

REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

STUDY FOUR

An Interlude: Earthly Restraint and Heavenly Worship

Revelation 7:1–17

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

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

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

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

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

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



PREPARE YOUR HEART

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

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



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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

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

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

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



Observation: The Sealed People of God

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

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

The 144,000—Revelation 17:1–8

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

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

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

The Vast Crowd—Revelation 17:9–17

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

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

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

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

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



Interpretation: Sealed with God’s Promise

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

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

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

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

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

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



Correlation: The Servant of Israel

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

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

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

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

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

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



Application: A Personal Interlude

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

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

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

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

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



A FINAL PRAYER

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

ENDNOTES

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

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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