

TEXT Revelation 6:12-17

REVIEW

### **What do the seven seals tell us?**

It is the Lord Jesus who opens the seals. He is the executor of God's will. He is Lord! He sits enthroned over all.

First four seals: The pagan Roman Empire would go through four kinds of experiences.

Rev 6:1-2 military conquest and resulting peace (verse 4 "take peace...")

Rev 6:3-4 civil war

Rev 6:5-7 shortages

-high taxes, ruthlessly exacted

-either resulting from or causing severe shortages of necessities

Rev 6:7-8 widespread death from many causes; vast depopulation

All of these things will happen, as they almost always do everywhere, but these things will predominate in this order.

Fifth seal: The pagan Roman Empire would make a last great persecution of Christians (6:9)

Rev 6:10 the saints will pray

Rev 6:11 the Lord will comfort the saints, telling them to wait just a little longer

Sixth seal: The pagan Roman Empire would be overthrown in a great convulsion (6:12-17)

The Christians first receiving the Revelation could not know what period of time into the future this all would take. But they could know it would be starting then.

We now know in history that this was about the next 200 years from when John wrote, the 2nd and 3rd centuries, plus a little more. Approximately from the death of Domitian a.d. 96 to the reign of Constantine w/ Edict of Milan a.d. 313, and his victory in civil war 322.

## LESSON

The sixth seal shows the wrath of God and of the Lamb coming on those who have been persecuting the saints.

Striking language: earthquake, sun black, moon blood, stars fell, heaven rolled up, mountains and islands moved

Misinterpreting this language is one of the most common interpretive tasks to get wrong, but one of the easiest interpretive tasks to get right

From the context, the verses that follow, we get the idea that it has to do with the wrath of God coming upon kings, and the people of their kingdoms with them.

Let's go find these figures used in the OT, to see what help we can get in interpreting them correctly.

Ezekiel 29:17-20

Siege of Tyre commenced just after conquest of Jerusalem, and lasted 13 years to 574 or 573 B.C.

City on mainland was destroyed; city on island was not destroyed

Nebuchadnezzar gained very little plunder from the city, it having been removed by sea

Ezekiel 32:1-15

## OBSERVATIONS

1. Prophecy in figurative or symbolic language
  - a. v. 2 Pharoah is like a lion and like a whale or crocodile or dragon or monster
  - b. v. 2 Pharoah is like a monster, crocodile, dragon, KJV whale
  - c. v. 3 net
  - d. v. 4 with you I will fill the beasts of the whole earth
  - e. v. 5 fill the valleys with your carcass
  - f. v. 6 'I will also water the land with the flow of your blood, Even to the mountains; And the riverbeds will be full of you.
  - g. v. 7-8 right at that point we get the language about the sun & moon
    - i. up to there, the language clearly has been figurative
    - ii. we can think this is, also
    - iii. see how there is "Says the Lord GOD" at the end of v. 8
2. Plain language explanation
  - a. v. 9 I will also vex the hearts of many people
  - b. v. 10 ...kings shall be horribly afraid
  - c. v. 11 ...The sword of the king of Babylon shall come
  - d. v. 12 ...will I cause they multitude to fall
  - e. v. 12 ...they shall spoil the pomp of Egypt
  - f. v. 15 ...I shall make the land of Egypt desolate

So, in the case of the prophecy in Ezekiel, this kind of prophetic language was to be understood as foretelling the downfall of a powerful king and his kingdom. God was going to use one powerful military leader to bring down some king and kingdom.

## APPLICATION

Learn to understand figurative or symbolic language in the Bible for what it really means.

Don't fall for whatever someone says about "end times prophecy."

Have confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ, that if one powerful country is brought down by some other powerful country; or if one powerful leader is replaced by another one, the Lord is still on the throne, and it is His doing.

When some wicked person or system wrongly troubles you, pray for comfort and vindication from the Lord Jesus. He will do it!

Rev 6:12

Trapp:

Understand hereby those horrible commotions and confusions that occurred in the Roman empire upon those ten bloody persecutions, and the earnest supplications of the saints which can work wonders in heaven and earth.

Poole:

Mr. Mede's judgment (followed by many other famous men) seems best, that it denotes that period when Constantine, the first Christian emperor, restored peace to the church, by overturning the whole pagan state, and making Christianity the religion of the greatest part of the world. This was about the year 311, and perfected upon his victory over Licinius, 325

Knollys:

John had the revelation of the great revolution of the Roman pagan empire, which should put an end unto the bloody persecutions of the heathen emperors, and all their tyrannical torturing of the Christians by cruel deaths; which revolution is there set forth in a prophetic style and manner of speaking.

Gill:

the removing of Pagan worship and idolatry, and of Pagan magistrates, that the Christian religion and Christian magistrates might take place. earthquake...darkness of the sun and moon, might be literally true...but then these may be considered as symbols of the change in the empire.

Clarke:

A most stupendous change in the civil and religious constitution of the world. If it refer to Constantine the Great, the change that was made by his conversion to Christianity might be very properly represented under the emblem of an earthquake, and the other symbols mentioned in this and the following verses.

The sun - the ancient pagan government of the Roman empire, was totally darkened; and, like a black hair sackcloth, was degraded and humbled to the dust.

