understand the meaning of *amen*?

In [2 Corinthians 1:20](#), the apostle Paul said, “For all of God’s promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding ‘Yes!’ And through Christ, our ‘Amen’ (which means ‘Yes’) ascends to God for his glory.” How does seeing Jesus as the Amen to God’s promises offer hope specifically to the believers in Laodicea?

# The Church That Nauseates God

*Revelation 3:14–22*

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Because Jesus is the Amen to God's promises, He is also the answer to all the world's problems. He stands knocking at the door of every human heart, eager to help us, waiting for us to let Him in.



## **Application: Heaven Knocking on Earth's Door**

The letter to the church in Laodicea is valuable for both believers and nonbelievers, for both new and seasoned Christians alike. Use the following points to help you apply the truth of this timeless letter:

- If Jesus is outside your life, open the door and let Him in.
- If Jesus is inside your life, give Him the throne and let Him rule.
- If Jesus is convicting you about releasing something, let it go.

Which of these three points resonate with your present situation the most? What practical steps can you take to respond to this letter?

Has some aspect of your spiritual life grown lukewarm lately? In what ways can you “buy” the renewed life that Jesus offers?

Take a few minutes to reread all of [Revelation 2–3](#). As you read each of the seven letters, ask yourself, “Does this letter speak to the circumstances of my Christian community today?” Which ancient church do you most identify with? What would it look like for you to practically follow Jesus’ timeless exhortations to that church today?



# The Church That Nauseates God

*Revelation 3:14–22*

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Jesus is standing at the door. Never be afraid to let Him in. He offers new spotless garments to anyone who wants them. No matter how nasty the sin, He will come in, clean you up, and relish your newfound righteousness.

Do you hear Him knocking? *Let Him in.*



## A FINAL PRAYER

Conclude your time in this *Searching the Scriptures* study by saying this prayer by Pastor Chuck:

*Father, I love You, and I lay my life before You. I trust You to take the truth that's been revealed and drill it home. Convict me of the truth. Keep me restless until my heart is at rest with You. Keep me in Your will as I seek to walk it and talk it and live it. In the name of Jesus 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 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

## STUDY ELEVEN

### Standing before God's Awesome Throne

*Revelation 4:1–11*

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*Hawaii, Paris, Tahiti. They ain't heaven. Nothing on this earth is anything like heaven. Nothing. Why? Because when you move from the creature comforts and the tangible benefits and the ecstatic pleasures that we have on this earth, nothing will look familiar in that resplendent, glorious place of worship. The word for it is incomprehensible.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**B**LINDING lights. Deafening booms. Dancing flames. Frightening beasts. Never-ending shouting. *What do these startling images depict?* Natural disasters? A warzone? The end of the world?

No, these are descriptions of *heaven*.

Such pictures don't exactly match up with the way art historically has portrayed heaven. When we think of heaven, we imagine a palace floating in the clouds, chubby babies flying on white feathered wings and strumming tiny golden harps, a beautiful landscape with a perfectly temperate climate. That may sound like paradise. Yet heaven is more than an idyllic location.

Heaven is God's home. In heaven, His glory shines more brightly than lightning, sings more loudly than thunder, glows more warmly than fire. Those who behold His majesty can do nothing but fall down and worship Him.

In this *Searching this Scriptures* study, we will step into the heavenly throne room to see why He is worthy of our praise—both now and forevermore.



# Standing before God's Awesome Throne

*Revelation 4:1–11*

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

God invites you to bring your needs and desires to Him in prayer. He wants to hear them! Yet prayer also provides an opportunity to worship—to tell God why you love Him and to express your confidence in Him. Write your own prayer of worship in the space below to prepare your heart for your time in God's Word.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The drama of Revelation unfolds in several acts. The opening chapter is the prelude. Then [Revelation 2–3](#) directly addresses seven churches throughout Asia Minor—the original recipients of the book. In [Revelation 4](#), a voice from above guides John through a door into heaven. As he enters God's presence, John welcomes his readers into the next major act of his grand narrative.

This section of Revelation contains the vivid pictures that make the book famous. These chapters contain movements of “apocalyptic prophecy.” Prophecy offers us a glimpse of the future. Yet the apocalyptic nature of the visions gives us insights into present realities. This unique combination gives readers of Revelation throughout time guidance on how to live in the present in light of the future. Let's see what timeless lessons we can learn from [4:1–11](#).



## Observation: The Heavenly Throne Room

John's eyes had never seen anything like his vision of God seated on His heavenly throne. John simply didn't have the language to describe what he saw. So he resorted to using similes—comparisons using “like” or “as”—to explain his mysterious vision. As you observe [Revelation 4:1–11](#), pay special attention to these human descriptions of divine realities.<sup>1</sup>

John's vision begins with him seeing an image of a door open in heaven and hearing a loud voice. According to [4:1](#), what did this voice say to him?

