

Understanding Revelation – Topic 10

The seven seals

Seals 5-7
Silence in heaven

An exposition of Revelation
Chapter 6:9-17 and Chapter 11

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Introduction

The seven seals are divided into two groups: one group of four and the other group of three seals. We have already learned that the first group of four seals is represented by the four horsemen. Each of these is introduced by a *living creature* in the heavenly sanctuary who invites all to behold what each seal reveals. The four horsemen represent four forms of warfare involving the church of God in the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

We now examine the final three seals. The fifth seal deals with the vindication of the martyrs of the church. The sixth seal deals with the preparation of the church for the Second Advent of Christ in the time of the end. The seventh seal deals with the deliverance and reward of the church at the Second Advent.

The fifth seal

When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed. Revelation 6:9-11

Slain for the Word of God

*I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain or as the Greek has it, had been slain for the word of God. This refers to the millions of martyrs slain under the domain of the pale horse of the fourth seal. It refers to martyrdoms of past eras rather than current, contemporary martyrdoms, something which is erroneously taught by some commentators. They ... *cried from under the altar*. Weymouth's translation says *the foot of the altar*¹. This indicates that they had already been martyred.*

What does the altar represent? In the Old Testament the altar was the place in the sanctuary court (or courtyard) where the blood of the sacrifices was poured out, outside the sanctuary proper. In the New Testament the Jewish sanctuary represents the true sanctuary in heaven, therefore the court represents Calvary, which was outside of heaven: that is, on the earth. The blood of the martyrs, then, was poured out on the earth because the altar represents the planet earth. The blood of the martyrs was certainly in the earth, under the *altar* of the earth.

We come now to the significance of the *souls crying out*. Are these meant to be disembodied spirits, as many conclude? However such a conclusion would gravely misrepresent a merciful God. To depict the martyrs as being in the presence of our God, under an altar, crying for vengeance, leads to an unfortunate concept of heaven.

¹ Richard Francis Weymouth, *The Modern Speech New Testament* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1903), Revelation 6:9.

The word *souls* is often used to mean persons in Scripture. Here is an example of this usage:

... while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. 1 Peter 3:20

How many people were saved by water at the time of the flood? There were eight, and Peter described them as *eight souls*. If the altar is on the earth, then the description above must represent an earthly scene where the term *souls* refers to people.

This understanding is confirmed by such great Bible scholars as Ellicott, Adam Clarke and Albert Barnes. While these scholars held to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul they never used these verses as proof of that doctrine. Rather they believed that Revelation 6:9 dramatically describes the need of redress on behalf of the millions of martyrs who had been slain under the fourth horseman.

A similar picture is given in Genesis where the Lord came to Cain after he had slain Abel.

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground." Genesis 4:9-10

Abel's murder called for redress and so it is as it applies to the murdered millions of martyrs. The fourth horseman had galloped heedlessly on leaving in his wake the innocent blood of millions of believers. Hardly a hand of protest was raised in their defense. These martyrs were victims of the apostate church. As one discerning author has declared:

In the thirteenth century was established that most terrible of all the engines of the papacy - the Inquisition. The prince of darkness wrought with the leaders of the papal hierarchy...the mangled forms of millions of martyrs cried to God for vengeance upon that apostate power.²

It is informative to read in the papers of Leonid Schoner who was beheaded in Rottenburg, Bavaria, in 1528. The following prayer, written by Schoner, illustrates the need of redress for the martyrs.

We are scattered like sheep having no shepherd. We have been compelled to forsake house and home. We are as night ravens which have flight in the rocks. Our chambers are in holes and crags...The world still rolls and rests not; it revels as if mad. They invent lies against us. They cease not their fires and murders. O Lord, how long wilt thou be silent? Let it come up before thy throne. How precious in Thine eyes is the blood of the holy ones. Therefore have we comfort in all our need, a refuge in Thee alone, And in none besides. But neither comfort or rest nor peace on this earth; but he who hopes in Thee shall never be confounded.³

² Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1898), 59.

³ Edwin E. Thiele, *Outline Studies in Revelation* (Angwin, CA.: Pacific Union College, 1990), 136.

Many are also familiar with the poem by John Milton, penned in response to the news of the massacre of the Waldenses in Northern Italy.

*Avenge, O Lord, Thy slaughtered Saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;
Even them who kept Thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,
Forget not: in Thy book record their groans,
Who were Thy sheep, and in their ancient fold,
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks, their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow
O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth sway
The triple tyrant; that from these may grow
A hundred fold, who, having learned Thy way,
Early, may fly the Babylonian woe.⁴*

When the martyrs were done to death for their faith, they were clothed, as it were, in the blackest garments of infamy. They were pictured by Mother Church as the vilest of criminals. They were spurned by society as scarcely human. They were looked upon as having the bodies of humans but the spirits of demons. They were deemed unworthy of the smallest mercy and deserving of the cruelest of deaths.