The moon - the ecclesiastical state of the same empire, became as blood - was totally ruined, their sacred rites abrogated, their priests and religious institutions desecrated, their altars cast down, their temples destroyed, or turned into places for Christian worship.

Rev 6:13

Knollys:

here, we are to understand the Roman pagan empire in its glorious state, with their temples, altars, idols, and worship.

The fall and ruin of the Roman kings and priests, are here fitly resembled

Gill:

All the other inferior deities lost their esteem, worship, and honour; for the idol temples being now opened, the idols and statues were exposed to the common people, and were found to be stuffed with hay and straw, which brought them into great contempt

they may here likewise include the idolatrous priests among the Heathens, who were discharged and removed by Constantine, and had their posts and profits taken away from them; yea, Maximinus, an Heathen emperor, or tyrant, being beaten by Licinius, who was then Constantine's colleague, killed many of the priests and prophets of his gods, which were formerly

had in great admiration by him, as deceivers and betrayers of him, by whose oracles he was animated to the war (m). And in like manner Licinius put to death the priests and prophets of the new idol at Antioch (n).

the rabble of Pagan deities, and idolatrous priests, were easily, and in great numbers, removed through the power of Constantine, which carried all before it.

Rev 6:14

Knollys:

signifies the total revolution, and final destruction of the pagan state of the Roman Empire; by Constantine the Great.

And every mountain - that is their high places on which they worshipped their idols. {Read Eze 18:6; Isa 57:7; Eze 6:13} Then shall ye know that I am JEHOVAH, when their slain men shall be among their idols, round about their altars, upon every high hill in all the tops of the mountains-The place where they did offer sweet savours unto all their idols. And by every island, we may understand every separated place (as islands are from the land) so all their consecrated temples, altars, &c. were dedicated unto their idol gods, and separated from their common places, and were removed; that is taken away and abolished. Their panyeon and all the rest of their idol temples, were taken away by the Christian emperors; and the worship of Christ set up gradually throughout the whole Roman Empire, by the edicts, decrees, and government of Constantine; {as Zep 2:10-11} JEHOVAH will famish all the gods of the earth, and destroy the idols and the heathen.

Gill:

the Roman empire, as Pagan, which was like a large sheet, or rather like the expanse or firmament of the heaven, stretched out over all the earth, was now, as to the Paganism of it, rolled up together, so that there were no more Heathen gods, nor Heathen priests; no more idolatry, and idolatrous worship of that kind were to be seen, and not so much as the names of Heathen gods to be heard of in the empire.

by "every mountain" may be meant the places of idolatrous worship, which were usually upon mountains; see Jer\_3:6; which were now shut up, or demolished, or used for Christian worship; and "every island" being moved also may show, that Paganism was not only rooted out of the provinces of the empire upon the continent, but out of the islands also; and the ecclesiastical history of these times informs us, that there were

Christian churches in the isles, which enjoyed the Gospel free of persecution and distress

Rev 6:15

Trapp:

Who came in to help their gods against the mighty, against Constantine, Theodosius, &c., that threw out their priests, and pulled down their temples. These kings and grandees were Maximianus, Maximinus, Maxentius, Galerius, Licinius, Jullanus, &c., and their complices, who were routed, ruined, and driven into holes and corners by the Christian emperors, and afterwards so pursued by divine justice, that they came to shameful ends. Diocletian poisoned himself, Maximian hanged himself; Maximinus likewise and Maxentius became their own executioners; Galerius died of a loathsome disease; Julian had his death wound from heaven, and died raving and blaspheming. (Euseb. Hist., Item de Vita Const.)

Gill:

this was remarkably true of their kings or emperors Dioclesian and Herculus Maximianus, who were emperors together, in the height of their imperial glory and grandeur, the one being at Nicomedia, and the other at Milan, did, on one and the same day, of their own accord, abdicate the empire, and divested themselves of their imperial crown and government, and retired to a private life; pretending in public, that old age, and the weight of business, were the cause, but to their friends they owned, that it was through despair, because they could not extinguish the Christian religion (p). Some ascribed this to frenzy and madness (q); but the true reason was, that the wrath of the Lamb was let into their consciences, and which they could not bear, and which obliged them to take this step, to the amazement of the whole world. Maximinus, who succeeded them, being overcome by Licinius, laid aside his imperial habit, and hid himself among the common people, and skulked about in fields and villages (r). Maxentius, another emperor, fled from Constantine, the instrument of the wrath of the Lamb, and the pouring it out upon his enemies, and fell into the river Tiber, from the Mylvian bridge, where he perished

Rev 6:16

Gill:

Dioclesian being invited by Constantine to a marriage feast, excused himself by reason of his old age; but receiving threatening letters, the historian (t) says, in which he was charged with having favoured

Maxentius, and with favouring Maximinus, he poisoned himself; and others of the emperors are said to lay violent hands upon themselves:  
-Maximinus being afflicted with a most horrible disease, of which he died, asked pardon of the God of the Christians, and owned that he suffered justly, for his reproaches of Christ  
-Licinius, who sometimes pretended to be a Christian, and joined with Constantine, but afterwards revolted and fought against him, being conquered and taken, was put to death