

The Twitter Commentary on Revelation

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Revelation Chapter 6

Rev 6 (General Introduction)–

The seven seals continue the story of Rev 5, they accompany the breaking of the seals that closed the scroll.

Rev 6 (The Timing of the Seals)–

Rev 5 and 6 are a continuous narrative and should be interpreted as such.

Rev 3:21 sets the scene of Rev 5 as Jesus' enthronement in heaven at the ascension.

The first half of Rev tends to cover the whole Christian age, so the same is likely for chapter six.

In Rev the first half of the book is generally historical and the last half eschatological.

Parallels between Rev 6 and Jesus' Olivet Discourse indicate seals concern the whole Christian age.

Like Matt 24, the seals cover the general realities of the whole Christian age, tribulation and heavenly signs.

Rev 6 (Structural Considerations)–

Rev 3:21 points to Rev 6 as the place where the overcoming of God's people is described.

Another strong connection between Rev 6 and the preceding vision is the four living creatures (Rev 4:6-7; 6:1,3,5,7).

Instead of "first living creature," Rev 6:1 has "one of the four" living creatures, this is unusual in context.

"One" in Greek should be translated "first" when followed by "second," "third," etc.

The first living creature in Rev 4 and 6 is the lion, the other three follow in the same order as Rev 4.

The order of living creatures in Rev 6 is lion (Christ-figure, Judah, Rev 5:5-6; 7:5), ox, human, vulture.

The other primary context for the four living creatures is in the Nebuchadnezzar narratives (Dan 7:4; 4:31-34).

The four living creatures correspond to the stages of Nebuchadnezzar's spiritual journey.

The vulture represents the ultimate consequence of rejecting the gospel, spiritual death.

The prayers of the saints are an important connection between the seals, the trumpets and Rev 5 (Rev 5:8; 6:9-10; 8:3-4).

Parallels with Matt 24 indicates a church-related focus in Rev 6.

The parallel between the two riders (Rev 6:2; 19:12) supports that the seals concern God's people.

The four horses seem parallel to the four winds of Rev 7:1-3 (see Zech 6:1-5).

The seals, trumpets and bowls move from fourths (6:8) to thirds (8:7) to the whole earth (16:1).

Babylon has three parts (Rev 16:19) so thirds of the earth in trumpets represent portions of Satan's kingdom.

Rev 6 (OT Background)–

Primary OT background is the covenant curses of Lev 26, Deut 32, and Zech 1 and 6.

There are multiple parallels between Lev 26 and Rev 6; seven, sword, wild animals and rationed bread.

The language of Lev 26 is the language of a siege, the curses of the covenant forecast Israel's exile.

Lev 26 is part of the "Holiness Code" of Lev 17-26, with its blessings and curses.

The biblical idea of covenant was adopted by God from the wider culture in which Israel lived.

God subjects Himself to His own covenant so we can feel secure in relationship to Him (Deut 7:7-9).

The covenant of Lev 26, with its blessings and curses, is a significant background to Rev 6.

The "curses" of the covenant are sometimes imposed by God and sometimes natural consequences.

The OT concept of covenant is transformed in relation to Jesus Christ, this matters in Rev 6.

Deut 32 parallels Lev 26, but expands the "curses" to enemies of Israel.

In Deut 32 the covenant curses apply to enemy powers as well as to Israel.

The covenant had moral implications and consequences for those outside Israel as well.

The covenant curses are often repeated in the prophets, with Ezek 14:12-21 a prominent example.

In Zech 1:8-17 the covenant curses are about to be unleashed on the oppressor's of God's people.

Zech 6:1-8 parallels in many ways the vision of Zech 1:8-17. Both are backgrounds for Rev 6.

When events seem out of control, prophecy tells us God has not lost control.

The four horses of Zech 6:5 are described also as "four winds" (Rev 6:1-8, cf. 7:1-3).

The difference between OT and NT is that in the NT the gospel is the context of the covenant.

The four horses are preliminary and partial judgments, in Rev 7:1-3 the woes of the covenant are fully unleashed.

The ultimate outcome of the covenant curses is full and final judgment on rebellion.