In some of the museums of Europe, there are paintings of a typical *auto de fe*. These public penance rituals were martyrdoms; contemporary paintings portray what occurred when martyrs were burned at the stake. Martyrs were stripped of their garments and tied to a stake while firewood was heaped around them. A pulpit was then erected and a crowd assembled. A spokesman for Mother Church then mounted the pulpit, proclaimed the glories of the church and then focused on the miserable character of the dissenter. The martyrs were portrayed as the enemies of God. The martyr was pictured as having the blackest of characters and clothed in the blackest of black garments. Their guilt was depicted as being so monstrous that more pity was shown to the furtive purse snatcher or the most violent murderer. The crowd would eventually applaud as the martyr was consigned to the flames.

In response to the cry of the martyrs as symbolised in this fifth seal, the Lord vindicated their righteous deaths. How did He do this?

...a white robe was given to each of them. Revelation 6:11

What is the significance of the gift of white robes? How is it possible that white robes could vindicate the death of millions of martyrs?

The first thing we should recognize is that the white robes indicate that the martyrs were overcomers.

He who overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment. Revelation 3:5

⁴ John Milton, Sonnet XVIII: On the Late Massacre in Piedmont, (1655).

White robes also represent the righteousness of the saints.

*...the fine linen, clean and white is the righteous acts of the saints.
Revelation 19:8*

Under the fifth seal those reviled as evil, heinous heretics are seen to be righteous and godly saints. How is it then that they are now seen to be saints rather than sinners? How are they now recognized as righteous rather than reprobate? What has transpired that transformed public opinion so dramatically?

The change of attitude was due to the Protestant Reformation. How was it then that the Reformation changed world opinion about these martyrs? During the Reformation, Catholic priests and scholars finally gained access to the message of the Bible, the Word of God, and being able to read it, had their eyes opened. They saw the real gospel expounded in its pages: they then recognised who were the true saints of the Christian era. They were shocked into the realization that Mother Church was a fallen, apostate church. When they studied the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation they discovered that Mother Church was not the true church, but *the Antichrist, the man of sin, the harlot church, the little horn, the ten-horned beast*. In other words, Mother Church was the enemy of the Lord Jesus Christ rather than His representative on earth.

If Mother Church was the antichrist, then those who had dissented from its stance, those who were martyred, must have been the true people of God. These men and women must have been the righteous saints. Thus the mighty gospel proclamation made by the Reformers of the 16th century opened the eyes of the world. Now the martyrs were seen, not clothed in the black of evildoers, but in the white of the saints of God. These so-called pernicious heretics — were now recognised as the favourites of heaven. This was a spectacular reversal of public opinion. We can only thank God for the glorious Protestant Reformation!

It is interesting to note Dr. Ellicott's comment.

There is also a sense in which a white robe is given to them in the eyes of men. Those whose names have been cast out as evil, have been honored by a repentant posterity with the robe of tardy praise. After generations garnished the sepulchers of the righteous that their fathers slew. The excommunicated in one age, are often the canonized of the next, for the dull world learns slowly and its purest honors are posthumous.⁵

The fifth seal represents an exposure of the apostate church through the great Protestant Reformation. As a result, revival and restoration came to the true church.

Future martyrdoms

The fifth seal concluded by encouraging the martyrs that they should

...rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed. v11

⁵ Charles J. Ellicott, *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 88.

Will there be further martyrdoms before the Second Advent? There certainly will be martyrdoms during the coming time of trouble, when the worship of the beast and his image is enforced: all who will not comply will be threatened with death (see Revelation 13:15-17).

This experience is described by one author as follows:

*When the fifth seal was opened, John...saw beneath the altar the company that were slain for the Word of God...**After this came the scenes described in the eighteenth of Revelation**, when those who are faithful and true are called out from Babylon.⁶*

What are the scenes *described* (but not fulfilled) in Revelation 18:1-5 and that are predicted in the latter part of the fifth seal? Revelation 18:1-5 describes *The Loud Cry* - the call to come out of Babylon - and the ensuing persecution which climaxes in the death decree.⁷ These are the scenes in which the future martyrdoms will occur and for which the martyrs of the Dark Ages were instructed to wait.

*...many who shall be convinced of truth will come on the side of God's commandment-keeping people. When this grand work is to take place in the battle, prior to the last closing conflict, many will be imprisoned, many will flee for their lives from cities and towns, **and many will be martyrs for Christ's sake in standing in defense of the truth.**⁸*

The martyrs are told to *rest* (or wait) *a little while longer* until the final martyrdoms are fulfilled. Why are they instructed to wait? The reason is that a time is appointed when all the martyrs of Christ are to be avenged.

And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth? Luke 18:7-8.

These verses refer particularly to martyrdoms during the time of trouble of the End Time. These martyrs will be avenged first by the plagues which will fall on evildoers and then at the time of the Second Advent. The wrath of God during the seven last plagues is poured out upon those *who worship the beast and his image*. These idolaters will have been responsible for the death of the martyrs in the last days. Those martyred during the great tribulation of the Dark Ages will be avenged at the third advent when their persecutors will rise in *the resurrection to damnation*. John 5:29.

