

DRAMA OF THE SIXTH SEAL

The saga of earth's final days unfolds with the breaking of the sixth Seal of Revelation's seven-sealed scroll. During this fearful period, the final phases of earth's de-creation occur. Imagining this time:

"Concerning the condition of the earth 'in the beginning,' the Bible record says that it 'was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.' Genesis 1:2. **Prophecy teaches that it will be brought back, partially at least, to this condition.** Looking forward to the great day of God, the prophet Jeremiah declares: 'I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down.' Jeremiah 4:23-26."¹

"The whole earth appears like a desolate wilderness. The ruins of cities and villages destroyed by the earthquake, uprooted trees, ragged rocks thrown out by the sea or torn out of the earth itself, are scattered over its surface, while vast caverns mark the spot where the mountains have been rent from their foundations."²

This is how that desolation accelerates:

"And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood" (Revelation 6:12).

"And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal," (vs 12)

In the first and sixth Seals John specifically notes that he saw the Lamb open those Seals. One can assume he had an air of suspense, anticipating the subsequent events.

"and, lo, there was a great earthquake;" (vs 12)

What now begins will be later called the "*wrath of the Lamb*" and the "*day of his wrath*" (vss 16-17) – paralleling Old Testament thought called, "*the Day of the Lord.*" That refers to when the coming of the Lord is shortly anticipated; it is a **period of divine wrath** (Ezekiel 38:19-20; Joel 2:10, 30-31; Amos 8:8-9).

- A "time of divine wrath" was prominent even in extra-Biblical religious literature.³
- It is **when** God fully responds to the cries, "*How long?*" of the faithful (6:10) and **when** He begins His "*strange work,*" His "*strange acts*" (Isaiah 28:21).
- In the fifth Seal one observed God's delay, from the victim's perspective, which finally led up to the assurance of their personal salvation. Now God's judgments turn against

¹ White, *The Great Controversy* (Pacific Press Publishing Association; Mountain View, CA), p. 658 (emphasis added).

² *Ibid*, p. 657 (emphasis added).

³ Stefanovic, Ranko; *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs, MI; 2002), p. 242.

their oppressors with raging fury, beginning with this great earthquake.⁴ This alludes to the third angel's message (the "*wrath of God*" from the "*cup of His indignation*") in Revelation 14:9-11.

This pre-eschatological event is an immediate harbinger of God coming in judgment against His enemies.⁵

The same earthquake phenomenon is also presented during the seventh Vial Plague (Revelation 16:18-19). A sequel to this catastrophe is later noted in this Seal:

- "*And every mountain and island were moved out of their places*" (6:14). This specific drama occurs at the same time the seventh Vial Plague is unleashed:
- "*And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found*" (16:20).

It will be a time of terror and hopelessness that staggers the imagination and will surpass any horror yet experienced by humanity.⁶

- This is when God will finally and fully vindicate the reputation of His name and display His justice against evil.
- Persecution of Christians has finally run its course. God's neutralizing justice steps into history.⁷

The first five Seals reveal the end-time "players" anticipated in this apocalyptic book. Seal six pictures the culmination of history, when the last "act" of the evil "players" comes to their end.

- This vast earthquake is a signal that divinity has taken **full control** of earth's last segment of time.
- When God descended onto Mt. Sinai, ***His major debut as Israel's sovereign Leader***, the whole mountain shook violently (Exodus 19:18). Here, God's power upsets ***all of earth's foundation to announce that He will shortly return as King of Kings and Lord of Lords***. The wicked are adversely affected. This is a significant sign – the saints will know that their deliverance is at hand.

"Never since man was created had there been witnessed such a manifestation of divine power as when the law was proclaimed from Sinai. 'The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel.' Psalm 68:8. ***Amid the most terrific convulsions of nature the voice of God***, like a trumpet, was heard from the cloud. The mountain was shaken from base to summit, and the hosts of Israel, pale and trembling with terror, lay upon their faces upon the earth. He whose voice then shook the earth has declared, ***'Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.'***

⁴ Doukhan, Jacques B.; *Secrets of Revelation* (The Review and Herald Publishing Association; Hagerstown, MD 21740), p.66.

⁵ Bauckham, Richard J.; *The Climax of Prophecy* (T&T Clark; Edinburgh, Scotland), pp. 199-209.

