

When the Last Opportunity Passes

Introduction

As in the book of Daniel, in Revelation there are many ***distinct segments of information*** that describe apocalyptic events. Collectively, they all create an amazing picture of the final stages of redemptive history. These segments are characterized by having unique climax statements.

Examples:

- “*And there was given him [Christ] dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an **everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom ... shall not be destroyed**” (Daniel 7:14).*
- “*... it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter [persecute] the power of the holy people, all these things **shall be finished**” (Daniel 12:7).*
- “*And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he **shall reign for ever and ever**” (Revelation 11:15).*
- “*And **death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire**” (Revelation 20:14-15).*

A fascinating prophetic conclusion is also described in the ***sixth seal***. The Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, has been sequentially breaking open the seals of a seven-sealed scroll (Revelation 6). The brief period immediately surrounding Christ’s Second Coming is described in that seal. This interval of time is described elsewhere as the “great tribulation” (Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:21, 29-31; Revelation 14:9-11) or the time of the “*seven vial plagues*” (Revelation 16).

- That scroll contains God’s reasons why the wicked could not be eternally saved.
- The seals represent sequential end-time events that must transpire before the scroll can be opened and read.

When the time arrives for the sixth seal to be broken, the final era of David’s prophecy comes to mind: “*It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law*” (Psalm 119:126).

It is assumed that those seals are broken in heaven where Jesus received that scroll from the Father while seated on His throne. However, the ***events*** of seals one through six occur on the earth. The seventh occurs in “*heaven.*”

The Sixth Seal Drama

Throughout Revelation God is seen in the process of bringing the issues of rebellion to an end. He often promises that time would be short ***in the context*** of those prophecies. Satan also

understands that “his time is short” when they occur (12:12). The persecuted saints¹ of the fifth seal had cried, “**How long?**”² They want this period even shorter!

- That emotional question relates to:
 - “When will this trying time end?” “God, when will your name be vindicated?”
 - It intimates the time when Jesus vigorously steps into history and shortly thereafter returns to this world.³
- The sixth seal is one answer to **this cry!**

Additionally, in the preceding Trumpet judgments, one through four (Revelation 8), *partial* answers to this “*How long?*” cry are found. In the fifth trumpet the sealed saints are finally protected. That period of waiting in 9:1-12 is over as the sixth seal is broken. The apex of God’s wrath against the wicked then occurs.

This sixth Seal portrays judgments against unbelievers, plus celestial events that put the whole world on notice that the end has come. What is depicted occurs towards the end of the seven vial plagues that are poured out on the earth (Revelation 16).

- Why two such judicial renditions?
- The sixth seal contains the final global announcements to all individuals that the end has come.
- The vial plagues are distinct punishments against those in Babylon, the great apostate church.

“I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red,¹³ and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind.¹⁴ The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place” (Revelation 6:12-14 – NIV).

Earthquakes

Earthquakes were a known issue to those living when John penned this book. In the first century they devastated the cities of Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.⁴

- This earthquake, however, is characterized as “*great*” or “*huge*,” perhaps earth’s largest.
- Intriguingly, this is during the same brief period of time that is also distinguished as the “*great tribulation*” in Matthew 24:21 (or “*time of trouble*” – Daniel 12:1).

¹ Beale, Gregory K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan – 1999), p. 395.

² Osborne, Grant R.; *Revelation* (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 289.

³ Aune, 406.

⁴ Kistemaker, Simon J.; *Revelation* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 236.

This terrible earthquake is prophesied when God comes in judgment against the unfaithful. (Ezekiel 38:19-10; Joel 2:10, 30-31; Amos 8:8-9; Hebrews 12:26). Examples of these amazing predictions:⁵

1. *“For thus saith the LORD of hosts; **Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land**” (Haggai 2:6).*
2. *“Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, **Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven**” (Hebrews 12:26).*

This earthquake during the time of Jacob’s Trouble (Jeremiah 30:3-7) appears to be in two distinct waves. The first, here, the second in verse 14, which is the same time as 16:18-19, when Babylon is destroyed.