There are some who claim that the fifth seal applies to the End Time. This cannot be the case because it is obvious that the End Time pertains to what is contained under the sixth seal. The fact that the martyrs, who cry for redress during the fifth seal, are instructed to rest for a little season until the final group of martyrs meet their fate, indicates that they must have met their fate prior to the End Time. Consequently the fifth seal must cover the period prior to the time of the end otherwise

⁶ F.D.Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 1 (Washington, Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1957), , Milian L. Andreasen et al., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1957), 7:698.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1900), 179.

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assoc, 1958), 379.

there would be no time for the second group of martyrs to exist. Note these words from the author of *The Great Controversy*:

*In the thirteenth century was established that most terrible of all...the Inquisition...The mangled forms of millions of martyrs **cried to God for vengeance upon that apostate power.***⁹

Describing the future sufferings of God's people, the same author declared:

*The people of God will then be plunged into those scenes of affliction and distress which prophets have described as the time of Jacob's trouble. The cries of the faithful, persecuted ones ascend to heaven. And as the blood of Abel cried from the ground, there are voices also crying to God from martyrs' graves, from the sepulchers of the sea, from mountain caverns, from convent vaults: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" The Lord is doing His work. All heaven is astir. The Judge of all the earth is soon to arise and vindicate His insulted authority. The mark of deliverance will be set upon the men who keep God's commandments, who revere His law, and who refuse the mark of the beast or of his image.*¹⁰

Here the author indicates the period when the cry of the saints during Jacob's trouble will be heard and their sufferings avenged. It will commence at the close of probation when God begins to mete out punishment upon the persecutors of His people. The second statement reads

From garrets, from hovels, from dungeons, from scaffolds, from mountains and deserts, from the caves of the earth and the caverns of the sea, Christ will gather His children to Himself. On earth they have been destitute, afflicted, and tormented. Millions have gone down to the grave loaded with infamy because they refused to yield to the deceptive claims of Satan.

*By human tribunals the children of God have been adjudged the vilest criminals. But the day is near when "God is judge Himself." Then the decisions of earth shall be reversed. "The rebuke of His people shall He take away." Isaiah 25:8. White robes will be given to every one of them. And "they shall call them the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord".*¹¹

With this statement the author again reveals the point in time when God will avenge His people. The phrases taken from the fifth seal and used in the above settings are not an exposition of the fifth seal. These phrases are borrowed from Revelation 6 and are used homiletically, out of context. While such use of scripture is permissible in preaching and writing, they are not appropriate for exegesis.

⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 59.

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1948), 5:451.

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* 182-3.

The sixth seal

We now come to the sixth seal. This seal is distinct from the other seals because it is couched in literal terminology, whereas the others are all in symbolic language.

I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Revelation 6:12-13

Some commentators attempt to symbolize sections of the sixth seal, but this is inconsistent: the seal must either be symbolically or literally interpreted. One commentator who gives the first half of the seal a symbolic application and the second half a literal application effectively destroys the impact of the prediction.¹² This view turns an orderly, logical exposition of Scripture into something that is hazy and uncertain. So why is the sixth seal in literal language while the other seals are treated symbolically? Two reasons are offered:

1. First, there would be a problem with trying to symbolize the final cataclysmic events prior to the Second Advent. How would one symbolize an earthquake, the darkening of the sun, the moon turning to blood, and the literal falling of the stars?
2. Second, the events of the sixth seal are couched in literal terms so that God's people would not fail to recognize them as the signs of the End. Most of the events of this seal were foretold by Jesus in the gospels. They were given as warning signs of the last days, and of the special need for the saints to be ready for the Second Advent. God couched them in literal terms so that His people would not fail to recognize them.

When Jesus described in Matthew 24:29-30 the events associated with the Second Advent, he listed seven specific occurrences:

1. the darkening of the sun
2. the moon not giving its light
3. the stars falling
4. the powers of heaven being shaken
5. the sign of the Son of man
6. the mourning of the unsaved
7. the actual appearing of Christ.

Six of the seven events listed are repeated in the sixth seal of Revelation. Three of the events of Matthew 24 involve the sun, the moon and the stars, in the same order as the sixth seal presentation. These signs were to occur *immediately after the tribulation of those days*, that is, in the tribulation which occurred during the Papal supremacy. The last martyrdom of that period occurred in 1762 AD. Immediately after that, the Scripture states that

¹² Desmond Ford, *Crisis: A Commentary on Revelation* (Newcastle: Desmond Ford Publication, 1982), 378.

... the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. Matthew 24:29

This was fulfilled in 1780 AD which was indeed after the tribulation. However in the sixth seal the darkening of the sun was preceded by a great earthquake.

Did an earthquake occur that would appropriately represent the opening of the sixth seal? In the record of earthquakes between 1600 and 1800 AD approximately 1,800 destructive earthquakes occurred.¹³ Of these, the greatest and the most spectacular was the Lisbon earthquake of November 1, 1755. This was 25 years prior to the darkening of the sun. History confirms that the Lisbon earthquake was the greatest known to that time, and it had a profound affect upon European society.

