

# The Beginning of the End

Week 50: December 10-16 — *Revelation 4-10*

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## Helpful Resources

Progressive Revelation (p.33), Interpretative Challenges (p.71), Order of End Time Events (p.73)

## Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

When reading a book or watching a television series, we always anticipate the last chapter or episode, in which the writer ties up all the loose ends and brings the drama to a close. That is the purpose of the book of *Revelation*. As the last book of the Bible, the Author (God) ties up all the loose ends and brings His story to its climactic finish. In fact, He tells John, "Write the things which you have seen, the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things" (*Rev. 1:19*). In other words, God laid out for us the sections of the book — "the things which you have seen" (*Rev. 1*), "the things which are" (*Rev. 2, 3*), and "the things which will take place after these things" (*Rev. 4-22*).

However, since most of *Revelation* is a glimpse into the future, it is important to be cautious with the interpretation of the details. Just as those who lived in the Old Testament were given prophecies of the coming Messiah, they were only given generalities, not the details, regarding who, what, when, where, or how. Now, we have these prophecies of the future, but our understanding is foggy at best (see the chart entitled, "Progressive Revelation"). We know generalities, but not the details, regarding who, what, when, where, and how.

Since we only know generalities regarding the future, there are various interpretations of the events of *Revelation*, regarding their order and timing. Take a minute to read the article entitled, "Interpretative Challenges in *Revelation*," then observe the chart, "Order of End Time Events." Like forecasting inclement weather, we know generally what might happen, but when it comes to pinpointing the timing, location, and severity with detail, even the meteorologists are guessing. We, too, must proceed with caution. With *Revelation*, we know generally what is going to take place, but explaining details with certainty is impossible.

As in any book or TV series, *Revelation* has a setting, characters, and the plot. In this review, we will consider these elements as we unfold the beginning of the end.

- The Setting

The book of *Revelation* is ordered nicely. Its chapters move from big picture to minute details and follow a logical progression. The book also opens with a setting in which the story unfolds. John first sees a vision of God's throne room in heaven (*Rev. 4*). This setting establishes a base of operations for the story's crazy plot twists and turns.

- The Characters

John's vision of the setting also introduces us to some of the characters who play a part in the end (*Rev. 4*). For example, God is on His throne (*v.1-3*). His throne is surrounded by smaller thrones of 24 elders (*v.4*). Then, there are seven lamps of fire burning before God's

throne, representing the Holy Spirit (v.5). Next, there are four living creatures around God's throne, each with six wings, having the appearance of a lion, calf, man, and eagle (v.6-8). John also sees angels, but the focus of attention is the Lion of Judah (Jesus), who is represented by a bloody Lamb (*Rev. 5*). All the characters in this setting praise and worship both the One on the throne and the Lamb (*4:8-11; 5:11-14*). Of course, more characters will be introduced into the story, but this is a good start.

- The Plot

Obviously, the theme of *Revelation* is the end of God's story. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end (*Rev. 1:8*), and like a masterful author, He completes what He started. We could summarize the end with two themes — recompensation and restoration. First, God will recompense (repay) judgment on those who deserve it, but He will also display great mercy and restore all things, making them new.

The judgment of God is fueled by the wrath of God, which burns against sin and wickedness. The judgments of *Revelation* will be aimed at the cursed earth, the godless, sin-indulgent people there, and the wicked forces of Satan. However, amid this terrible tribulation, God displays His mercy towards those who love the Lamb (144,000 Jews and the Great Multitude, *Rev. 7*). He protects His own, avenges them, and rewards their faithfulness.

- Moving the Story Along

The end begins when God presents a scroll having seven seals (*Rev. 5:1*). The scroll represents the stages of His judgment against earth and its wicked people. Only the Lamb (the Lion of Judah, Jesus) is worthy to break the seals and execute judgment (v.2, 3).

**Seven Seals** (*6:1-8:6*): The first four seals released the four horsemen of the apocalypse — a deceitful peace (white), war (red), famine (black), and death (pale or grey). The horsemen represent four human actions that have deadly consequences, all used by God for judgment. The fifth seal reveals the voice of the martyrs that cries out for vengeance on their enemies. The sixth seal unleashes global terror (earthquakes, astrological chaos, and falling stars).

**Seven Trumpets** (*8:6-10:11*): The first four trumpet judgments are meant to destroy creation — fire and hail, the bloody sea, the tainted fresh water, and the darkened sun, moon, and stars. The last three trumpet judgments are worse. They are aimed at the wicked people of earth. They include intense suffering and death (a third of the population). The last trumpet includes the seven bowl judgments. We will read about those in *Revelation 16*.

## The Bottom Line

Like a masterful author, God begins to tie up the loose ends and bring His story to a climactic close.

## Questions to Consider

1. What thoughts or impressions have you had when reading this week about the future?
2. Describe progressive revelation as best you can. How does it affect interpretation?
3. After reading the article entitled, "Interpretative Challenges," and after observing the chart called, "Order of End Time Events," which way do you lean? Explain why.
4. Why is Jesus (the Lion and the Lamb) the only one worthy to break the seals?
5. Is God justified in His wrath towards mankind, to the point of passing judgment? Explain.
6. Could God's *Revelation* judgments be taking place today? Why or why not?