⁶ Brighton, Louis A; *Revelation, Concordance Commentary* (Concordance Publishing House, Saint Louis; 1999), p. 173.

⁷ Beale, Gregory K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan – 1999), p. 396.

Hebrews 12:26. Says the Scripture, ‘The Lord shall roar from on high, and utter His voice from His holy habitation;’ ‘and the heavens and the earth shall shake.’ Jeremiah 25:30; Joel 3:16.”⁸

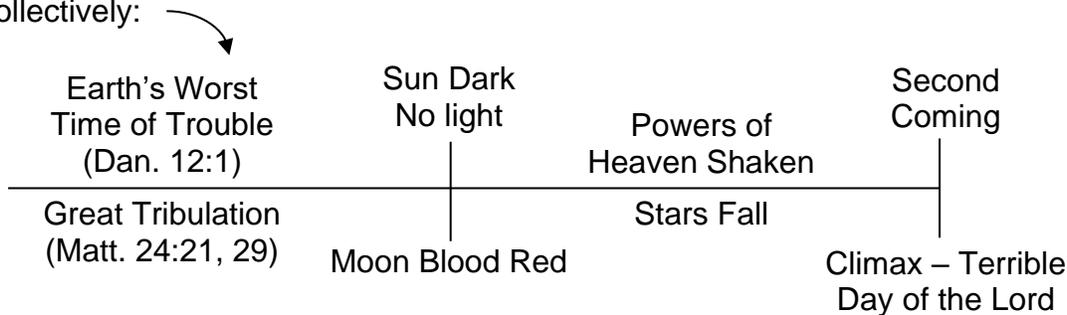
“and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood” (vs 12)

- This imagery is similar to that of the Olivet discourse, where Christ said: **“Immediately after** the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give her light” (Matthew 24:29a).
- A coarse coat was made of black goat’s hair called sackcloth. It was often worn at the time of mourning. The earth has symbolically entered a full state of mourning over its destruction by the blackness of the sun. The blood-colored moon furthers the image of this terrible time.⁹

This was prophesied in the Old Testament: *“The sunlight will be turned to darkness and the moon to the color of blood, before the day of the LORD comes – that great and terrible day!”* (Joel 2:31).

Peter had also predicted this event (Acts 2:17-21; cf. Isaiah 13:10, 50:3; Ezekiel 32:8).

Collectively:



“And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind” (Revelation 6:13).

- Jesus had noted that during these celestial sun/moon events, the stars would fall from the heavens (Matthew 24:29).
- This fulfils part of Luke’s *“fearful and great signs of heaven”* (Luke 21:11).¹⁰ This display will be terrifying. It is so intense that it is depicted as unripe figs falling from a tree in the wind.

The falling of the stars does not imply destruction of the heavens. It is to be considered an omen that occurs in anticipation of Christ’s arrival as part of the *“Day of the great Lord”*

⁸ White, Ellen G.; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 340.
⁹ Osborne, Grant R.; *Revelation* (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 292.
¹⁰ Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 1–7 – An Exegetical Commentary* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1992), p. 454.

(Ezekiel 32:7; Joel 2;10, 3:15).¹¹ This will be a time of terror to the wicked and a wonderful sign to the saints.

Many scholars question whether these celestial events are literal or figurative.

The similes in these verses allude to literal events.

- “The sun becomes black ... **as** (*hōs*) ... sackcloth of hair.
The moon becomes ... **as** (*hōs*) ... blood.
The stars of heaven fall to the earth ... **as** (*hōs*) ... a fig tree discards its figs.
The heavens split up ... **as** (*hōs*) ... a rolled-up scroll.”¹²
- In ancient thought, such a display of falling stars meant “the end has come.”¹³

As the world’s attention is gazing upward in chilling concern, the **next phase** in God’s “grand finale” of redemptive events occurs:

“The sky was split apart like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved from its place” (Revelation 6:14 – NET).

This and the verses that follow affirm that the whole world is being affected by the sixth Seal. “His wrath invades the earth in its totality”¹⁴ “His glory encompasses everything righteous.”

“The sky was split apart like a scroll being rolled up” (vs 14 – NET)

- This is patterned after Isaiah 34:4: “*And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree*” (KJV).
- How the sky is rolled up in this Greek expression is not clear. Some divine, supernatural display occurs¹⁵ – like the parting of the curtains on a theater stage. As these unparalleled events unfold, every person will know that a power beyond planet earth has full control.