- We are at the end of human history when this seal is broken.⁶
- The cosmic signs that will follow herald the Second Coming of Christ.⁷

An earthquake is not only a harbinger of God’s coming judgment against His enemies but, as at Sinai, it can also symbolizes the greatness of His power and holiness (Exodus 19:18-19; Psalms 68:8, 77:17-18; Habakkuk 3).⁸ Here, it is part of the amazing manifestations of the “*Day of the Lord*” itself!⁹

This is stunning because John appears to be “there,” observing these incredible events! We are drawn into this drama. The word “*earthquake*” may be inadequate since the heavens are also shaken.¹⁰ The extent of destruction is portrayed. Imagining this time: “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.”¹¹

Astounding is the observation that this cataclysmic time is alluded to several times in the Old Testament.

- *“In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there will be a **great earthquake in the land of Israel...** And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that [are] with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone” (Ezek. 38:19, 22).*
- *“**The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord**” (Joel 2:31).*

⁵ Stefanovic, Ranko; *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs, MI; 2002), pp. 244-245.

⁶ Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 398.

⁷ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

⁸ Bauckham, Richard; *The Climax of Prophecy* (T&T Clark Ltd; Edinburgh, Scotland; 1993), pp.199-209.

⁹ LaRondelle, Hans K., Th.D.; *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible* (First Impressions; Sarasota, FL 34243 – 1997), pp. 133-134.

¹⁰ Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 8–22 – An Exegetical Commentary* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1995), p. 452.

¹¹ White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 657.

- “Before them the **earth shakes**, the **sky trembles**, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine” (Joel 2:10; see Isa. 13:10).
- “**Immediately after the distress of those days** [great tribulation] *‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken’*” (Matt. 24:29; also Mark 13:24; see Isa. 13:10, 34:4).¹²

Sun, Moon, Stars – Shaking of Heaven

In the synoptic apocalyptic discourse, the shaking of the heavens, affecting these celestial bodies, occurs at or immediately preceding the Second Coming of Christ (Mark 13:24-27).¹³

- A vital sequence is noted in that Olivet Discourse (cf. Matthew 24:29-30).

Great tribulation (some call it Jacob’s Trouble) – shaking of celestial bodies – coming of Christ

} Earthquake

- One or more of these bodies are also affected in the:
 1. Fourth trumpet plague – 1/3 of the sun, moon and stars darkened
 2. Fourth vial plague – sun “scorching” heat

The celestial bodies each have their unique apocalyptic sign or punishment:

Sun: Black as sackcloth (color of sackcloth of goat’s hair). This is a sign of judgment in the Old Testament (Exodus 10:22, Isaiah 13:10, Ezekiel 32:7-8). This color was a visible expression of mourning.¹⁴ For the wicked, it will be a time of mourning. They will recognize that they are lost.

Moon: Like blood. This was a sign that God’s judgments were about to begin. That will be described in verse 16.

Joel 2:3 (quoted by Peter in Acts 2:17-21): “A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and **behind them a desolate wilderness**; yea, and nothing shall escape them.”

Since these signs are presented as similes, they are literal. The use of the words “as” or “like” means that they are figurative of an actual event.¹⁵

<u>Literal</u>		<u>Figurative</u>
Sun	“as”	“black as sackcloth”
Moon	“as”	“blood”
Stars	“as”	“a fig tree casts her untimely figs”

¹² Kistemaker, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

¹³ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

¹⁴ Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 1–7 – An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. I (Moody Press, Chicago – 1992), p. 453.

¹⁵ Stefanovic, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

The **Day of the Lord** is ushered in by the breaking of this sixth seal.¹⁶

Stars: Major meteor showers have been recorded in history. This is apparently unprecedented and likely global when the sun has become dark, suggesting a major supernatural phenomenon.