*The effects of the Lisbon earthquake... were distributed over very nearly four millions of square English miles of the earth's surface, and greatly surpassed anything of the kind ever recorded in history.*¹⁴

*The great earthquake of 1755 extended over a tract of at least 4 million square miles... it pervaded the greater proportion of the continents of Europe, Africa and America... all Africa was shaken by this tremendous convulsion... the city of Lisbon contained about 150,000 inhabitants... Mr. Barretti says, 90,000 persons are supposed to have been lost on that fateful day*¹⁵

*Among the earth movements which in historic times have affected the kingdom of Portugal, that of November 1, 1755 takes first rank; as it does also in some respects, in all recorded earthquakes... in 6 minutes 60,000 persons perished.*¹⁶

*By far the most spectacular earthquake of earlier times was that of Lisbon in 1755. This has some claim to be regarded as the greatest earthquake on record... The disaster shocked all Europe and the moralists and the wiseacres were not slow to make capital of it.*¹⁷

*Probably the most famous of all earthquakes is that which destroyed Lisbon on November 1, 1755. Alexander Von Humboldt stated that the total area shaken, was four times that of Europe.*¹⁸

This earthquake profoundly affected all strata of society,

*The Lisbon earthquake...put both the theologians and philosophers on the defensive... for many weeks, as we see in the letters and memoirs of that time, people in distant parts of Europe went to bed in alarm, relieved in the morning to find that they had escaped the fate of Lisbon one night more.*¹⁹

This earthquake indeed was recognized as a sign of the End.

¹³ British Association for the Advancement of Science.

¹⁴ Armand Pontmartin, *The History and Philosophy of Earthquakes* (London: 1757), 333.

¹⁵ Robert Sears, *Wonders of the World* (New York: Robert Sears, 1843), 50, 58, 381.

¹⁶ William Hobbs, *Earthquakes: an Introduction to Seismic Geology* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1907), 142-143.

¹⁷ George A. Eiby, *Earthquakes* (London: Muller, 1957), 141-142.

¹⁸ "Earthquake", in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, ed. (London, Cambridge University Press, 1911), 7:848.

¹⁹ James Parton, *The Life of Voltaire* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1884), 2:208-209.

The earthquake had made all men thoughtful. They mistrusted their love of the drama and filled the churches instead.²⁰

Englishman John Biddulf composed a poem recognizing the Lisbon quake as a sign of the last days.

*Who can with curious eyes this globe survey
And not behold it tottering with decay?
All things created God's designs fulfill,
And natural causes work his destined will.
And that eternal Word, which cannot lie,
To mortals hath revealed in prophecy
That in these latter days such signs should come,
Preludes and prologues to the general doom.
But not the Son of man can tell that day;
Then, lest it find you sleeping, watch and pray.²¹*

The next events in the sixth seal are the darkening of the sun, the moon being turned to blood and the stars falling from heaven (Revelation 6:12-13). As mentioned previously, this is a repetition of the prediction Jesus made as recorded in three of the gospels. Jesus predicted:

*Immediately after the tribulations of those days the sun will be darkened...
Matthew 24:29*

The tribulation ceased in 1762 with the death of a Protestant pastor in France. In 1773 the Jesuits, the chief instigators of persecution, were temporarily outlawed by Pope Clement XIV.

The prediction concerning the sun was fulfilled in the famous Dark Day of May 19, 1780 which chiefly affected the north-eastern area of North America. The true cause of this event is unknown; however it was not the result of an eclipse. As a consequence it caused consternation in the places where it was observed.

The Dark Day, May 19, 1780 – so called on account of a remarkable darkness on that day extending over all New England. In some places, persons could not see to read common print in the open air for several hours together. Birds sang their evening songs, disappeared, and became silent; fowls went to roost; cattle sought the barnyard; and candles were lighted in the houses. The obscuration began about ten o' clock in the morning, and continued till the middle of the next night, but with differences of degree and duration in different places.

For several days previous, the wind had been variable, but chiefly from the southwest and the northeast. The true cause of this remarkable phenomenon is not known.²²

That this darkness was not caused by an eclipse, is manifested by the various positions of the planetary bodies at that time, for the moon was more than one

²⁰ S.G. Tallentyre (pseudonym for E.B. Hall), *Life of Voltaire* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), 319.

²¹ John Biddulf, *A Poem on the Lisbon earthquake* (London: Printed for W. Owen, 1755),

²² Webster's Dictionary (1869 Edition)

*hundred and fifty degrees from the sun all that day...and as to the moon, she was at that time more than forty hours in motion past her opposition.*²³

*Dark Day, Men Filled With Awe and Alarm. Refers especially to May 19, 1780, which was very dark in Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey causing great alarm.*²⁴

The darkening of the sun occurred in the northeast of North America. Why in such a limited area of the world? Scripture does not reveal the reason, but there are two possible reasons to explain this. First, the Christian churches of the day had become very worldly and the truth of the Second Advent neglected, together with the signs that had been mentioned by Jesus. This was especially true of the churches of North America. The author of *The Great Controversy* has stated

*The heavenly signs were given to arouse Christians particularly in North America*²⁵

The second reason which presents itself is that soon after, in the area where these signs in the sky appeared, a remarkable revival of interest arose in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. Christians had recognized these events as signs given by Jesus, warning of His return.²⁶

Whatever the cause of the darkening of the sun, it certainly occurred at the time predicted and met the specifications of the prediction.²⁷ The same night when the moon arose – it was a full moon, indicating that it was not an eclipse - it appeared red like blood. But before long it completely disappeared from sight and the blackness of the night was so deep that even horses lost their way.

