

INTRODUCTION TO THE SEVEN SEALS

Before analyzing each of the seven seals in detail, some points of vital importance for the correct understanding of Revelation 6 must be stressed.

First, Revelation 6 builds on chapter 4 and 5. Everything taking place in chapter 6 is a result of what happened in chapter 5. This means that the opening of the seven seals begins with the inauguration and enthronement of Christ at Pentecost.

Rev. 6:15-17 shows that the opening of the sixth seal describes the Second Coming of Jesus and the events that accompany it. This suggests that the scene of the opening of the seven seals covers the historical era from the ascension of Christ and His elevation to the throne of the universe to the Second Coming.

Second, the events of Revelation 6 do not describe the contents of the seven seals themselves. They are, rather, the consequences of Christ's breaking the seals in heaven. The events triggered by the opening of the seven seals, however, all take place on earth. Neither the breaking of the seven seals nor the events that follow constitute the contents of the sealed scroll of Revelation 5.

The scroll was not opened and its contents disclosed until all seven seals were broken. The opening of the seven seals represents the steps or means by which God through Christ prepares the way in history for the opening and reading of the Book of Life at the end-time judgment (Rev. 20:12).

Third, when in the Old Testament the newly crowned king took his place on the throne, the destiny of the entire nation was placed in his hands. The Old Testament enthronement ceremonies were usually followed by judgment actions of a newly enthroned king when he proceeded to punish those who have proven disloyal and rebellious. He would also bestow favorable benefits on the loyal adherents (1 Kings 2; 16:11; 2 Kings 9:14-10:27; 11:1, 13-16). This judgment aspect is expressed in the vision of the opening of the seven seals.

When at his enthronement in Revelation 5 the exalted Christ received the covenant scroll, which represented the covenant relationship between him and his people, the destiny of all humanity was placed in His hands. His faithful ones were endowed with the right to be "a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign over the earth" (Rev. 5:9-10). Then the action of the newly enthroned Christ, portrayed in the opening of the seven seals, triggered a sequential chain of events on earth (judgments); war and slaughter, famine, and pestilence.

Fourth, the Old Testament background of the seven seals are the Covenant Curses. The language of Revelation 6:1-8 parallels the covenant curses in the Pentateuch and their execution in the context of the Babylonian exile. After God brought his people out from the bondage of Egypt, he made a covenant with them that contained certain stipulations. If the Israelites obeyed and cooperated with God, they would receive rewards and blessings. If they did not obey the covenant and continued in their disobedience, however, there would be ultimate consequences known as the curses of the covenant (Deut. 28:15-68).

These curses of the covenant are described in the Old Testament in terms of "war, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts," which in Ezekiel are referred to as God's "four severe judgments"

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(Ezek. 14:21). In Jeremiah 15:3 these are called the “four kinds of destroyers” (RSV). The core text of these covenant curses is Leviticus 26:21-26.

Here are described the penalties which God would send upon Israel because of her unfaithfulness. The parallels between the language used in Leviticus 26 and that of Revelation 6 are obvious: the sevenfold plague – sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts. They are all the consequences of disobedience to the covenant. In addition, the famine is described in terms of giving the bread by weight (Lev. 26:26; Rev. 6:6). The same language and concepts are repeated in Moses’ farewell speech in Deut. 32:23-25.

The covenant curses were, **in the initial phase**, preliminary judgments from God on his people. They were intended to wake them from their apostate condition, lead them to repentance, and move them towards a positive relationship with God. What seems clear in the Old Testament is that, in implementing those curses, God used enemy nations, such as Assyria and Babylon. Those nations were often used as instruments of God’s judgment on his own people (Isa. 10:5-6).

The covenant curse, then, may be explained in the following way; when Israel became unfaithful to the covenant, God would remove his protective power, and the enemy nations would come and afflict the people of Israel as a result. They would bring the sword against them. Wild beasts would rob them of their children and destroy their livestock. Pestilence and famine would complete the desolation of the land. If God’s people persisted in their sins, the final consequence would take place; exile from the Promised Land.

Later in Israel’s history, “the four severe judgments” (which could come in any order), became widely known and commonly used with reference to the judgments for disloyalty to the covenant. Especially in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, they became technical terms for covenant “woes” by which God punished apostasy, endeavoring to lead the people to repentance (Jer. 14:12-13; 15:2-3; Ezek. 5:12-17; 14:12-23).