This narrative also pictures that the “*heavens will be shaken*” (Mark 12:25, Matthew 24:29) – first the global earthquake and now the sky shudders. Interestingly, at Jesus’ baptism the heavens were split apart (Mark 1:10).¹⁶

¹¹ Aune, David E.; *52B World Biblical Commentary; Revelation 6–16* (World Books; Dallas, Texas – 1997), p. 415.

¹² Holbrook, Frank B., editor; *Symposium on Revelation – Book I* (Review and Herald Publishing Association; Hagerstown, Maryland 21740), p. 237.

¹³ Mounce, Robert H.; *The Book of Revelation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1977), p. 151.

¹⁴ Douhkan, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

¹⁵ Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 398.

¹⁶ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

- This suggests that the opening or rolling back of the “*heavens*” will reveal something vital to mankind.
- God is about to make some announcement, demonstration or pronouncement to earth’s inhabitants. In that “open sky,” Jesus will also shortly return.

“A change is soon to take place; ***a new order of things is to begin.*** The heavens are to be rolled together as a scroll. ‘And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with power and great glory.’ ‘The Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him; ***then*** shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.’”¹⁷

“As the living cloud comes still nearer, every eye beholds the Prince of life. No crown of thorns now mars that sacred head, but a diadem of glory rests on His holy brow. His countenance outshines the dazzling brightness of the noonday sun. ‘And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords.’ . . . The heavens are rolled together as a scroll, the earth trembles before Him, and every mountain and island is moved out of its place.”¹⁸

“and every mountain and island was moved from its place” (vs 14 – NET)

The word *ekinethesan* (G) can mean “moved” or “removed.” Concern has been raised that if they are removed and there are local inhabitants that belong to God, what will happen to them? In light of a parallel verse in 16:20 (“*And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.*”), it is likely that they are “removed.” One must conclude that God has made provision for His people.

- This final shaking is likely a continuation of the earthquake that began with the breaking of the sixth Seal (6:12),¹⁹ though some have concluded that it is another phase.
- Such geophysical changes are part of the continuing de-creation of the earth that began with the first four Trumpets (yet to be described in chapters 8, 9 and 11).

The most stable features of the world are shaken or destroyed in the context of this divine action (Judges 5:5; Psalm 18:7; Isaiah 5:25, 54:10; Jeremiah 4:24; Habakkuk 1:6; Zechariah 14:4). Removal of mountains is deemed impossible except by an act of God.²⁰

“Then the kings of the earth, the very important people, the generals, the rich, the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains (Revelation 6:15 – NET).

“Then the kings of the earth, the very important people, the generals, the rich, the powerful, and everyone, slave and free,” (vs 15 – NET)

- By now the “*earth dwellers*” are terrorized by the massive earthquakes and supernatural celestial events, including that inexplicable “*opening*” in the heavens.

¹⁷ *The Review and Herald*, January 12, 1886.

¹⁸ White, Ellen G.; *My Life Today*, p. 345.

¹⁹ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 454.

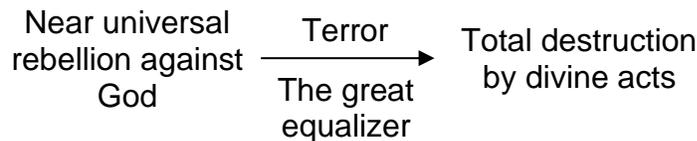
²⁰ Aune, *op. cit.*, p. 416.

- A natural conclusion: The fearful Day of the Lord has arrived.

This list of persons is similar to that in 19:18, where the carrion birds are invited to feast on their flesh (an ancient metaphor of justified death and destruction). There is a unique link between these two events: here, they are alive – there, they have died.

- The imagery figuratively emphasizes the certainty of their end.²¹
- A similar picture was described at the defeat of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 39:4, 38:2-6, 17-20 (Satan and his kingdom).

All levels of evil humanity are represented. Those who have plundered the people of God and surrendered to the antichrist powers now are coming to an end in a “first death.”