In ancient thought, it meant a variety of omens, including the death of many people.¹⁷

The combination of these three events will be an announcement by God that Jesus is coming. There is no perceived delay now.

These celestial events draw the attention of all of earth's inhabitants.

Sun darkened – moon like blood – stars fall – sky in tumult

Heavens: The *rolling up* of the heavens suggests that God is about to show earth's inhabitants a dramatic divine display: It is as though the curtains in a theater have just parted. Something powerful, extreme and climactic is about to occur.

- Isaiah 34:4 discusses this time, which includes this rolling up of the sky:
“All the stars in the sky will be dissolved and the heavens rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.”
- In ways difficult to imagine, the sky is “*opened up*.”

A “segment” of *God's reality* is about to be revealed. Little do we know of the realm where the angels operate, where Satan moves and even where the essence and operations of the Holy Spirit are. Something never before visible will be opened to earthlings!

Interestingly, at Jesus' baptism the heavens were “*split apart*” (Mark 1:10). Then the Holy Spirit descended. Will this happen when Jesus returns? Will a special endowment of the Holy Spirit again descend? ***Some divine spectacle is expected.*** Based upon the many references of this time (earthquakes, celestial signs), many expositors have pieced together what apparently is occurring ***when God has the undivided attention of the whole world!***

1. It is a day of God's vengeance (Isaiah 34:1-10).
2. Streams will cease to flow (Isaiah 34:1-10).
3. There will be thunder and lightning with this great and mighty earthquake (Revelation 16:18).
4. Unutterable sorrow will sweep over the wicked inhabitants. Men's hearts will melt with fear (Isaiah 13:6-18).
5. The earth then becomes desolate (Isaiah 13:9, 24:3, 19).

¹⁶ Aune, *op. cit.*, p. 414.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

The Second Coming of Christ will shortly be noted *in this seal*, associated with the terror of the wicked world. We can conclude that at this time the celestial drama and the “*opening*” of the sky are preparatory to that event.

As the minds and eyes are looking upward, the record reminds us that the earth is reeling under the horrors of an earthquake as has never been seen in history.

- “... *and every island were moved out of their places*” (Revelation 6:14b).
- This exact same prophecy is repeated in Revelation 16:20: “*And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.*” This is almost unimaginable.

In chapter 16 more details are added:

1. It is when a voice out of the throne room temple in heaven declares “It is done” (16:17).
2. There is a massive display of thunder and lightning (16:18).
3. Babylon (a code word for apostate Christianity) is split into three parts (16:19).
4. God’s wrath will then be poured out (16:19b; cf. 14:9-11).
5. Islands and mountains disappear (16:20).
6. 50+-pound hailstones fall from the sky (16:21).

Expositor White caught the picture in this spectacular language:

“The wicked look with terror and amazement upon the scene, while the righteous behold with solemn joy the tokens of their deliverance. Everything in nature seems turned out of its course. The streams cease to flow. Dark, heavy clouds come up and clash against each other. In the midst of the angry heavens is one clear space of indescribable glory, whence comes the voice of God like the sound of many waters, saying: ‘It is done.’ Revelation 16:17.

“That voice shakes the heavens and the earth. There is a mighty earthquake, ‘such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.’ Verses 17, 18. The firmament appears to open and shut. The glory from the throne of God seems flashing through. The mountains shake like a reed in the wind, and ragged rocks are scattered on every side. There is a roar as of a coming tempest. The sea is lashed into fury. There is heard the shriek of a hurricane like the voice of demons upon a mission of destruction. The whole earth heaves and swells like the waves of the sea. Its surface is breaking up. Its very foundations seem to be giving way. Mountain chains are sinking. Inhabited islands disappear. The seaports that have become like Sodom for wickedness are swallowed up by the angry waters. Babylon the great has come in remembrance before God, ‘to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.’ Great hailstones, every one ‘about the weight of a talent,’ are doing their work of destruction. Verses 19, 21. The proudest cities of the earth are laid low. The lordly palaces, upon which the world’s great men have lavished their wealth in order to glorify themselves, are crumbling to ruin before their eyes. Prison walls are rent asunder, and God’s people, who have been held in bondage for their faith, are set free.”¹⁸

¹⁸ White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 636-637.

