

REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 3 THE FINAL CURTAIN

STUDY FOUR

The Final Seven Super Bowls

Revelation 16

You never know when it's your last opportunity. That's not meant to manipulate you. It's a fact. For somebody, this next minute will be his or her last. Postponing repentance is regrettable. The Lord graciously gives you the opportunity to turn to Him, and in full compassion, He's waiting for you to reach back. I invite you to do that today.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

HAVE you ever left your home on a long trip and forgotten to arrange for someone to care for your plants?

When you get home, you stare at the wilted flowers littering the ground, the shriveled-up leaves, and the sad stalks drooping downward. You immediately prune the dying parts, place the plant in the sun, and give it some water. The next day you give it more water, but nothing changes. In fact, it looks worse. You realize that no amount of water will save this dead-to-the-core plant . . .

It's too late.

Some people fear that their souls are like this underwatered plant. As if sin has dried up all goodness to the point that they're past saving. As if it's too late even for God to save them.

This feeling, though, misses the reality of the unlimited mercy of our God. Because of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ—God's own son—no sin is too great for His forgiveness. No one who comes seeking this forgiveness will ever hear God reply, "You're too late."

Yet a time will come when Jesus returns to earth to deal with evil for good. In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we will examine that day. Indeed, that will be a dreadful day for those who reject God. But until that day arrives, we still have hope in this rock-solid truth. No matter how lost a person may feel or seem, new life through Christ is available.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Is it too late for me? Have you ever had this thought—the thought that God’s mercy has run out on you? The message of this study is simple: As long as you have breath, *it’s not too late!* God is totally merciful, totally loving, totally patient, totally forgiving. Before you turn to today’s passage, write your own prayer expressing your gratitude for His mercy.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

God’s judgment against Satan, sin, and death plays a central role in the drama of Revelation. This judgment occurs in three acts of seven judgments. John presented these cycles as nested within one another. The seventh seal judgment launched the seven trumpet judgments, and the seventh trumpet judgment announced the arrival of the seven bowl judgments.

Review the nature of these judgments in the chart below.¹ Like God’s judgment against the ancient Egyptians who held His people captive, God gradually increased the intensity of these judgments to demonstrate His absolute power over creation.

| | Seals (6:1–8:5) | Trumpets (8:6–9:21) | Bowls (16:1–21) |
|----------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| First | Conquest | Hail and fire | Malignant sores |
| Second | Warfare | Meteor shower | Poisoned seas |
| Third | Famine and poverty | Water pollution | Poisoned fresh water |
| Fourth | Death | Darkness | Humanity scorched |
| Fifth | Persecution | Demonic locusts | Widespread darkness |
| Sixth | Earthquake | Demonic hordes | Vast military invasion |
| Seventh | Trumpet judgments | Bowl judgments | Earthquake and hail |

Let’s now turn to [Revelation 16](#) to experience the conclusion of this cycle of judgment.

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Observation: The Bowl Judgments

At the beginning of *Revelation 16*, John noted that he heard a mighty voice that told the angels, “Go your ways and pour out on the earth the seven bowls containing God’s wrath” (*Revelation 16:1*). As you read this chapter, *observe* not only what happened as each angel poured out his bowl but also how the people experiencing the judgment responded.²

Natural Disaster—Revelation 16:2–9

According to *Revelation 16:2*, what happened when the *first* angel poured out his bowl? Who did this judgment affect specifically?

According to *16:3*, what happened when the *second* angel poured out his bowl?

According to *16:4*, what happened when the *third* angel poured out his bowl?

In *16:5–7*, we experience a brief interlude that offers an explanation for the nature of the second and third bowl judgments. Based on these verses, why did God judge the earth in this manner?

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According to *Revelation 16:8–9*, what happened when the *fourth* angel poured out his bowl? How did the people respond—or *not* respond—to this judgment?

Wicked Rulers—Revelation 16:10–16

The first four bowl judgments brought horror upon the earth unlike anything humankind had ever known. Yet people *still* refused to turn to God. So God proceeded with His judgment.

According to *Revelation 16:10–11*, what happened when the *fifth* angel poured out his bowl? Note how the people's response paralleled that of the *fourth* bowl judgment.