*At night it was so inky dark that a person could not see his hand when held up, nor even a white sheet of paper*²⁸

*Nor was the darkness of the night less uncommon and terrifying than that of the day; notwithstanding there was almost a full moon, no object was discernible, but by the help of some artificial light...*²⁹

*The darkness of the following night was so dense that many who were but a little way from home, on well known roads, could not, without extreme difficulty, retrace the way to their own dwellings.*³⁰

²³ Richard Devens, *Our First Century* (Springfield MA: C.A. Nichols and Co, 1878), 'The Wonderful Dark Day – 1780.' 95

²⁴ "Dark Day, Men filled with awe and alarm", in *Universal Cyclopaedia*, Charles Kendall Adams, ed. (New York, D. Appleton and Company, 1900).

²⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 309.

²⁶ Milian L. Andreasen et al., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* 7:779

²⁷ One modern investigator, on the basis of newspaper reports at that time, has advanced the opinion that the Dark Day of 19 May 1780 was caused by forest fires. This has led some to seriously question the event as constituting a fulfillment of the prediction. In answer we would suggest that to base a conclusion on a newspaper report should not be taken very seriously. See M. Sprengel, "1780 Accounts of the Dark Day", *The Review and Herald*, 157, No. 28 (5 June, 1980), 11.

²⁸ William Little, *The History of Weare, New Hampshire 1735-1888* (Lowell Mass.: S.W. Huse & Co, 1888),

²⁹ Dr Samuel Tenney, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (Cambridge MA: MHS, 1792), Vol. 1, "1785 Letter".

The next event listed as occurring under the sixth seal entailed the falling of the stars.

And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Revelation 6:13

This text does not refer to fixed stars, but to meteors. Did meteors appear after the Dark Day of 1780 in such a way as to constitute a fulfillment of this prediction? The fact is that there always have been “falling stars”, meteors, which have been traced back as far as 902 AD, however very little was known or understood concerning meteors till 1798 AD. At that time two German students reported observations and conclusions in regard to meteors.³¹

*The first spectacular fall of meteors was in 1799 AD. It was observed mostly in central and south America.*³²

The most spectacular fall was in 1833.

*... the most magnificent meteor shower on record.*³³

*For nearly four hours the sky was literally ablaze... more than a billion shooting stars appeared over the United States and Canada alone.*³⁴

This startled the population and many recognized it as a fulfillment of the predictions of Jesus and of the sixth seal of Revelation. It is interesting to notice the manner in which the stars were predicted to fall.

...as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind.

The stars were not to fall like ripe figs, directly in a straight line to the ground, but like figs under pressure, which snap off and fly away in the wind. Eyewitness accounts of the falling stars confirm this description.

*It may be doubted, whether any description has surpassed, in accuracy and impressiveness, that of the old Negro in Virginia, who remarked “it is awful, indeed, sir, it looked like ripe crab-apples falling from the trees, when shaking them for cider”.*³⁵

*...this language of the prophet has always been received as metaphorical... It was literally fulfilled in the phenomenon of yesterday, so as no man before yesterday had conceived to be possible that it should be fulfilled... And how did they fall? Neither myself nor one of the family heard any report; and were I to hunt through nature for a simile, I could not find one so apt to illustrate the appearance of the heavens as that which St John uses in the prophecy.*³⁶

³⁰ John M. Whitton, *Sketches of the History of New-Hampshire* (Concorde, NH: Marsh, Capen & Lyon, 1834), np.

³¹ James C. Hickey, *Introducing the Universe* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1952), 85-86.

³² Willard James Fisher, “The Ancient Leonids”, *The Telescope* (October 1934), 80-82, 84.

³³ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

³⁴ Peter Millman, “The Falling of the Stars”, *The Telescope* (May-June 1940), 57.

³⁵ J.T. Buckingham et al, “The Meteoric Shower”, *The New-England Journal*, 6 No.? (January, 1834), 48.

³⁶ Henry Dana Ward, “Falling Stars”, *Journal of Commerce*, 8, No. 534 (November 16, 1833), np.

...the observers saw that the meteors darted away from a single point in the sky; the meteors 'were like the ribs of a gigantic umbrella'.³⁷

With the falling of the meteors of 1799 and 1833, a new division of astronomy commenced titled *Meteoric Astronomy*. It was realized that these falling stars, which were called Leonids because they appeared under the constellation of Leo, came in cycles of 33.33 years. The first fall was in 1799, 33.33 years later in 1833 came the next fall, and the third fall came in 1866. This third fall was seen in Britain, Europe, Africa and parts of Asia.

Some scientists therefore concluded that the Leonids would appear every 33.33 years. Thus when the next 33.33 years arrived in 1899 there was great expectation. The world was alerted to watch. However they searched the skies in vain as not a single Leonid appeared. Meteors still race through outer space, but no regular spectacular appearances continue to occur. If the Leonids had come regularly every 33.33 years, they would not have been recognized as special signs of a great event in the history of the world. These celestial events occurred at a particular time to mark the commencement of the final era in history - *The time of the end*.