The covenantal way of reading Rev 6 is confirmed in Matt 24 and parallels.

The purpose of covenant judgments is a wake-up call to realign ourselves with the way we were originally designed.

Rev 6 (The Nature of the Seals)–

Breaking the seals portrays the progressive conquest of Jesus' kingdom from His enthronement to the Second Coming.

The emphasis in the seals is on God's people IN the world, it is the church in the world that is in view.

Rev 6 extends Jesus' heavenly kingship to earth through the preaching of the gospel.

The curses of the covenant imply that there is a rival kingdom that contests the spread of Jesus' kingdom.

The most natural reading of the seven seals is symbolic.

Horses, Lamb and Lion are certainly not literal, so why take the rest of the vision as literal?

Rev 6 makes the most coherent sense when you take it symbolically.

The seven seals offer a general progression of major events from the enthronement of Christ to the End.

The symbolism of the seals fits fairly well with the realities of Christian history.

There is, however, evidence that the seals are not as sequential as Daniel 2 and 7 are.

The action in the first seal is extremely continuous, suggesting general rather than apocalyptic prophecy.

Rev 6:1–

The voice like thunder is appropriate to the lion creature of Rev 4:7.

“And I saw” (Rev 6:1, 12) tends to introduce major sections of the book of Revelation (Rev 5:1; 7:1, 9; 10:1; 15:1).

The command, “come,” is directed not to the Lamb or John, but to the rider on the white horse.

Rev 6:2–

In the preterist view, Rev is not predictive prophecy of the far future, it addresses First Century realities.

In the preterist view, the white horse is a military threat from east of the Roman Empire.

The text of Rev itself suggests that a preterist reading, common elsewhere in the NT, is not appropriate to Rev.

Some point to the language of “bow” and “conquest” to suggest the rider on the white horse is the Antichrist.

Throughout Rev, the color white represents Christ, His people, and the things of heaven.

In the OT the bow was wielded by enemy powers, but also by God, so it is ambiguous for determining the rider here.

The crown here is a sign of victory and achievement rather than rulership. The royal crown is portrayed in 19:12.

The word for “conquering” is applied to Christ in Rev 3:21 and 5:5.

Parallels to Matt 24 and the absence of affliction in the first seal support a gospel interpretation of this verse.

In Rev counterfeits are always exposed to the reader, there is no language of counterfeit in this verse.

There is an allusion to Hab 3:8-9, where Yahweh rides a horse to victory, supporting a positive view of the first seal.

Psalm 45 portrays the victory of the Messianic King, the allusion appropriate to Christ as the rider on the white horse.

Psa 45 also contains wedding imagery, so in the first seal there is the implication of Christ seeking His bride.

The conquering expression is extremely continuous, the rider conquers until there is nothing left to conquer.

The conclusion of this verse is inappropriate to Satan or the Antichrist, their conquests come to an end in Rev.

Rev 6:1-2 (Conclusion)—

The rider on the white horse carries the gospel to others, so the kingdom of Christ can be increased.

Through the long and hard darkness of Christian history, Christ continues his triumph until the End.

Rev 6:3-8 (Introduction)—

If Christ is the rider on all four horses, it shows Him using calamities to draw people back to Himself.

If horses 2 through 4 are Satan’s work, they represent increasing resistance to the gospel.

Rev 6:3—

The word for “opened” is a visionary aorist, describing the vision as in the recipient of the vision’s past.

While this seal uses the language of war, the creature like an ox brings sacrificial overtones into the depiction.

Rev 6:4—

There are two words for “red” in the Greek, crimson and the color of fire. The red horse is “fiery red.”

In 2 Kings 3:22, fiery red is associated with blood, hence an association with violence here is possible.

The power to take peace from the earth “was given” to the rider on the red horse, it is a “divine passive.”

The “peace” in this text has the article, referring back to the peace that comes with the conquests of the white horse.

“Slay one another” can refer to civil war or wars and violence in general.

The word for “slaying” here is the one used in the LXX for sacrifice, so this brings sacrificial overtones to the second seal.

The sword here between a belt knife and the larger battle sword of Rev 6:8 in size, often associated with sacrifice.