This is a final judgment scene against the earth immediately before and as Christ appears the second time in the clouds (Revelation 1:7). Most interestingly, that verse confirms, “every eye will see him” (Christ at His coming). That helps us understand the next verse:

“And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains” (Revelation 6:15).

This “inventory” echoes Isaiah 34, describing those who received heaven’s punishment anciently. The changes lay in persecution of God’s people and idolatry.¹⁹ Such lists are noted in several places. This response is seen in:

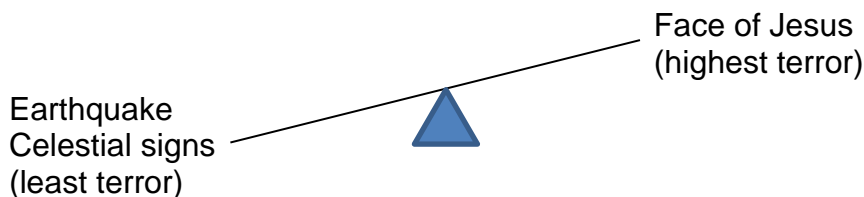
- Jeremiah 4:23-28, 5:7: “You enter into the rocks and hide yourselves in the earth from the presence of the terror of the LORD.... But the idols will completely vanish. And they will go into caves of the rocks and into holes of the ground before the terror of the LORD.... In that day they will cast away to the moles and bats their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, in order to go into the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs before the terror of the LORD ... when he arises to make the earth tremble.” (cf. Revelation 13:15-16). They worshiped the beast and have its mark.
- Revelation 19:18-19, 21 reveals the allies of the antichrist beast.

This inclusive list announces that God is no respecter of persons. God is now about to avenge the blood of the martyrs, answering their cry in the previous seal! What is noted above in chapter 19 is a detailed description of what God’s terminal wrath entails.

All these individuals are united in fear. Terror is a great equalizer. All social distinctions, as listed, will vanish. This group has observed the amazing drama in the heavens and experienced the fear and panic of the greatest earthquake this world has ever experienced. Now – something even more alarming and frightful must be happening!

- This whole group tries to hide among the rocks and caves in the mountains.
- This is as unreasonable and illogical as their degraded minds can go. These rocks and mountains are being moved, destroyed or collapsing from the earthquake! Might this be a veiled narrative for a death wish? The wording suggests that their hiding was at least temporarily successful.

What did they hide themselves from?



¹⁹ Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 399.

Fleeing into caves to hide is a noted experience in the Old Testament (Genesis 19:30, Joshua 10:16, I Samuel 22:1). In a prophecy related to this time Isaiah notes:

- *“Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty.... And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.... To go into the clefts of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth”* (Isaiah 2:10, 19, 21).
- **Ending their lives is preferable to meeting the glory of Jesus at His coming.**

Even the rocks are under God’s control (Luke 19:40). If need be, they would testify of the victory of the Lamb (Matthew 27:51-53, 28:2). Thus, rocks won’t hide them but might kill them.²⁰

John now gets specific: **“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).**

This is graphic. One can hear the words of Hosea:

- *“The high places of wickedness will be destroyed – it is the sin of Israel. Thorns and thistles will grow up and cover their altars. Then they will say to the mountains, ‘Cover us!’ and to the hills, ‘Fall on us!’”* (Hosea 10:8 – NIV).
- Interesting to reflect the experience of Adam and Eve after they sinned. They *“hid from the presence of the Lord”* (Genesis 3:9; cf. Psalm 139:7-12). That pure, holy divine atmosphere became unbearable, even torturous, to these new sinners!