The term *the time of the end* originates in the book of Daniel. It began at the close of 1260 years of papal supremacy which concluded in 1798. Around that important date these celestial signs appeared - first of all the sun darkening in 1780, then the moon turning red the same night, then the stars fell in 1799, 1833 and 1866. In these signs God was telling mankind that the last days had begun. Thus, ever since 1798, we have been in the time of the end - the last days.

Christians should have been expecting the Second Advent ever since 1798. It is informative to note the correspondence between the events of Matthew 24:29-30 foretold by Christ, and the events of Revelation 6:12-17 under the sixth seal.

There are a total of nine events. It is enlightening to compare the details of these dramatic awe-inspiring scenes of the Second Advent of Christ.

6th seal events Revelation 6:12-17	Events foretold by Christ Matthew 24:29-30
1. Great earthquake	Not mentioned
2. Sun darkened	Sun darkened
3. Moon as blood	Moon unlit
4. Stars fall	Stars fall
5. Atmospheric heaven departs	Heavenly powers shaken
6. Great earthquake	No mention
7. No mention	Sign of Son of Man
8. Flight and cry of unsaved	Populace mourns
9. Coming of Christ	Coming of Christ

³⁷ Willard James Fisher, "The Ancient Leonids", *The Telescope*, 80.

We now stand between v13 and v14 of Revelation 6. The next great event in history, as far as this line of prophecy is concerned, is described thus:

Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. v14

Which heaven is it that departs as a scroll? It cannot be the third heaven, for that is where God is enthroned. Undoubtedly it has to be the first, the atmospheric heaven. However at the Second Advent, other areas of space will also be affected.

Jesus said

the powers of heaven will be shaken Matthew 24:29

This refers to the powers of the second heaven - outer space - the sun, moon and stars. Both the first and second heavens will be disturbed when Christ in power and glory descends through space to this planet. The apostle Paul confirms this fact.

...I shake not only the earth, but also heaven. Hebrews 12:26

At the Second Advent not only will our planetary system be greatly disturbed, but our own planet, it appears, could have its rotation upon its axis affected. As one author has written:

The powers of heaven are the sun, moon, and stars. They rule in the heavens ... The powers of heaven will be shaken at the voice of God. Then the sun, moon, and stars will be moved out of their places. They will not pass away, but be shaken by the voice of God. Dark, heavy clouds came up and clashed against each other. The atmosphere parted and rolled back; then we could look up through the open space in Orion, whence came the voice of God.³⁸

Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up...

This must refer to the cloudy atmosphere, rather than the air that surrounds the planet, otherwise all life would cease. Associated with these amazing atmospheric disturbances a violent upheaval occurs upon the earth.

...and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. v14

This mammoth earthquake is also described under the seventh plague.

and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth... Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. Revelation 16:18, 20.

This text describes a stupendous earthquake which denotes the destruction of the world's civilization. As the author of *The Great Controversy* has written:

The firmament (atmosphere) appears to open and shut... 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

³⁸ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1882), 41.

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... 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.³⁹

We now come to the actual appearance of Christ in the heavens. As a result of the atmospheric disturbances and the removal of the cloudy atmosphere, the world's inhabitants will be able to see into the vast distance. They behold

...the sign of the Son of man, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds, of heaven with power and great glory. Matthew 24:30.

The sixth seal then describes the reaction of the unsaved as they behold the coming of Christ.

And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains. Revelation 6:15

The various strata of the whole of mankind hide because they know doomsday has come. They know this fact because they have heard the message of Christ's coming which has sounded to the whole world, especially in the *Loud Cry* of Revelation 18:1-4. All classes of the unsaved who have supported the false church now in despair call to the mountains and rocks to

...Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand? Revelation 6:16-17

This fearful flight of the unsaved reveals that Christ's return is gradual. It must take time for the unsaved to flee to the mountains, indicating that Christ's approach to the earth becomes more apparent over time. He does not come in a sudden, blinding flash to snatch away His people.

During this fateful, final scene is heard humankind's lost prayer of despair. They have rejected Him who is the Rock of Ages, and now pray to the mountains and rocks to hide them from His face.

Bound up in this tragedy is also a dramatic demonstration of Divine Law.

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. Galatians 6:7

The supporters of the apostate church had turned away from the truth of Christ. Now they turn away in despair from the face of Christ. They had refused to fall upon the Rock and be broken in repentance: now they plead for the rocks to fall on them. They had hidden themselves from the light of the truth of Christ. They had rejected the call to stand

³⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 637-378.

for Christ. Now they cry, "Who shall be able to stand?" 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*.

Seven classes of the unsaved are presented in this scenario representing all humanity. Birth, position, power and talent mean nothing now - just as they have always countered for nothing as far as God is concerned. There is a lesson here for humankind today. We dare not look to those elevated by the world's acclaim to lead in the things of God. We need to beware of the example and opinions of the world's leading lights, because one day they will rush to the mountains and rocks in utter despair.