In the final phase, when these enemy nations used by God as the executors of judgment overdid the punishment of his people, God reversed the judgments and turned them against these enemy nations, in order to deliver his people. That is what Moses announced in Deut. 32:41-43. In his prophecy against the nations, Joel declares that God would judge and punish all nations for what they have done to his people Israel (Joel 3:2-7). Jeremiah prophesied concerning Babylon that God will repay Babylon (Jer. 51:24).

It is important to note that when exercised upon God’s people, the covenant curses were preliminary judgments intended to lead them to repentance. When exercised upon the nations who have shed the blood of His people, they are judgments of vengeance (fifth seal).

Zechariah’s vision. Another Old Testament passage that helps us understand the scene of the opening of the seven seals is Zechariah 1:8-17. The prophet saw in vision four different colored horses, which are the instruments of divine judgment. While in Revelation 6 the colors of the four horses characterize the works they carry out, it appears that the colors of the four horses had no apparent significance in Zechariah’s vision.

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Revelation 6 clearly follows the covenant-curses pattern. The scene portrayed in the opening of the first four seals describes the consequences of preliminary judgments intended to awaken God’s people and lead them to repentance and restoration. In Revelation 6, God’s people are afflicted with severe persecution. In the scene of the opening of the fifth seal, the martyrs underneath the altar cry for vindication: “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will you not judge and avenge our blood upon those who dwell on the earth?” (Rev. 6:10). This cry strikingly parallel with the one cried in Zachariah 1:12: “How long, O Lord?”

In the scene of the opening of the sixth seal, God’s wrath turns against the persecutors of his people. The time has come for the judgments to fall on the enemies of God and His people. God’s people are rescued and appear before God’s throne in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 7:9-17; chapters 21-22). Their enemies are now to experience severe judgments, which are portrayed in the scene of the blowing of the seven trumpets. The seven trumpet plagues (Rev. 8-9) are indeed preliminary to the final and ultimate judgment described in Revelation 16-20.

Fifth, Revelation 6 also parallels the eschatological discourse of Jesus on the Mount of Olives that is reported in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. In that sermon Jesus describes the events leading up to the time of the end. Many commentators have observed many similarities between the structure of Revelation 6 and Synoptic Apocalypse as recorded in Matthew 24 and Mark 13.

THEME	REVELATION	GOSPELS
The Gospel Spreading	Rev. 6:1-2	Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10
War	Rev. 6:3-4	Matt. 24:6-7; Mark 13:7-8
Famine	Rev. 6:5-6	Matt. 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11
Pestilence	Rev. 6:7-8	Luke 21:11
Persecution	Rev. 6:9-11	Matt. 24:9-10; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-17
Heavenly Signs	Rev. 6:12-13	Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:25-26
Tribes Mourn	Rev. 6:15-17	Matt. 24:30
The Second Coming	Rev. 6:17	Matt. 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27

Jesus is describing the experience of God’s people between the first century and the Second Coming uses Old Testament language and motifs. Curses are merged with heavenly signs accompanying the “Day of the Lord.” The inspired author of Revelation uses a similar design pattern. The parallels between Synoptic Apocalypse and Revelation 6 indicate that the scene of the opening of the seven seals refers to the events taking place on earth from the time of Christ’s exaltation on the heavenly throne until His return to earth.

Sixth, the springboard passage of Revelation 3:21, in which it is promised that the overcomer will sit with Jesus on His throne as Jesus overcame and sat with his Father on his throne, provides the clue for understanding the nature of the opening of the seven seals. Revelation 4-5 refers to Jesus’ overcoming and his subsequent sitting with his Father on his throne, which fulfills the second part of Revelation 3:21.

Revelation 7:9-17 describes the fulfillment of its first part with regard to the overcomers who will join Christ on his throne. Since chapter 6 is set between chapters 5 and 7, it appears that the opening of the seven seals corresponds to the statement, “to the one who overcomes,” of 3:21. One may

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conclude that the scene of the opening of the seven seals has to do with the ongoing period in which God's people are in the process of overcoming until they finally join Christ on his throne.