# Standing before God's Awesome Throne

## *Revelation 4:1–11*

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The voice that called John used the expression “after these things” (*Revelation 4:1* NASB). John highlighted this phrase all throughout Revelation both as a *literary* marker (to signal a transition to the next portion of his narrative) and as a *temporal* marker (to indicate a sequence of events). As you journey through this book, keep an eye out for these words to help you navigate John’s visions.

In this vision, three things drew John’s attention. First—and naturally—John’s eyes fell upon God’s throne. How did John describe what he saw in *4:2–3*? According to *4:5–6a*, what else did John see when he looked at the throne? Imagine yourself in John’s sandals seeing these fantastic sights!

Second, John saw a group of twenty-four elders. How did John describe what he saw in *4:4*? According to *4:10–11*, what did these elders do and say in response to God’s glorious presence?

Third, John beheld four living beasts. How did John describe what he saw in *4:6b–8a*? According to *4:8b*, what did the beasts say to “give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne” (*Revelation 4:9*)?

*That’s why we were created. It’s all for His glory, for His purpose. That’s why we live. Our births, our death, our achievements, our failures . . . it’s all about the One who is worthy to receive glory and honor and praise.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

# Standing before God's Awesome Throne

*Revelation 4:1–11*

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## Interpretation: Worship in Heaven

Since his mind could hardly fathom what he beheld, John used his limited earthly vocabulary to depict heavenly glory. How does John's use of language affect the way we think about heaven as we read its descriptions in Revelation?

In [Revelation 4:10](#), John explained that he saw the elders laying their crowns before the throne. The New Testament authors used several different Greek terms that we translate as “crown.” The crowns on the heads of these elders do not signify rule or authority—like a royal crown. Rather, the term John used was *stephanos*.

Look up [stephanos](#) in the Greek lexicon, available for free at [billmounce.com](http://billmounce.com), and summarize what this kind of crown represents. Why is it significant that these elders wore this kind of crown? What does their willingness to lay these crowns at God's feet reveal?

Central to this heavenly scene is the refrain from the angelic beasts: “Holy, Holy, Holy!” Though God's goodness, mercy, grace, love, and righteousness make up essential components of His character, the heavenly host worships Him because He is, above all else, *holy*.

Using your Bible-study tools (like [Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#)) do some research on the term *holy*. Record what you learn in the space below. Why does God's holiness make Him worthy of our praise?

# Standing before God's Awesome Throne

## *Revelation 4:1–11*

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Much of this scene may still feel a bit confusing. For example, many have speculated about the identity of the twenty-four elders noted in [Revelation 4:4](#). Are they angels or humans? Old Testament saints or New Testament martyrs? Some combination of the above? Yet John never tries to identify them! He simply wrote down what he saw—even if he didn't totally understand what it was.

Now, as John looked around Jesus' heavenly throne room, he *did* see something remarkably familiar, though strange . . . the quartet of mismatched beings worshipping Jesus.



### **Correlation: A Vision of Heaven**

John had never seen anything like the creatures that worshiped God. But he had *read* about them in an account from another man who received a vision of heaven. Read about this vision in [Ezekiel 1:4–14, 22–28](#). Then record the ways Ezekiel's and John's visions overlap.

Why is it significant that these two accounts share so much in common? What does this consistency reveal about God and heaven? For some help wrestling with these questions, feel free to consult a commentary, like Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Revelation*.<sup>2</sup> Or, for a free resource, check out [Constable's Notes](#), which are available online at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).

*This myriad of angels ceaselessly give praise to Him who is worthy of honor and glory and blessing and majesty. And we fiddle around on this earth worried about our plans and our disappointments and our future and our money and our hopes and our dreams, when in the final analysis, all of that fades before the throne of Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

# Standing before God's Awesome Throne

*Revelation 4:1–11*

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## Application: Worship on Earth

To apply the truths of *Revelation 4:1–11*, we must consider both the present and the future. Focusing on one while ignoring the other will produce a Christian faith that lacks depth. Consider the following application points as you reflect on your life.

- If you tend to ignore the future, recognize that certain end-times events must take place.
- If you tend to oversimplify what's ahead, realize that most of the scenes of heaven are nearly incomprehensible.
- If you tend to think it's all about you, remember that, in the end, it will be all about our God.

As you consider your own life, do your thoughts, worries, and fears fall more so on the present or the future? What would it practically look like for you to live a life of faith in the present based on the future hope you have in Jesus Christ?

The heavenly throne room can be summarized in one word: *worship*. The beasts cried, “Holy!” The elders shouted, “Worthy!” What would it look like for you to practice expressive worship in your own life? Perhaps you can set aside a time each day to verbally state your love, gratitude, and praise to God. Write down some other ideas in the space below.