At this hour two heartfelt prayers will be heard – the prayers of the majority – those who have followed the popular practices of the day - who will pray to the rocks and mountains, and the prayers of the minority - the remnant - who have followed the Lamb and kept His commandments. Their prayer will be

...Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.
Isaiah 25:9

How they have so patiently waited! They have endured persecution, endured the overhanging threat of death, the seven last plagues, the pursuit of mobs; they have waited with incredible endurance and now at last their Saviour has finally appeared. What unutterable relief will be theirs!

One important fact to note is that between the sixth and seventh seals lies the seventh chapter of Revelation. It is significant enough to consider why this chapter is inserted into this position. The information in the seventh chapter of Revelation is located here to answer the insistent question *Who shall be able to stand?* Everyone needs to know the answer to that question – it is the most vital of all questions for earth's final generation.

The answer to the question of *who shall be able to stand* is found in Revelation Chapter 7:1-3.

...I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."
Revelation 7:1-3.

The only people who will be able to endure when Christ comes are those who have God's special seal. The prophet also witnessed four angels holding back the four winds which denote the judgments of God. They hold back the winds of judgment so that God's servants can be sealed on their foreheads.

A second reason why Chapter 7 is inserted between the sixth and seventh seals is that it reveals the final destiny and reward of those who have stood faithfully for Christ.

The close of the sixth seal portrays the fall of the apostate church. By this time the apostate church will be worldwide and be comprised of all the unsaved.

And all who dwell on the earth will worship Him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life... Revelation 13:8

The close of the sixth seal also reveals the sealing of those who comprise the true church and assures them of deliverance at the Second Advent.

The seventh seal

When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Revelation 8:1

This silence in heaven may appear to be an anticlimax but it isn't, indeed this seventh seal is one of the most thrilling of all. The sixth seal depicted tremendous upheavals - the great earthquake, the sun blackened out, the moon appearing as blood, stars falling to earth, the world's population stricken with terrifying panic. But then there is silence!

Why is there silence when normally there is continual music and praise in the presence of God?

And they do not rest day or night, saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come! Revelation 4:8

What could bring about silence in heaven? It has occurred only once before.

On this occasion heaven's glorious atmosphere of praise is transformed to one of grief. Why has this change occurred? Has sorrow ever afflicted our Heavenly Father? The answer is in the affirmative. His heart was afflicted with sorrow when He gave His only begotten Son, when to save our guilty race He had to withdraw His presence from His beloved, as He hung upon the cross. While amidst fearful darkness Jesus, as He died in agony, cried

...My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Mark 15:34

Upon that cross Jesus, His beloved Son, died of a broken heart. The author of *The Desire of Ages* describes this as follows

*God suffered with His Son. Angels beheld the Saviour's agony. They saw their Lord enclosed by legions of satanic forces, His nature weighed down with a shuddering, mysterious dread. **There was silence in heaven.** No harp was touched. Could mortals have viewed the amazement of the angelic host as in silent grief they watched the Father separating His beams of light, love, and glory from His beloved Son, they would better understand how offensive in His sight is sin.⁴⁰*

Why silence at the Second Advent?

Could there be any other event that could bring sorrow again to the heart of God? There certainly will be. At the Second Advent the unready, the unsaved, will meet their doom.

...the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe... 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10

⁴⁰ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1898), 693.

The Second Advent brings about the destruction of unsaved millions. What a shocking and tragic event this will be. But it will be essential, and this tragedy will grieve the heart of God.

...‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’ Ezekiel 33:11.

This is the first reason for silence in heaven at the Second Advent. But what is the significance of the *half hour* time frame? It suggests a second reason for the silence in heaven.

The half hour prophecy

The seventh seal is a symbolic prophecy; consequently the *half hour* is symbolic time. In prophecy symbols extend until the time of the Second Advent. This means that the year-day principle is in force, where a prophetic day represents a literal year. Therefore a half hour in this prophecy calculates as follows:

Half an hour	=	1/48 of a day
One day	=	One year
A Bible year	=	360 Days
∴ half an hour	=	1/48 of 360
	=	7½ days.

There will be silence in heaven for seven and a half literal days. Even though some claim that prophetic times of less than one day don't exist, that conclusion is based on pure assumption and should be ignored. There is no support for such a supposition in Scripture.

It is also claimed by some that all prophetic time ended in 1844, asserting that *time shall be no longer* (Revelation 10:6). But this only refers to the prophetic periods of the book of Daniel of which there are four - the 1260 years, the 1290 years, the 1335 years and the 2300 years.

When Revelation says that *time shall be no longer*, it is speaking of the great chronological time periods of the book of Daniel. All chronological *prophetic* time ended in 1844. There is *no longer* any further chronological *prophetic time* after 1844. In other words, there are no prophetic dates later than 1844.

In symbolic prophecy, however, when time is mentioned it is still symbolic time up until the Second Advent. *After* the Second Advent time then reverts to a literal timeframe. Symbols cease at the Second Advent and this is why the one thousand years of Revelation 20 must be interpreted as literal years rather than a symbolic period of time.

What then is the significance of the seven and a half literal days in connection with the Second Advent? When Jesus Christ returns to this world, heaven will be emptied of its

inhabitants, except for God the Father.⁴¹ All the angelic host accompany Christ to this world.