The opening of the seven seals portray events occurring on earth between the ascension of Christ and the Second Coming with particular focus on the Gospel and the experience of the people of God in the world. Christ's enthronement at the Pentecost marks the beginning of Christ's kingdom spread through the preaching of the Gospel. As the Gospel is being proclaimed, God's people on earth often fail in their faithfulness. The seven seals are instruments that Christ uses for the sanctification of His Church and the extension of His kingdom.

The opening of the seven seals appears in two installments – one of four the other of three seals – which differ in form and weight. The opening of the first four seals leads into the scene of the four horsemen (6:1-8); the opening of the last three seals brings us to the approaching time of the end. The fifth and the sixth seals (6:9-17) are separated from the seventh one (8:1) by an interlude of the sealing of the 144,000 saints in chapter 7.

The four horsemen are evidently concerned with Christians and their response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of the kingdom is being preached to all nations of the earth. When, after experiencing the Gospel, people reject it, consequences are described symbolically in terms of the sword, famine, and pestilence, which are preliminary judgments on God's people who reject or disobey the Gospel, that have redemptive purpose.

The four horsemen have a historical fulfillment and also a personal spiritual application. The scenes of the four horsemen are drawn from the Old Testament and they contain the permanent truth of what happens when people reject the Gospel and choose to live in sin. So, the riders on the four horsemen portray general realities besides specific historical fulfillment. By general realities we mean the things that each person experiences when confronted with the Gospel. We whether accept it or reject it, and depending on our choice we will receive a blessing or a curse.

The judgments depicted in the opening of the first four seals are partial and preliminary. The preaching of the Gospel did not end in any way with the first century. The rider on the white horse is still going forth overcoming that he might overcome (6:2). The four horsemen are just the precursors of the future reality; when once more at the end time of this world's history there will be the great and final proclamation of the Gospel (Rev. 14:6-12; 18:1-4).

This preaching of the Gospel results in acceptance by some and rejection and resistance by others. When the preaching of the Gospel is complete, and the destiny of every person decided, then the final judgment of God will be unleashed on those who have rejected and resisted the Gospel. The covenant curses indicated in the four horsemen will then be complete and final.

REVELATION 6 AND 8:1

1. The Opening of the First Seal (6:1-2)

V1. At the opening of the first seal John hears a living being speak in a voice of thunder. This must certainly be the first of the living beings, the one, which looks like a lion (4:7), because the voice like a thunder is very appropriate for a lion.

“Come.” Variations of this text exist in ancient manuscripts. The King James Version follows some Greek manuscripts that have the phrase “Come and see!” However, the best Greek manuscripts, including Codex Alexandrinus, which shows the least evidence of alteration, have the shorter form, “Come!” as a summons to the four horsemen to come forth one by one upon the scene of action.

V2. “White horse.” In Revelation, white always, and without any exceptions, refers to Christ (Rev. 19:11-12) or his followers and is never used with reference to the forces of evil. The white horse is the symbol of the conqueror. Roman general would ride a white horse to celebrate a triumphant victory.

The rider on the white horse symbolizes the triumphant spreading of the Gospel initiated by Christ on the cross and begun at Pentecost. Through the Holy Spirit and through the preaching of the Gospel by his faithful people, Christ has begun the expansion of his kingdom by conquering and winning human hearts for himself and bringing the Gospel into their lives.

“The bow.” Although the bow is sometimes used in the Old Testament as a symbol of the enemy forces, it is also a weapon of God (Isa. 41:2; Hab. 3:8-9; Zech. 9:13).

“Crown.” The “*stephanos*” crown worn by the rider is used in Revelation always with reference to Christ and his people. It is not the royal crown but the crown of victory. Christ appropriately wears this crown in the light of his overcoming on the cross (5:5-6) and the victory of his people as they overcome sin by means of his blood and their testimony (Rev. 12:11).

As with the message to the church in Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7), the scene of the opening of the first seal can be applied historically to the church of the apostolic period. However, an important point must be understood. The conquest of the rider on the white horse in no way ends with the apostolic era of the first century. Rather, it portrays in a general way the ongoing progress of the Gospel throughout Christian history beginning in John’s day and going through to the Second Coming. Christ will continue the triumphant expansion of his kingdom until the total conquest is achieved (Matt. 24:14).

2. The Opening of the Second Seal (6:3-4)

V3. We see here that the second living being, which had the appearance of a calf (4:7), calling the second horseman. A calf is a symbol of sacrifice and fits nicely into the context of the scene.