Worship involves more than just singing songs of praise. This is why the elders laid their crowns at God's feet. What “crowns” has He given you? What steps can you take to give these crowns back to Him as a sacrificial act of worship?



# Standing before God's Awesome Throne

*Revelation 4:1–11*

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Only God is holy. Only He is worthy. To Him, we give *all* glory and honor and thanks. Such power is so great that we, like John, often fail to comprehend it. Yet John's lack of understanding didn't stop him from joining the chorus of worship to God in His eternal throne room. And if He is going to be worshiped for eternity, why not lift your voice up now?



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, I worship You because You are the holy and worthy creator. I worship You because You sent Your Son Jesus to die in my place. I worship You because You brought Him back to life. May my life be a fragrant offering to You in all that I think, say, and do. In Jesus' holy 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 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

## STUDY TWELVE

### Worthy Is the Lamb

*Revelation 5:1–14*

*In the future, we will see Jesus in a different role than we've ever known Him. We've always known Him as Servant, Savior, Redeemer, Forgiver, and even Friend. In the book of the Revelation, however, we see Jesus in a new role that is essential for the fulfillment of prophecy as well as the plan God has arranged. It is essential there be the judgment upon this earth.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**I**F you look around most American courtrooms, you will see the same cast of characters. The defendant, who stands under the inspection of the law. The prosecutor or plaintiff, who brings the accusation. The attorneys, who represent the parties involved in the case. The witnesses, who testify to the case. The jurors, who listen to the case and collectively decide the verdict based on the evidence.

Yet no courtroom is complete without a *judge*. He or she sits in a central, elevated seat for all to see. The judge knows the law better than anyone else in the room. Judges spend years mastering the history of its composition, the nature of its complexities, and the application of its content. Indeed, only the judge is worthy to oversee the legal proceedings, issue the sentence, and strike the gavel that closes the case. Good judges help cleanse their communities of crime and uphold justice.

Our world needs good judges—those who can bring an end to those injustices which often bring us to tears. Violence, deception, betrayal, and hatred tear apart families and nations. We long for the day when sin sits on the stand and is sentenced to its execution. Yet no mere human judge can defeat the full power of sin.

For that reason, our world needs a *divine* judge to enact complete justice.

Because Jesus Christ is perfectly righteous and holy and powerful, only He is worthy to declare Satan, sin, and death, “Guilty!” Though we daily feel the biting pain of these powers, we can praise God because Jesus will soon return to bang the gavel and forever rid His precious creation of evil.



# Worthy Is the Lamb

*Revelation 5:1–14*

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Say this prayer as you prepare to search the Scriptures today:

*Father, every day, I feel evil pressing in on me. I watch sin harming those I love. I sense death looming ever closer. Yet, I praise You because I know that You have the final word. As I open my Bible today, give me confidence as I await the return of Jesus to judge the wickedness of this world. In His just name I pray. Amen.*



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The central message of the New Testament is that Jesus is *the Christ*. The Greek term *Christ* is a translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*, which refers to someone who is anointed. In the Old Testament, several groups received anointing, like kings, prophets, and priests. Jesus Christ fulfills all these roles and many more.

[Deuteronomy 16:18–20](#) tells of another anointed office in the community of Israel. What was this other role that Jesus fulfilled? What were the essential responsibilities of this role?

Now, let's turn to [Revelation 5:1–14](#) to see what makes Jesus a *worthy* judge.



## Observation: The Slaughtered Lamb

John's sequence of visions continues in [Revelation 5:1–14](#). As you read these verses, focus specifically on observing what John says rather than speculating about what the images might represent.<sup>1</sup> We will focus on the meaning of John's words in the interpretation phase.

The next thing John noticed in his vision of God's heavenly throne room was a scroll. According to [5:1](#), how did John describe this scroll?

# Worthy Is the Lamb

## *Revelation 5:1–14*

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In [Revelation 5:2](#), a strong angel asked, “Who is worthy to break the seals on this scroll and open it?” What did John conclude in [5:3](#), and how did he react to this conclusion in [5:4](#)?

How did one of the twenty-four elders respond to John in [5:5](#)?

In [5:5](#), the elder directed John’s attention to “the Lion of the tribe of Judah.” Yet, when John turned in [5:6](#), He didn’t see a lion. What did John see instead?

According to [5:8–10](#), how did the four living beasts and the twenty-four elders respond when the Lamb took the scroll? Why did they consider the Lamb worthy to break the scroll’s seals and open it?

In [5:11–13](#), the rest of the angelic host joined the chorus of worship. According to this song of praise, what is the Lamb worthy to receive? What rightly belongs to Him?