God is no respecter of persons – but judges all on an equal basis regardless of gender or social, political or economic standing.²²

“hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains” (vs 15 – NET)

- This is interesting. One must conclude that the earthquake has opened up vast areas where the wicked seek to hide themselves.
- Yet who can hide from God’s “anger” and judgment (Isaiah 2:10-22, Hosea 10:8, Luke 23:29-31)? It is now too late!
- From the time Adam and Eve hid themselves from God’s presence (Genesis 3:8), the guilty conscience has made people fugitives from God.²³

God is confronting the wicked through the Trumpet and Vial Plagues, supernatural signs and terrorizing events. Presently they will encounter Him personally.

“And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:” (Revelation 6:16).

“And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us” (vs 16)

The first reaction of the wicked is to hide among the rocks and in the caves. Their terror intensifies to an irrational level, and they plead for an avalanche to bury them.²⁴

- This is an echo of a prophecy regarding apostate Israel.

²¹ Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 965.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 400.

²³ Mounce, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

²⁴ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

- “The high places of the ‘House of Wickedness’ will be destroyed; it is the place where Israel sins. Thorns and thistles will grow up over its altars. Then they will say to the ‘mountains, ‘Cover us!’ and to the hills, ‘Fall on us!’” (Hosea 10:8 – NET; cf. Jeremiah 4:23-30, 5:7).

What has brought this mortal fear to this worldwide, rebellious multitude?

“from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:” (vs 16)

This is repeated in a later rendition at the end of the millennium.

*“And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, **from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away**; and there was found no place for them”* (Revelation 20:11).

- This echoes Revelation 4:2 and 5:7, where God is pictured “*sitting on a throne.*”
- It alludes to Daniel 7:9 and Ezekiel 1:26-28.

This Seal is a depiction of earth’s final “judgment” scene with the words “*sitting*” and “*throne.*”²⁵ Contextually, the sky has rolled back like a scroll, apparently in that space the great throne of the universe approaches planet earth.²⁶

- The saints will see His face and His name will be on their foreheads (Revelation 22:3-4).
- A unique tie with Revelation 1:7 reveals that at Christ’s return “*all kindreds of the earth shall wail **because of him,***” as every eye sees Him!

A question arises: “Since the wicked want to hide from God’s face, does God accompany Jesus when He returns? Looking at this deeper:

- Jesus told Caiaphas, the High Priest: “*But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man **sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven***” (Matthew 26:63-64). Will people see that “*power*”?
- “Christ will come in His own glory, in the glory of His Father, and the glory of the holy angels. Ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands of angels, the beautiful and triumphant sons of God, possessing surpassing loveliness and glory, will escort Him on His way. Then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations.”²⁷

Evidence mounts that God will accompany Jesus when He returns. In Revelation 1:7 and 6:16 these divine Beings are seen at the eschaton. The sixth Vial Plague supports this understanding:

²⁵ Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 400.

²⁶ *The Signs of the Times*, June 20, 1895.

²⁷ White, Ellen G.; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 739.

*“And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the **kings [plural]** of the east might be prepared”* (Revelation 16:12).

It is interesting to observe that there are two distinct references to judicial Beings:

1. *“The face of him that sitteth on the throne”* (sitting on a throne represents a judgment process)
2. *“The wrath of the Lamb”* (this represents the execution of the sentence)

In early Christianity, Christ is frequently assigned the role of an eschatological judge (John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Romans 2:16; II Corinthians 5:10; II Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Timothy 4:1; *Barn.* 15:5). Yet from Daniel 7 to Revelation 4 God is functioning in that throne room role.

The sacrificial Lamb becomes the arbiter of judgment.

- The Lamb became the conquering ram because He was *“slain”* (5:6).
- The Lamb is then deemed worthy (6:1-2).
- The Lamb opens the Seals and ushers in the time of the end (Revelation 6:1-2).
- The Lamb becomes the executive of heaven’s wrath (6:12-17).

This event is later noted as *“the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God”* (19:15).²⁸

Matthew 25:31-32 notes: *“**When** the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, **then** shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: **And before him shall be gathered all nations:** and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd **divideth** his sheep from the goats.”* He is judicially acting on the court’s decisions.