Rev 6:3-4—

The second seal blends the images of war and sacrifice.

The second seal blends the images of civil war and persecution.

The backgrounds in John 16:2 and Psalm 45:3-5 combine the images of civil war and persecution.

In the OT, peace and civil war are often used in a spiritual sense.

In the NT, the gospel is the great divider of people (2 Cor 2:14-16; John 3:18-21) because of human resistance to the gospel.

Division is a natural consequence of the gospel: Matt 10:34-36 and Luke 12:51-53.

Whenever the gospel is clearly heard, there is always the temptation to wonder what the family and neighbors will think.

Rev 6:3-4 (Spiritual Lessons)--

A major message of the second seal is that rejection of the gospel results in violence.

The winners in the ultimate race of life rarely look like winners now. If we go by what works best in the present world, we may end up on the wrong side, because today’s winners are not the ultimate winners.

Rev 6:5—

Like the first four verses, you have a seal, a living creature and a horse, but in this case the horse is black and does not go out.

Commentators have not found a convincing reason for connecting the third living creature (the man) with the third seal.

The word “black” is the Greek word for “ink.” So it can refer to writing as well as the color of hair or skin. It was associated with mourning and calamity in the ancient world.

Light and darkness represent the gospel and its rejection in the NT. So the black horse represents darkness (see Rev 6:12) in contrast to the white horse’s light.

The root meaning for “scale” (Gk: *zugon*) is “yoke,” which is applied to the crossbar of a mechanical scale or balances. It has the extended meaning of a burden someone carries.

The mention of a scale, high prices and food items expresses famine conditions.

The extended spiritual meaning of famine in a covenant context is judgment of human character (Dan 5:27; Job 31:6).

Rev 6:6—

The origin of the voice is not defined. It is from somewhere in the midst of the four living creatures, which means it must be a voice from the throne, either the Lamb or the “one sitting on the throne.”

This verse addresses the three main crops of Palestine; grains, grapes (wine), and olives (oil).

There are two crop seasons in Palestine, grains are planted in the Fall because they are shallow rooted and need the moderate winter rains to survive and grow, deep-rooted fruits can survive the summer drought and ripen with the Fall rains at the end.

The denarius represented roughly a day’s wage. A laborer could buy just enough wheat to feed one. The price was ten times the normal cost of wheat at the time.

Cycles of wet and dry, cold and hot, mark the agricultural year in Palestine. Rain is good for fruit growing, but freezing is deadly, so fruit grows more securely over the dry, summer months. Grain needs early and later rain, so grows best in winter.

God is not the author of evil and suffering, but He allows the cumulative effect of sin and rebellion to wreak their havoc. At the same time, His love compels Him to limit those consequences in mercy.

The balance between necessities (bread, grain) and luxuries (wine, oil) has broken down; the shallow rooted crops are scarce and the deep-rooted ones are still abundant.

Rev 6:5-6—

There is evidence in the third seal that we are to understand the imagery of famine and drought in a spiritual or symbolic sense.

As is the case of the first two seals, there is a spiritual tone to the hurting taking place in this seal. If the black horse is seen as the opposite of the white horse, the passage is describing a spiritual famine, a famine for God’s word.

The third seal depicts a time when the word of God may be hard to find or poorly understood, yet the gospel, the offer of grace and mercy, is still in place. We seem to live in a time like that.

Rev 6:7—

This is the only seal that mentions “voice,” but it is the living creature that speaks, not just a disembodied voice. “Saying” is neuter singular, which matches the living creature, not the voice.

The symbol of the fourth living creature (eagle/vulture) represents judgment (eagle) or the outcome of disaster (vulture).

Rev 6:8—

The adjective "pale" is an attempt to translate the Greek "*chlôros*," which when applied to people anciently represented the sickly, yellow-green color of a very sick person.

The fourth horse of Rev 6 may be grounded in the dappled or "flesh-colored" horse of Zechariah 6. The pale color of the horse in the fourth seal symbolizes the kind of death that comes, not from violence, but from famine and contagious disease.