V4. “Fiery-red.” The Greek word “*puros*” means fiery red. Red is the color of blood and oppression. In Revelation 17, the scarlet color of the beast is linked directly to the prostitute “drunk from the blood of the saints and from the witnesses of Jesus” (Rev. 17:6). The color in the scene of the second seal is appropriate for persecution and bloodshed.

“Was given to take peace from the earth.” The fiery-red color of the horse corresponds to the mission of its rider to remove the peace from the earth. In Rev. 1:4, God’s people are promised grace and peace. This peace is evidently the perfect peace of the Gospel as the result of having a relationship with Jesus (John 14:27; 16:33).

However, resistance to the Gospel message results in a loss of peace. When the people reject the love of the Gospel, they lose the peace that the Gospel brings. This naturally results in opposition and division. The New Testament is replete with texts that make clear that the preaching of the Gospel always divides people (Matthew 10:34-36).

“That they might slay one another.” The vision brings to mind the scene at Sinai where the Israelites each killed his brother, friend, and neighbor with the sword (Ex. 32:27-29). The Greek word “*sphazo*” (to slay or slaughter) is not a typical word for death in battle. In Revelation, it is normally used with reference to the death of Christ (5:6; 13:8) and his saints, because of their witness to the Gospel (6:9; 18:24).

“Sword.” Jesus stated clearly that his mission was not to bring peace but a sword. The context indicates that the sword symbolizes opposition and division. Luke’s version of Jesus’ statement confirms this: “Do you suppose I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division” (Luke 12:51-53).

All of this strongly suggests that the rider on the second horse symbolizes the consequences of the rejection of the Gospel. The second horse follows the first, so it means that, whenever the Gospel is preached, and it has been accepted, persecution follows from those who reject the Gospel. The opening of the second seal is parallel to the time period of the church in Smyrna - the period of trouble and persecution of the church 2nd and 3rd century AD.

3. The Opening of the Third Seal (6:5-6)

V5. The third living being (most likely the one having a face like a man, 4:7) calls the black horse. **“Black.”** In Revelation, black is related to darkness, the sun becomes “black as sackcloth” (Rev. 6:12). In the New Testament, darkness symbolizes the absence of the gospel (Matt. 4:16; Luke 1:79; John 1:5; 3:19; Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13; 1 John 1:5).

“A balance in his hand.” A balance in the Old Testament functions as a symbol of famine. To eat bread by weight denoted in antiquity the greatest scarcity. The balance points to a time of shortage of food when the basic commodities of life are measured out at greatly inflated prices (Lev. 26:26; Ezek. 4:16). So, the scene of the opening of the third seal portrays a famine.

V6. “A quart of wheat for a denarius.” A quart of wheat was approximately a daily amount of food for an average person. A person had to spend a denarius – his full day’s wage – to purchase enough wheat only for himself to survive. He could spend his whole wage on the much cheaper and inferior barley (food for the poor) to feed himself and his family. In ordinary times, a denarius would purchase twelve to fifteen times as much food. This illustrates serious food shortage.

“Do not harm the oil and the wine.” The word “harm” comes from Greek word “*adikeo*,” which means “to injure” or “to do harm to.” It is used elsewhere in the book of Revelation repeatedly for

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judgment on evildoers (2:11; 9:10, 19) or for persecution on God's people (11:5). It can also be used symbolically as damaging and destroying the earth and plants (7:2-3; 9:4).

In Palestine, the grain, wine, and oil were three main crops. All three of these are mentioned together repeatedly in the Old Testament as representing the ordinary necessities of life (Deut. 7:13; 11:14; Hos. 2:8, 22; Joel 2:19). All of these crops were essential to life in the Bible lands. Because the olive and the vine were much more deeply rooted than grain, which was shallow rooted, they could survive a drought much more easily than grain could. So, while the drought would have damaged and destroyed necessities of the basic diet (grain), the hardship of the famine plague in the scene of the opening of the third seal was limited and partial.

The rider on the black horse must represent symbolically a spiritual famine of the word of God rather than a physical shortage of food. The prophecy of Amos suggests that famine can be spiritual (Amos 8:11-13). If the black horse of the third seal is opposite to the white horse of the first seal, which symbolizes the proclamation and the spreading of the Gospel, then the opening of the third seal portrays a spiritual famine. Grain would symbolize God's Word (Matt. 13:3-30; Luke 8:11).