Most fascinating, in these last few months of earth’s history, under the **fifth trumpet plague** (Revelation 9:1-11), the wicked want to die from Satan’s torment – but are not permitted to (vs 5)! Now, during the sixth seal (and 6th trumpet plague), they, once again, want to die from *Christ’s glory*, which will occur (Revelation 19:15-18 – graphic symbolic language)!

Christ is moving closer to earth. They know who He is. He is on a throne. The glory must be overwhelming. One can only imagine in a small way from the story of Moses, when he came down from Mount Sinai, where he was in contact with God. His face shone so brightly the people couldn’t stand it (Exodus 34:29-35).

- This “escape” parallels Matthew’s description of Jesus’ coming (Matthew 24).

The wicked want to escape from the “wrath of the Lamb.” This is the only place where this wording is used in the New Testament. They were adversaries of the Lamb and made war against Him. Now John notes that the Lamb overcame them (Revelation 17:14).²¹

²⁰ Brighton, Louis A; *Revelation, Concordance Commentary* (Concordance Publishing House, Saint Louis), 1999, p. 173.

²¹ Kistemaker, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

- Because Christ is the Lamb, He earned the right to execute judgment and save God's people from the judgment against sin.
- Though He executes God's judicial will as the Son of Man, He can do so because He was the Lamb of God (cf. Revelation 14:1, 14).²²

The plea of the wicked is filled with irony – they killed God's people, now they call for the inanimate world to kill them!

- *"Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power"* (II Thessalonians 2:9).
- *"For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil"* (I Peter 3:12).

The meek Lamb now becomes the "Lamb of wrath," described further in chapter 16: *"And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her **the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath**"* (Revelation 16:19).

Christ's wrath is called *"the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God"* (Revelation 19:15). This is summarized in 14:10, where the sinner will drink of *"the wine of God's fury – poured full strength into the cup of his wrath."*²³

- In this apocalyptic book, the wrath of God is contrasted with the wrath of Satan (12:12), noted in that fifth trumpet.
- Paul also addresses God's intense reaction to sin (Ephesians 2:3, 5:6; Romans 1:18, 2:5, 8; 5:9; Colossians 3:6).

We are finally at the fulfillment of all the "Day of Yahweh" prophecies in the Bible. This *"Day of the Lord"* has been inaugurated as the final judgment and the end of earth's redemptive history. It is at the eschaton.²⁴

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

At this time the wicked are not asking for mercy. In their despair they want to hide from the Judge – but cannot. Old Testament verses reflect this time:

- *"... who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry"* (Psalm 76:7b).
- *"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).²⁵

²² Brighton, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

²³ Osborne, *op. cit.*, pp. 296-297.

²⁴ Osborne, *op. cit.* pp. 297-298; Stefanovic, *op. cit.*, p. 245; Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 458; Aune, *op. cit.*, p. 421.

²⁵ Kistemaker, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

Their final question and words: *“Who shall be able to stand?”* They lose their lives at this time (Revelation 19). The Scriptural answer, however, follows: the 144,000, which becomes the great multitude, are full of hope and comfort.²⁶

- *“Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him. The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him”* (Naham 1:6-7).
- *“For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee”* (Isaiah 54:10).

For the saints, this Isaiah promise is full of hope and trust in God through the final expression of His justice.

Summary

		Seal 6							Seal 7
Seals 1-4	Seal 5	Earthquake	Signs	Sign	Earthquakes intensify	Wicked world	Christ’s Advent	Wicked finally ask	
	Martyrdom	Massive in size	Sun, moon, stars	Heavens shaken	Islands moved, disappear	in terror	Wicked cry to mountains & rocks, <i>“hide us”</i> from His face who sits on the throne	“Who can stand?”	On way to heaven (Rev. 8:1)

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²⁶ Brighton, *op. cit.*, p. 175.