The rider on the fourth horse is the only one that is named ("Death"). The word for death appears twice in this verse. The second time it carries the OT meaning of plague or pestilence, things that result in death.

"Hades" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Sheol," which means the grave, the place where the dead are buried. Sheol is sometimes personified in the OT.

Both Death and Hades are personified in this verse.

The fourth seal depicts deadly, contagious disease, like Ebola, but it is more anticipated than a reality. Death and Hades are seen but they do not "go out."

As severe as the plagues of the fourth seal appear, the reader of Revelation comes to know that death and the grave are not the ultimate reality. They are under Jesus' control and will someday be abolished (Rev 1:18; 20:14).

"They were given" is a divine passive. The assumption is that the agent of the passive action is God. God is portrayed as giving Death and Hades permission to do their work.

God is not the author of death and suffering, but allows them as the consequence of human freedom.

The word "authority" does not express ability so much as permission, or the right to act, which better fits what God is actually doing in these plagues.

Earth represents the human race here. The four horsemen each affect a quarter of the human race.

As I understand it, the actions of the first seal represent the gospel and those who receive it. The other three seals represent Satan's kingdom and the consequences experienced by those aligned with Satan's kingdom.

This seal sums up all the main covenant curses in the Old Testament (Ezek 14:12-21) and gathers together all the plagues of the four horsemen into one. It portrays the worst spiritual condition in the book before Rev 18:1-3.

The word translated "pestilence" in the second half of this verse is the Greek word for "death" (used as such in the first part of the verse), which is used in the Greek OT more often than not to translate the Hebrew word for pestilence.

Sword, famine, pestilence and wild beasts are a general reference to destructive power, rather than a detailed outline of future events. There are great consequences that come from the rejection of God.

Sword, famine and pestilence likely allude somewhat to the Synoptic Apocalypse (Matt 24, Mark 13, Luke 21), especially Luke's version.

Rev 6:1-8 (Summary and Conclusion)—

There is a progression and escalation throughout the first four seals. The imagery is grounded in the blessings and curses of the Old Testament covenant, particularly the negative consequences of disobedience.

The four horses represent the gospel of Christ followed by division in relation to the gospel, then famine for the word of God and finally decline, disease, and spiritual death. But listed here are not the ultimate end.

The sword, famine, pestilence sequence is used interchangeably and not in specific order throughout OT and NT, so are probably not indication of a fixed sequence here either.

The continuous, interchangeable nature of the imagery in the four horses points to the general realities of the Christian age.

Only in Rev 6 do the four living creatures act independently of each other. Here they act in sequence, suggesting a sequential reading like that of Daniel 2.

The overall trend of Christian history from the first century until the Reformation fits fairly well with the imagery of the four horses as I have come to understand them.

Rev 7:1-3 completes the work of the four horses (as four winds), unleashing the close of human probation and the gathering of God's end-time people, represented by the 144,000 (Rev 7:4-8) and the Great Multitude (Rev 7:9-14).

Rev 6:1-8 (Spiritual Lessons)—

Spiritual health depends on regular engagement with God's Word. Ignorance of the Word leads to lessening impact of the Holy Spirit and lessening impact of the Spirit reduces interest in the Word.

The gospel is not about human striving, but about a generous gift that comes to us from the throne in heaven. One of the clearest signs of the absence of the gospel can be seen in today's world; low self-esteem, genuine self-worth is grounded in the cross.

One implication of the four horses is that our own choices can increasingly remove us from spiritual influence until we reach a state where we can no longer perceive it.

Rev 6:9-11 (Introduction)—

There are significant differences between the fifth seal and the first four: Here there are no horses and riders, no personification (like Death and Hades) and no four living creatures.

What is added in the fifth seal, in contrast with the first four, is a strong sense of future judgment.

Both the seals and the trumpets occur in a 4-2-1 sequence. The seals have four horsemen and heavenly voices (seals 1-4), no horsemen and earthly voices (seals 5-6) and no voices or horsemen at all (seal 7).

In contrast to the seven seals (4-2-1) the messages to the seven churches are grouped on a 3-4 basis. The first three are addressed to the whole church, the last four only to the faithful ones in the church.