This famine is not fatal, however. The voice also orders that the oil and the wine are not to be harmed. The wine symbolizes God's gracious salvation in Jesus Christ and the oil stands for the Holy Spirit. It suggests that even though there might be a shortage of God's word in the world, and that the Gospel message (the good news about Christ's salvation) is hidden from people, the Holy Spirit is still at work making salvation available to everyone.

The opening of the third seal is parallel to the time period of the church in Pergamos - the period of compromise and the union of the church and state (4th and 5th Century AD), during which there was a shortage of the Word of God, a spiritual famine.

4. The Opening of the Fourth Seal (6:7-8)

V7. "Fourth living being." At the breaking of the fourth seal, the fourth living being (most likely the one like a flying eagle) calls for a pale horse.

V8. "A pale horse." The Greek word "*chloros*" is used for green vegetation. It was used also in ancient times for the appearance of a person who was sick. In the content of the fourth seal, it designates "yellowish green" or "pale." It is a pale, ash-gray color that resembles a corpse in the advanced state of corruption or a person who is very sick.

"Death and Hades." In Revelation 1:18, Death and Hades, as terrible as they might be, are under Christ's control. And here, with the opening of the fourth seal, Death and Hades appear as the ultimate consequence of the rejection of the gospel. Death is a natural consequence of the famine, which is portrayed in the scene of the opening of the third seal.

However, Death and Hades – these two enemies – are temporary. The message of the Bible is that death is a consequence of sin. Death, however, is not an ultimate reality. The book of Revelation makes clear that the day is coming when Death and Hades will have their end in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14).

“Authority over one-fourth of the earth.” The fact that Death and Hades are **“given”** authority over one-fourth of the earth indicates that they do not have ultimate power; they are under Christ’s control (Rev. 1:18). One-fourth of the earth in Revelation relates to God’s dominion; one-third of the earth refers to Satan’s dominion.

“Kill with the sword and with famine and with pestilence and by beasts of the earth.” In many places in the Old Testament, sword, famine, pestilence, and the beasts are a series of God’s judgments upon his people as the consequence of disobedience to the covenant. (Leviticus 26:21-26). Here John is using a well-known picture of what happens when God dispatches His wrath upon his disobedient people.

The rider on the fourth horse describes the most serious situation. It describes the death of the church as a result of disobedience to the covenant (the Gospel). The plagues of the first four seals are just precursors and a foretaste of the final judgment, which will be experienced by those who refuse to repent and resist the gospel in their unfaithfulness and disobedience.

The opening of the fourth seal is parallel to the time period of the fourth church of Revelation - Thyatira - the medieval period, dark ages (6th to 14th century AD), during which the church was spiritually dead.

5. The Opening of the Fifth Seal (6:9-11)

V9. “The altar.” The Old Testament temple had two altars. The altar of sacrifice was in the outer court outside the temple for the sacrifice of animals in burnt offering. Inside the temple was the altar of incense. The altar in view here is most likely the altar of burnt offering rather than the altar of incense. This is clearly seen in the fact that in the Old Testament temple ritual, the blood was poured out at the base of the altar of burnt offering (Lev. 4:7, 18, 25; 8:15; 9:9).

The phrase **“poured out”** is also used in Revelation 16:6 where the blood of saints and prophets is poured out (evidently beneath the altar as verse 7 indicates). Since the altar of sacrifice was not in the temple, but in the outer court, it is clear that the scene portrayed here takes place not in the heavenly temple but on the earth, which was symbolized by the outer court of the temple.

“The souls.” This scene depicts God’s faithful people who died because of their faith and their faithful bearing of their testimony to the Gospel. Their souls are seen as being beneath the altar. This imagery is drawn directly from the Old Testament sacrificial ritual and as such must be understood symbolically. Many people take this scene literally in order to support the idea of an immortal soul. If we take this literally, then we have to take the rest of the scene literally. That would mean that these souls are all under a literal altar somewhere and they are crying for vengeance.