*When the Son of Man comes in His glory, **and all the holy angels with Him**, then He will sit on the throne of His glory Matthew 25:31*

The Second Advent will be the greatest display of power and glory ever witnessed.

He comes in His own glory and in His Father's and of the holy angels. Luke 9:26

All the inhabitants of heaven and probably the leaders of other worlds, as well as their subjects, will accompany Christ. But the Father remains alone, awaiting the return of His Son with the saints. Undoubtedly He waits in silence. There is no praise because no one is present to give voice to heavenly adulation. For six thousand years the unfallen universe has intently witnessed the great controversy on earth. Now, in the great climax of the controversy, in the grand finale of the war between good and evil, in the battle of Armageddon, the unnumbered hosts of heaven are present to witness the scene.

*And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.
Revelation 19:14-15*

It appears therefore that the Father waits for seven and a half days. The time taken for the cataclysmic events of the Second Advent undoubtedly will be very short, for Jesus said, *Behold I come quickly*. Why then seven and a half days? One answer is suggested by the author of *Early Writings*:

*We were changed and caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air. We all entered the cloud together, and **were seven days ascending to the sea of glass**, when Jesus brought the crowns and with His own right hand placed them on our heads. He gave us harps of gold and palms of victory.⁴²*

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 Advent, 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.

Then the saints of God begin their epic journey of seven awe-inspiring days through outer space, back to the Father's home. In that great reunion day all the saints will return together to the kingdom where they shall receive the promised reward. What a marvelous prospect!

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! Revelation 7:9-10

⁴¹ Some have claimed that God the Father also accompanies Jesus Christ when he returns to this world. There is no scriptural support for this view. The Second Advent is always associated with Jesus Christ. If God the Father were coming to this world there would surely be evidence for this in Scripture.

⁴² Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, 16.

Imagine the glorious experience when we finally stand before the throne and see the face of our wonderful God.

...they shall neither hunger any more nor thirst anymore... And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Revelation 7:16-17

...there shall be no more death... there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Revelation 21:4

Appendix A: The seven seals of Revelation – summary

1 st seal White horse	2 nd seal Red horse	3 rd seal Black horse	4 th seal Pale horse	5 th seal Cry of the martyrs	6 th seal Signs in earth & sky	7 th seal Silence in heaven
A war of righteousness against Satan's kingdom by the church of Christ	A war against the doctrines & standards of the church of Christ.	A war against the character and leadership of the church of Christ.	A war against the people of the Church of Christ.	Vindication of the Martyrs of the Church of Christ.	Time of preparation of the Church of Christ.	The Deliverance of the Church of Christ
Apostolic church	Church after persecution	Church united with State.	Church dominating the State	The Protestant Reformation	The time of the end	The second advent.
Pure, zealous, persecuted.	Sinful, heretical, political.	Corrupt, idolatrous, pagan	Deadly & repulsive	Recovery of the gospel. Antichrist identified.	Warnings of the second advent.	Enemies of church slain.
Faithful and united proclaim truth.	Faithful resist apostasy.	Faithful separate from apostasy.	Faithful in flight from apostates	Faithful gain recognition.	Faithful proclaim Christ's return.	Faithful taken to kingdom.
<u>Bow</u> = Word of God <u>Crown</u> = Christ as king <u>Conquering</u> = triumph of gospel in apostles' day.	No peace = literal & spiritual peace vanishes from the church. <u>Kill</u> = Intolerance & hatred in the church. <u>Sword</u> = Authoritarianism, love of power. Division & separation.	<u>Balances</u> = 1. Judgment – Apostate Church rejected. 2. Commerce – Gospel commercialized. 3. Corrupt dealing – trade in relics, indulgences etc. <u>Spiritual Famine</u> = Bible kept from the people. <u>Oil & Wine</u> = Holy Spirit & true doctrine	<u>Death and grave ride</u> = Spiritual death to supporters. Literal death to dissenters Millions martyred Papacy supreme	<u>White Robes Given</u> = Previously martyrs were clothed in black. The Reformation clothed the martyrs in white. Martyrs to await future martyrdoms in the final conflict.	<u>Lisbon quake</u> 1755 <u>Sun darkened</u> 1780 <u>Moon red</u> 1780 <u>Stars fall (x 3)</u> 1799 1833 1866 Last Days commence 1798 <u>Atmosphere departs</u> - Christ seen in distant heavens. <u>Flight of supporters</u> of world-wide apostate church.	<u>Silence</u> = God's grief at the destruction of the millions of unsaved. <u>Half Hour</u> = <u>7½ literal days</u> . Christ & angels are absent from the Father. <u>1/2 day</u> = Christ's coming, resurrection, translation, destruction of wicked. <u>7 Days</u> = Return journey to kingdom.
31 AD	100 AD	320 AD	538 AD	1500 AD	1755 AD	Second Advent
Warnings of Apostasy	Apostate church emerges	Apostate church complete	Apostate church supreme	Apostate church exposed	Apostate church falls	Apostate church destroyed.
True church victorious	True church under attack	True church eclipsed	True church in wilderness	True church revived	True church vindicated	True church rewarded

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