Rev 6:9—

There were two altars in the Hebrew sanctuary and temple, the Altar of Burnt Offering and the Altar of Incense. The altar in view here determines whether the “souls” are in heaven or on earth.

The only altar with any activity at the base is the Altar of Burnt Offering. The blood of the sacrifices was poured out at its base. Jews of the time had a saying that everyone buried in the land of Israel was as if they were buried under the altar. This text is a reference to earthly burial.

In Revelation 16:6 the same word for “pouring out” is used to describe the martyrdom of the saints and prophets.

The martyrdom theme echoes the language of Jesus in John 16:2. Persecutors justify their actions out of the conviction that this is what God wants from them. They think they are serving God well in doing so.

This passage is not a reference to bodiless souls in heaven. The altar in view represents earthly things, in this case, God God’s consciousness of the martyrdom of His saints with the intent of exposure and appropriate compensation in the judgment.

The injustice of martyrdom is addressed, among other passages, in Rev 20:4, where the martyrs (perhaps a representative group in the text) are raised to life at the beginning of the millennium.

In Greek philosophy, human beings were bi-partite, made up of a physical body and an immaterial soul. But in the biblical context the human being is a unity.

This passage is not attempting to depict disembodied souls in the Greek sense, but portraying in symbol God’s remembrance of whole persons who died for their faith.

The word “slain” is used in Scripture for sacrifice and for the cross. Dying on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus means being faithful to the gospel proclamation unto death.

Rev 6:10--

The loud voice comes from the souls under the altar, not from heaven. Like the blood of Abel, they are not conscious, this is a figurative expression of how God looks at the situation.

The phrase, “How long, O Lord?” occurs frequently in the OT, it is usually associated with the first destruction of Jerusalem (586 BC).

Major occurrences of “How long” in the OT are Psalms 79:5-10, 94:3, Habakkuk 1:2, Daniel 8:13, 12:6-7 and Zechariah 1:12-13.

A parallel to this text is the importunate widow of Luke 18:2-5.

“How long?” is a cry of protest over persecution. The wrongs of the past that were seemingly forgotten or ignored by God are here brought loudly to attention. This passage is addressing one of the most painful realities of human existence. People suffer and God seems to be silent. But it will not always be so.

The term “Lord” in this text is not the usual one applied to God or Jesus in the Bible. It means “master” or “owner.” The use here focuses more on God’s power than on His right to rule or style of leadership.

Most references to “Lord” in Revelation use the Greek word for Yahweh. In this verse “Lord” translates the word from which we get “despot,” emphasizing “master” as opposed to “servants.”

The combination of “holy” and “true” recalls Jesus’ self-introduction to the church at Philadelphia (Rev 3:7). “Holy” (Greek: *hagios*) means to be set apart by God for a special task.

The word for true (Greek: *alēthinos*) means genuine, representing the perfect realization of an idea.

“Vengeance” in Greek does not necessarily have the violent overtones of the English word. It is a law court term that provides legal protection to the oppressed.

In the book of Revelation “those who live on the earth” represent those in opposition to God and His faithful saints (Rev 1:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 14; 17:2).

Rev 6:10 (Excursus on The Problem of Vengeance)--

It is not the slain themselves that are calling for vengeance, this is a figure of speech communicating that God does not sit idly by in the face of abuse, genocide or oppression, but there are larger issues that may mandate His silence for a time.

These figures of speech communicate that even though God seems silent in the face of injustice, injustice is never overlooked in heaven. The fifth seal is not the end of the story. God can be trusted to set things right on the judgment day if not sooner.

The cries of the martyrs receive an answer in Rev in three different places: 1) the introduction to the seven trumpets (Rev 8:3-4), the fall of Babylon (19:1-2) and the resurrection of the righteous (20:4).

The golden altar of this text is the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place of the sanctuary, near the Ark of the Covenant. The incense offered there was drawn from the Altar of Burnt Offering (referenced in 6:9-11), hence the trumpets are a response to the prayers of the saints there.

A second extended answer to the cries of the souls under the altar is found in Revelation 19:1-2, the dethroning of Babylon and the ultimate vindication of the saints. The souls under the altar are encouraged to rest until everything is made right.