The question then arises, how big is this altar that it fits so many souls. The text indicates that these are the souls of those who have been faithful to God, and as such, according to the theology of the immortality of the soul, they should be in heaven enjoying their time, not under an altar crying for vengeance. Also, the souls of these people have been **“slain,”** or in other words put to death. If we believe that these are real souls that live after death, then they should be alive, not dead. So, this

scene should be taken symbolically, including the souls. In this context the souls would mean “life,” which is in the blood.

The most sacred part of the sacrifice was the blood, which symbolized life. When the blood was poured out, a person or animal died. Because life belonged to God (Lev. 17:11-14), the blood of slain animals was drained and poured out beneath the altar. Thus, the faithful martyrs were beneath the altar because their life-blood had been poured out as an offering to God. So, using the symbolism drawn from the Old Testament, John describes God’s faithful people sacrificed as martyrs.

V10. “Cried with a loud voice.” This cry or the plea reminds us of the blood of Abel, which is described as crying out to God from the ground (Gen. 4:10). Just as Abel’s blood cried out to God because of his death, so the blood of the martyrs cry out to God because they were unjustly persecuted and died because of their faithfulness to him.

“Those who dwell on earth.” This phrase occurs frequently in the book of Revelation and functions almost as a technical expression for the wicked, namely, those who resisted the Gospel and persecuted God’s faithful people (3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8; 17:2).

“Avenge.” Although the plea of the slain martyrs is a request for judgment on their enemies, it should not be regarded as a longing for revenge, but a plea for legal justice. The Greek word “*ekdikeo*” is a term implying a legal action. The word is found in Luke 18:3 where the widow cries to the judge “Give me legal protection from my opponents.”

In Luke 18:5 the judge responds: “because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection.” This legal aspect is clearly expressed in Revelation 19:2, where God has judged Babylon in that He has avenged the blood from her hands. This cry must be seen as a legal pleas in which God is asked to conduct a legal process leading to a verdict that will vindicate his martyred saints.

V11. “White garments.” The white garments of the saved (Rev. 3:4-5) are the garments of victory, triumph, and faithfulness. The white garments represent the righteousness of Christ.

“They should rest for a while.” The death of the faithful people in Revelation is described as resting for a little while or resting “from their labor; for their works follow them” (Rev. 14:13). The slain martyrs do not come to life until the return of Christ. In the meantime, these faithful dead rest under God’s watchful care until the day of resurrection.

“Might be made complete.” The Greek word “*pleroo*” means “to make full,” “to complete.” The text could either mean that the number of their fellow servants who are about to be killed are to be made complete (as translated by the NASB, NIV, NKJV, NRSV, RSV, and others) or that their fellow servants who are about to be killed are to be made complete with reference to character (as KJV seems to suggest). Evidence elsewhere in the book of Revelation supports the second meaning.

The word “**number**” does not appear in the Greek text of Revelation 6:11. The translators usually supply the word “number” on the assumption that John held to an idea of a fixed number of martyrs to be complete before time comes to an end. But this is not a Biblical idea. The support for this idea is found only in extra-Biblical Jewish literature. So, this statement is surely not to be understood in

any mathematical way, as though God had decreed that there must be a certain number of martyrs, and when this number was slain, the end will come. The statement should be understood as referring to being made complete in reference to character.

The opening of the fifth seal is parallel to the time period of the church in Sardis - the period of Reformation (15th to 18th century AD) when the Reformation brought to light the terrible things that the medieval church has done during the dark ages. The Reformation slowed down the persecution and served as the voice that cried out to God with the plea of “How long God will allow injustice on the earth?”

6. The Opening of the Sixth Seal (6:12-17)

V12-14. The opening of the sixth seal unleashed a series of phenomena, which are cosmic in scope; **they include a great earthquake, a darkening of the sun and moon, and the falling of the stars.** Everything is concluded with an even greater earthquake. The scene consisting of these five elements was very familiar to the Christians of John’s time. These phenomena were used in the Old Testament to describe the visitation of God’s final judgment to the earth, called the Day of the Lord.

The Day of the Lord is an important eschatological concept that runs through the Old Testament prophetic books. It is the occasion when God will finally visit the earth as a result of the unfaithfulness of people of God. God will come to the earth in judgment, bringing annihilation to the wicked, on one side, and redemption and deliverance for those who are loyal to God, on the other side. The Day of the Lord is described as an event of frightening qualities; it is regularly associated with cosmic upheaval and the shattering and destruction of the earth.