According to *16:12*, what happened when the *sixth* angel poured out his bowl?

This sixth bowl judgment anticipates a key moment in human history: the battle between God and His enemies at Armageddon. We read of this climactic clash in greater detail later in Revelation, but John offered some foreshadowing here. According to *16:13–16*, how did the sixth bowl judgment prepare the way for what would later take place at Armageddon?

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A Somber Conclusion—Revelation 16:17–21

According to *Revelation 16:17*, what declaration did John *hear* when the *seventh* angel poured out his bowl? What did he then *see* in *16:18, 20–21*?

John included an interesting note in *16:19*—that Babylon and other great Gentile cities “fell into heaps of rubble.” Why did God cause this to happen?

The seventh bowl marks the completion of the cycles of judgment. Despite such a magnificent display of God’s power, the people refused to repent and even “cursed God.” God had given them plenty of chances, but they chose to suffer rather than to receive the mercy of Jesus Christ. For them, it was too late.



Interpretation: Cycles of Judgment

Why does the book of Revelation present God’s judgment taking place in increasingly intense cycles? What does this method reveal about God’s character? For help answering these questions, consult your Bible-study resources like Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Revelation*, or *Constable’s Notes* at netbible.org.

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What does Revelation reveal about humanity's response to God's judgment and more broadly about the human condition? Compare the people's reactions as they experienced God's justice at the culmination of the seal ([Revelation 6:16–17](#)), trumpet ([11:13](#)), and bowl judgments ([16:21](#)).

This is our God—the true and righteous sovereign Lord who has for centuries patiently awaited the response of humanity to His offer of salvation. Graciously offering it, patiently with great long-suffering. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Culmination of Judgment

The sixth bowl describes a battle that would take place at a place called “Armageddon.” This name refers to a mountain or hill in the region of Megiddo—a region near the Jezreel Valley that was very familiar to the people of Israel. Find Megiddo using a Bible atlas or the maps at insight.org/general/bible-maps (see “[Topography of Palestine](#)”).

In the Old Testament, Megiddo was a significant site for the nation of Israel for both good and bad reasons. For a positive example, the judge Deborah and the military commander Barak defeated a faction of Canaanites at Megiddo amid Israel's conquest of the promised land (see [Judges 4:1–16; 5:12–19](#)). For a negative example, the Egyptian Pharaoh Neco killed Josiah—one of Judah's greatest, most righteous kings—at Megiddo (see [2 Kings 23:29–30](#)).

Why is it significant that the culmination of God's judgment would take place at such a storied site known for conflict between God's people and God's enemies? (For a look ahead at how the battle of Armageddon ends, check out [Revelation 19:11–21](#).)

God takes no delight in the judgment of the unrepentant. He doesn't want any to perish. He wants everyone to come to repentance. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: The Harsh Reality of Judgment

Passages that depict God's judgment challenge us. They remind us that our righteous God will not allow the dark spot of sin to pollute His pure and holy presence. Though we must contend with the reality of our own sin, we must never forget that God has offered us hope through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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Consider the following points for application:

1. *Escaping the reality of judgment is impossible.* Jesus will return as the righteous judge.
2. *Postponing repentance is regrettable.* Those who refuse Him will face His justice.

If you do not yet know Jesus, it's not too late for you to turn to God in repentance and experience the hope of everlasting life. But don't delay making this decision! A time will come when it *will* be too late. And you never know when that moment will happen.

If you are a follower of Jesus, remember that Christ has claimed the victory. You are no longer a slave to sin. In fact, you are *dead* to sin and *alive* in Christ Jesus. God wants you to live this new life for your good and for His eternal glory.

How do you sense God leading you to respond to these challenging truths today?

If you feel like it's too late, remember that God's mercy will not run dry on you as long as you live. He wants to shower it down on you. All you need to do is come to Jesus—the living water—and experience the new life He wants you to live.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the reminder that Your grace is greater than my sin and that it's not too late to experience Your grace. I confess that I have broken Your law, and I receive Your forgiveness today. Help me lead a life closely connected to You, the source of life. In Jesus' patient name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 232.
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the article, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

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 © 2004, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