Judging and avenging have not yet happened in the fifth seal, in chap. 19 they are already in the past (chaps 17 and 18). So chap. 19 is part of the answer to the cry of the martyrs.

While the language of Rev 20:4 seems limited, the strong connection with this text indicates the “beheaded” ones are representative of all the martyrs throughout Christian history.

The cry of the martyrs must not be read in isolation. God responds to these cries in verse 11, in the seven trumpets (8:3-4, 13), at the Fall of Babylon (19:1-2) and at the resurrection of the righteous (20:4).

God acts with vengeance for two reasons. One, to get the attention of people who are in rebellion or extreme forgetfulness, and two, to deliver His people from unjust treatment. God’s response to the cry in this verse would be in the second category.

Rev 6:11—

Each martyr gets a white robe between death and resurrection, representing acceptance with God (just as sealing often does—Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 Tim 2:19).

The white robes given to each of these martyrs is the assurance that they will be accepted in the judgment at the end of time (Matt 22:11-12; Rev 3:4-5; 7:9; 19:7-8; 20:4-6).

The future, middle participle for “rest” means to relax and become quiet. It functions like a command. The use here is in contrast with Rev 4:8 and 14:9-13.

While it may appear that God is not listening or acting, the book of Revelation reveals that God is already dealing with these issues within history (the seven trumpets), and will deal with them decisively at the end of history (Rev 19:1-2; 20:4).

The word “number,” found in most translations, is missing in the Greek text. It is the fellow servants and brothers, not the number, that needs to be made complete.

Rev 6:11 (Excursus on the Number of Martyrs in Jewish Apocalyptic)--

Jewish apocalyptic books 1 Enoch (47:1-4) and 4 Ezra (2:39-41) describes how justice will come for the martyrs when their full number is complete. Is the fifth seal echoing this or taking it in another direction?

4 Ezra (4:30-37) implies that God is waiting for the accumulation of a certain amount of evil before intervening in behalf of the saints. This is compatible with cosmic conflict theology, but is probably not the point of Rev 6:11.

In Ascension of Isaiah 9 the righteous of earlier eras are seen wearing the garments of heaven but not sitting on thrones or wearing crowns, quite parallel with the fifth seal.

In Apocalypse of Baruch 23:4-5 it says that a specific number of those who would be born was set after sin and death came into the world. This idea is not reflected in the fifth seal.

Rev 6:11--

The text is awkward without adding “the number of” but that Jewish apocalyptic theme does not seem important to John (Rev 7:9-14). There is a better way to read this verse than emending the text.

It is not clear from the grammar if the fellow servants and brothers are two different groups or two different ways of describing the same group. The Greek “and” (*kai*) here can mean “in addition to” or “namely.”

In one reading the servants and brothers are all about to be killed, in the other, the servants are all the faithful and the brothers are about to be killed. Either way the meaning of the text is essentially the same.

Taken as the text reads, the souls under the altar are told to rest or wait until their fellow servants and brothers are “made complete.” What needs to be completed is not their death, but their life.

“Made complete” is an aorist passive subjunctive, which means something in or about the “fellow servants” is completed by an outside agent, presumably God.

What is completed in the servants of God is their character (Rev 12:11).

God tolerates the suffering of His saints, not because of some arbitrary number, but because suffering is the context in which important things happen in their character.

The end-time saints are loyal to God not because they have to be, but because they truly want to be. In the context of the cosmic conflict, such individuals would be “safe to save” for eternity.

In this passage, Revelation builds on a popular understanding within the Judaism of the time. But Revelation does not echo that understanding, it transforms that understanding in a Christian context with a different picture of God.

Rev 6:9-11 (Conclusion)—

The giving of white robes to the martyrs symbolizes their vindication in the pre-advent judgment which begins with the dead.

This passage describes the pre-advent judgment of the dead, indicating that the eternal fate of the martyrs has been settled before the End.

The judgment of the living is not mentioned in Rev 6, but is a focus of the second half of the book of Rev as well as the opening verses of Rev 7.