The catastrophic language describing the breaking of the sixth seal is almost identical with Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount of Olives with reference to the signs of the Second Coming (Matthew 24:29). After these cosmic phenomena, the sign of the Second Coming will appear, initiating the gathering of the saints into God’s kingdom.

A question arises: Should these descriptions (found both in Jesus’ portrayal of the end of the world and in the scene of the opening of the sixth seal) be understood literally or symbolically? Although the language of the opening of the sixth seal is drawn from the Old Testament, nothing in the text indicates that these signs are intended to be symbolic. On the contrary, the repeated usage of the word “as” or “like” in the text appears to be very significant.

The sun becomes black **as** sackcloth, the moon **as** blood, the stars of the sky fall **as** do the figs of the fig tree, and heaven splits **as** the papyrus scroll. In Greek this word introduces a figurative analogy to an actual event, which is compared with something figurative.

When the word “as” is used it is called a simile (a figurative language drawing comparison). The second word in a simile explains the first one. In this case, the actual word has to be literal, because a simile is always used in relation to an actual thing, event, or person. This suggests that these heavenly signs are to be taken literally.

So, if these are real events, then the question is when they were fulfilled. As we saw, the opening of the fifth seal brings us up to Reformation time of 15th to 18th century AD. So, all of these cataclysmic

events of the sixth seal have to take place after this and bringing us to the event of the Second Coming of Jesus.

V12. “A great earthquake.” In the Old Testament the coming of the Lord is accompanied by the shaking of the earth (Joel 2:10; Amos 8:8; Haggai 2:6). The earthquake of the sixth seal appears to precede the one mentioned in Rev. 16:18 of the seventh plague, which shatters end-time Babylon, resulting in its destruction. This one mentioned in Rev. 6:12 has been identified by historicist commentators as the Lisbon great earthquake of 1775.

“The sun became as a sackcloth and the moon became like blood.” The Old Testament background text for these phenomena is Joel 2:31, where the prophet predicted that before the great Day of the Lord comes these two phenomena will take place. The historical fulfillment of these phenomena has been dated by historicist scholars as May 19, 1780, when it was experienced in eastern New York and southern New England.

V13. “The stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind.” This description comes from Isaiah 34:4 where the hosts of heaven will wither away and fall down. In his sermon from the Mount of Olives Jesus predicted that the stars would fall down from the sky and the powers of heaven be shaken. Historicist scholars suggest the historical fulfillment of this phenomenon is the spectacular meteor shower of November 13, 1833 over the entire region of North America east of the Rocky Mountains.

It seems that the text indicates that Rev. 6:12-13 describe the signs that are taking place before the end-time events are beginning to unfold, and verses 14-17 describe the natural calamities and other activities that are taking place right prior to the Second Coming.

V14. “The sky was parted as a scroll being rolled up.” This picture is taken from Isaiah 34:4 in a description of the Lord’s wrath.

“Every mountain and island were moved from their places.” Jeremiah speaks of the mountains quaking and all the hills moved to and from (Jer. 4:24). Revelation 6:14 refers most likely to the final earthquake mentioned again in Rev. 16:18 (the seventh plague), which is distinct and greater than the first one mentioned in Rev. 6:12. This earthquake takes place right before the Second Coming of Jesus.

V15-17. John states that during this fateful time when all the cataclysmic events are taking place, the unrepentant sinners cry out in despair to the mountains to fall on them and “hide them from the One sitting on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.”

This is reminiscent of Isaiah 2:19, a prophecy of the Day of the Lord: "They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily.”

It is somewhat startling that earth's sinners correctly identify these catastrophic events as evidences of God's wrath. We are used to them being termed "natural disasters" and in no way a result of God's intervention in humanity's affairs. Yet, this time, these cataclysmic signs are indeed "acts of

God," and men know it. The sinners clearly understand that such a succession of disturbances can be nothing other than divine wrath.

A common misconception is that the sinners are trying to hide from Christ's face as He is coming to the earth. However, the text tells us the unrepentant sinners are hiding from the "face of the One sitting on the throne," who is God the Father. The face of God is used here symbolically. In the Old Testament the "face of God" has two meanings.