For the wicked, the guilt of sin remains.²⁹ Scholar Robert Thomas notes that sinners do not dread death the most, but to face a holy and righteous God. The consequence and outcome of this encounter is their death.³⁰

- As judgment turns against the oppressor, two complementary issues emerge – two faces of salvation rise: “To truly save, God must create anew, and the creation of the new necessitates the destruction of the old.”³¹
- This now fully opens the eternal hope of the saints that sin and sinners will no longer affect them. God’s eternal *“rest”* is anticipated.

The fate of the wicked is depicted by Paul in the imagery of the end of the antichrist:

*“And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the **Lord Jesus** will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the **splendor of his coming**”* (II Thessalonians 2:8 – NIV).

²⁸ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

²⁹ Roloff, Jürgen; *The Revelation of John – A Continental Commentary*, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN), p. 93.

³⁰ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 456.

³¹ Douhkan, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

- Christ has earned the right to be judge. He is worthy – because He died on the Cross, due to God’s wrath against Him. This is signified by His wearing a garment dipped in blood (Revelation 19:13). He alone trod that winepress (19:15).³² He paid the price to redeem us!
- He alone has the right to **carry out** the judgments of God.

God’s justice is not to be ignored. He has been called the “*lion of the tribe of Judah*” (5:5).³³ Many scholars have negative reactions to the concept of “*the wrath of God*,” concluding that it is contrary to His divine love. However, the focus is ultimately against sin. The wicked cherish such rebellion; when God addresses sin, they are affected!

John the Baptist preached the necessity of repentance in light of God’s coming wrath (Matthew 3:7-8). Jesus warned of rejecting the Son and experiencing the wrath of God (John 3:36). Paul warned of God’s anger (e.g., Ephesians 2:3, Romans 1:18). The main reason for the terror of the wicked is now described.³⁴

“For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Revelation 6:17).

“For the great day of his wrath is come” (vs 17)

The wrath mentioned in verse 16 is now emphasized in verse 17. At this time no rebellious individual nor unbeliever can resist what has come.

- By this point the earth is desolate. Nothing material is left that might create a bond with the world! Now the only thing left is their life. It, too, is now going to cease. They have reached the “end of the road.” They wish death also.

This wrath is seen in many Biblical references as the Day of **God** or of **Christ**. In the book of Revelation, John never calls Jesus “God.” Through pronouns, however, he places Jesus at the same level (cf. 20:6, 22:3).³⁵ His wrath initiates His divine retribution against evil.

“and who shall be able to stand?” (vs 17)

This echoes an Old Testament thought: “*But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap*” (Malachi 3:2; cf. Naham 1:6).

- This question is asked in desperation!
- The obvious answer **to the questioners** is “No one!”

Revelation 7, the next chapter, indicates that those **who are able to stand in this day of wrath** are the sealed people of God. “It assures us that, while the Second Coming and the

³² Brighton, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

³³ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 612; Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 476.

³⁴ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

³⁵ Kistemaker, Simon J.; *Revelation* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI), 239.

events accompanying it terrify the wicked, God's faithful people may hold on to the promise: 'For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, but My loving-kindness will not be removed from you, and My covenant of peace will not be shaken' (Isaiah 54:10). When the prophet Nahum asked, 'Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger?' he got the unequivocal answer: 'The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him' (Nah. 1:6-7). Here is the hope for God's people with regard to the future. This is what Revelation 7 is all about."³⁶

Within this sixth Seal is Christ's Second Coming!³⁷ This completes John's first major description of earth's final chaos, the last moments of this age. Yet, greater details unfold in later chapters. This is God's divine line of demarcation between good and evil, related to the forever destiny of mankind.³⁸

With the sixth Seal we have arrived at the eschaton and the end of history.³⁹ The next chapter unfolds the answer to the above question.⁴⁰ The sealed 144,000 will survive this time and will be seen around God's throne! That is a promise given to the Philadelphia church – the 144,000.

Franklin S. Fowler, Jr., M.D.
Prophecy Research Initiative – non-profit 501(c)3 © 2020
EndTime Issues..., Number 239, July 2, 2020

³⁶ Stefanovic, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

³⁷ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 298; Mounce, *op. cit.*, p. 162; Stefanovic, *op. cit.*, p. 243; Aune, *op. cit.*, p. 421.

³⁸ Naden, Roy C.; *The Lamb Among the Beasts* (Review and Herald Publishing Association; Hagerstown, MD; 1996), p. 115.

³⁹ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

⁴⁰ Aune, *op. cit.*, p. 421.