# Worthy Is the Lamb

*Revelation 5:1–14*

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*This is the most glorious chorus of praise ever. And one day, your voice will be heard in it, and my voice will be heard in it. Is that great or what?*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## Interpretation: The Living Lamb

When John realized that no one in the heavenly throne room could open the scroll, he wept. Why did the sealed scroll cause John such sorrow? To answer this question, you may need to preview what occurs in Revelation's coming chapters. For additional guidance, feel free to consult your Bible-study tools, like Pastor Chuck's commentary, *Insights on Revelation*.<sup>2</sup> For a free online resource, check out [Constable's Notes](http://netbible.org) at netbible.org.

*Revelation 5:1–14* identifies Jesus both as the Lion of Judah and as the slaughtered lamb. How is Jesus the slaughtered lamb? How is He the Lion of Judah? Why is Jesus as the Lion of Judah important in this chapter and in Revelation in general?

In *5:5*, one of the elders tells John that Jesus is worthy to open the scroll because He “has won the victory.” Then, in *5:9*, the angelic chorus sings that He is worthy because He was slaughtered. This seems like a paradoxical statement. How did Jesus achieve victory *by* being slaughtered? What did He do that makes Him worthy to open this scroll? Remember to consult your resources.

*There is only one qualified to be judge. That's why He's the object of our worship and the subject of our praise. How reassuring the role that Christ will fill as these events unfold! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

# Worthy Is the Lamb

*Revelation 5:1–14*

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## Correlation: The Passover Lamb

The words of [Revelation 5:1–14](#) recalled one of Israel’s most significant and long-standing traditions: the Passover. Read [Exodus 12:1–13](#). In your own words, summarize the custom of the Passover lamb. What kind of lamb did God command the people to select? What were they to do with the lamb? What would happen if they did (or did *not*) obey Him?

The people of Israel celebrated the festival of the Passover every year to look back in remembrance of God’s faithfulness to deliver them from slavery in Egypt. Yet not every Israelite might have realized that this custom also looked *ahead* to the coming of another Lamb.

In what ways did the Passover anticipate the arrival of Jesus, the suffering servant of Israel (see [Isaiah 53](#))? What are the parallel results of the deaths of these two spotless lambs?

The sacrifice of lambs, no matter how pure and white, would never be enough to satisfy God’s wrath against sin. Only the death of the *holy* Lamb—His own Son—could do that. Jesus’ death was the final sacrifice. Through His resurrection, He now offers this redemption that He purchased and eternal life that He earned. Those who trust Him may still experience physical death, but the second death will pass them over.



## Application: The Redeeming Lamb

When John realized Jesus could unseal the scroll of redemption, he stopped weeping because he knew that Jesus would finally right all the world’s wrongs. Based on this passage, Pastor Chuck listed three reasons for us to rejoice:

- It’s *comforting* for believers in Jesus Christ to know their ultimate destination.
- It’s *reassuring* to know that the Lamb of God is qualified to carry out God’s plan.
- It’s *thrilling* to engage in the worship and praise of Jesus Christ while we wait.

# Worthy Is the Lamb

*Revelation 5:1–14*

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How does knowing Jesus is the worthy judge offer you comfort in your present circumstances? How does Jesus' authority and your promised future influence how you live today?

In what ways have you tried to handle the injustices, small or big, of this world rather than waiting patiently for Jesus to set things right? What does it look like practically to trust Him to carry out God's plan?

The chorus of heavenly angels offered a brief—yet powerful—list of their reasons for praising God. For what other reasons do *you* praise God? List some specific, personal reasons why He deserves your worship.

You may look at the world around you and feel like weeping. There's so much sin, death, pain, and injustice. Creation is groaning for a judge to sentence this evil to its eternal demise. It often feels like no one can set things right. Thankfully, there is a worthy judge. His name is Jesus. He is our friend, our Savior, our Lord. And He will return as the perfect, righteous judge creation has awaited for so long. So let's praise Him while we wait in hope.



# Worthy Is the Lamb

*Revelation 5:1–14*

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## 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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Insight for Living Ministries

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# Insight for Living Ministries

## The Bible-Teaching Ministry of Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Insight for Living Ministries is committed to excellence in communicating the truths of Scripture and the person of Jesus Christ in an accurate, clear, and practical manner so that people will come to an understanding of God's plan for their lives, as well as their significant role as authentic Christians in a needy, hostile, and desperate world. That commitment has been our mission from our beginning in 1979, and it will never change. Visit [insight.org](http://insight.org).

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# REVELATION UNVEILING THE END, ACT 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

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# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES BIBLE STUDIES

## REVELATION

### *Unveiling the End, Act 1*

### *The Heavenly Stage*

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For the 2024 broadcasts, these *Searching the Scriptures* studies were developed by Brad Smith, writer and content strategist, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

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Printed in the United States of America



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