First, the "face of the Lord" suggests being in His presence (Gen. 33:10; 1 Sam. 26:20; 2 Chron. 7:14; Lam. 2:19). **Second**, it can also imply being under the judgment of God (Lev. 26:17; Psalm 34:16; Jer. 44:11; Lam. 4:16). Based on the context, the second meaning fits this instance best, where sinners are trying to hide from God's judgment.

The text says that the sinners are also trying to hide from the wrath of the Lamb. The lamb represents Jesus in His sacrificial role. The unrepentant sinners have not accepted Christ as their personal Savior, therefore, now they are suffering the consequences of their own rejection. They failed to apply the blood of the lamb, for forgiveness and now they experience the wrath of the lamb. They despised the day of salvation and now they despair in the great day of His wrath. The sinners have rejected God's grace, and now they are experiencing His justice.

The entire scene ends with a very significant rhetorical question: "Who is able to stand?" Everyone needs to know the answer to that question – it is the most vital of all questions for the people living in the final days of this earth's history. This question is answered in Revelation 7. The only people who will be able to endure and stand during those times are those who have God's special seal.

7. The Opening of the Seventh Seal (Rev. 8:1)

V.1 "The silence in heaven." There are two main interpretations of the silence in heaven.

First, some people suggest that the sixth seal brings us all the way to the Second Coming of Jesus, so the seventh seal chronologically will take place after the Second Coming. In this vein of thought, the silence in heaven most likely refers to the millennium, which is a relatively short period of time as compared to eternity. "**Half an hour**" should be understood symbolically to refer to a very short period of time of unspecified length.

Following the Old Testament pattern, we have the silence before the complete destruction of the wicked. After the millennium we have the last judgment on the wicked when they will be destroyed forever (Rev. 21). The silence indicates that the judgment is about to be executed and the whole universe will be at peace.

Second, some other people suggest that the sixth seal brings us all the way to the natural calamities and other events immediately preceding the Second Coming of Jesus, consequently, the seventh seal describes the actual Second Coming of Jesus. In this vein of thought, the silence in heaven most likely refers to the time when Jesus and His angels leave to come to earth to take the saved ones to heaven.

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Having said that, the silence is not understood as being caused by heaven being empty during this time as a result of Jesus and all the angels leaving (Matt. 25:31). Even though Jesus and the angels are gone, there are still other beings in heaven during that time, such as the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures. So, then the question is, “What is the silence in heaven caused by?”

In this interpretation the “**half an hour**” is understood as a prophetic time period representing 7½ literal days based on the year-day principle. It appears from this interpretation that the Father waits for 7½ days. The question is, “Why seven and a half days?” Some authors suggest that when Jesus comes and takes his people, they will be ascending to heaven for seven days.

The reason for the seven day period for the saints’ ascension to heaven is not stated but if the saints are to spend seven glorious days on their return journey to the kingdom, that leaves just half a day for the events of the Second Coming, that is, Christ’s journey from heaven to earth, the resurrection of the just, the destruction of the unsaved, and the translation of the living saints.

The silence in heaven will last for 7½ days until Jesus returns back to heaven with the saved, at which point, a celebration will erupt in heaven described in Rev. 19:9 as the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Whether we agree that the “**half an hour**” silence represents a literal 7½ days time period, or that it symbolically refers to a very short period of time of unspecified length, the truth is, the second interpretation, which places the opening of the seventh seal at the Second Coming of Jesus, fits better the context.

According to Rev. 10:7, the mystery of God will be accomplished at the time when the seventh angel is about to sound the seventh trumpet. The seventh trumpet sounds the end of earth’s history, and now the “mystery of God”, his plan of salvation, is being brought to its completion.

Revelation 11:15 says, “Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’” The mystery of God is the consummation of God’s plan in bringing His kingdom in Christ to fulfillment, which will take place at the Second Coming.

This is the same mystery that is represented by the inner part of the scroll of Revelation 5. The contents of the inner part will be revealed only when all the seven seals are removed. So, at the time when the seventh seal is removed, then the mystery of God in relationship to who will join Christ on His Father’s throne (Rev. 3:21) and reign with Him forever, will be revealed.

Both, the seventh seal and the seventh trumpet occur at the same time, because both deal with the accomplishing or the revealing of the mystery of God. This fact places the opening of the seventh seal at the Second Coming of Jesus during the same time when the seventh trumpet will sound.