Timewise, there are two stages in the fifth seal. First, a time of persecution and suffering. Second, a heavenly judgment in behalf of the persecuted.

Rev 6:12-17 (Introduction)—

The passage divides naturally into two parts (Rev 6:12-14 and 15-17). The first part (6:12-14) focuses on dramatic natural events, the second part (6:15-17) focuses on the fate of those who are in opposition to God.

Is this passage literal or symbolic? The default answer is symbolic (Rev 1:1), but grammatical aspects of Rev 6:12-14 indicate parts of this seal are to be taken literally.

The “after this I saw” of Rev 7:1 indicates a new section of the book (see also Rev 4:1; 7:9; 15:5; 18:1), but chapter 7 does provide the answer to the question of Rev 6:17.

Rev 6:12-14 (Introduction)—

This passage is grounded in OT Day of the Lord imagery. The Day of the Lord was the full and final expression of the curses of the covenant.

SDAs have understood the earthquake, dark day and falling of stars as specific events over about 80 years in the 18th and 19th centuries. But can the text be read in that way? See next post.

The first earthquake in this passage (Rev 6:12) is parallel to the earthquake of Rev 11:13, which is before the close of probation (Rev 11:15, cf. 10:7).

The second earthquake in this passage (Rev 6:14) is parallel to the earthquake of Rev 16:18, 20, which comes at the close of the seven last bowl-plagues, the final events of earth’s history.

Are the sun, moon and stars of this passage to be taken literally or are they symbols of spiritual realities? The natural assumption would be symbolic, as is most of the book of Rev (Rev 1:1).

The sun, moon, stars and heaven are followed by a Greek *hôs*, which means “like” or “as.” Grammatially, what precedes *hôs* is literal and what follows is figurative. Sun, moon, stars, etc., is to be taken literally in this passage.

Rev 6:12--

The order of events in the seals is more like that of Matt 24 than Luke 21. The heavenly signs in both Matthew and Luke are associated with the end-time events. Here there is room in the text for a broader interpretation.

Earthquakes in the Bible are often associated with God’s presence (Exod 19:20; 1 Kings 19:11) and activity (Isa 29:6; Hab 2:6-7; Heb 12:26-28). The grammar of the sixth seal suggests taking the language of earthquake literally here.

The specific wording “a great earthquake” is precisely repeated in Rev 11:13. This is not the final earthquake of 6:14 and 16:18-20, it is a more typical earthquake prior to the consummation.

The heavenly signs seen in this verse are frequently associated with the Day of the Lord in the OT. The very expression “Day of the Lord” is echoed in Rev 6:17 and 16:13.

Reference to the sun should be taken literally, since it is followed by the Greek word for “like,” while implies a figure of speech following in explanation of the term before. So the sun (literal) went black “like” sackcloth.

Unlike Matt 24 and Mark 13, the heavenly signs of this verse are prior to consummation, so reference to the Dark Day of May 19, 1780 cannot be ruled out.

There is no direct linguistic connection between the color “red” in the second seal and the “moon like blood” here. Blood here describes what the moon looks like.

The moon turning to blood is drawn from the eschatological picture of Joel 2:28-32, which is applied by Peter to Pentecost in Acts 2:16-21.

Rev 6:13--

The concept of the stars falling to earth is associated with the Second Coming in Matt 24:29. This is not an attempt at scientific accuracy.

Matt 24 also combines falling of the stars with reference to a fig tree, but places them at different points in history.

Rev 6:14--

What happens to the sky here? It is “separated from,” in the most wooden understanding of the original. Hence the translation “split apart.” As if the sky is ripped down the middle and rolls up both directions.

We know today that the sky cannot literally roll up, but this is being described, not as it is scientifically, but as it appears to human beings from an earthly vantage point.

While this is world-wide and catastrophic, it is still not as severe as the event in Rev 20:11, which occurs after the close of probation.

In OT times, mountains and hills were places of idolatrous worship, so can represent substitutes for the strength that can only come from God (Psa 121:1-2; Jer 3:23). As a whole, this is an eschatological picture (Isa 40:4, Jer 4:24; Nah 1:5).

Rev 6:12-14 (Conclusion)--

This passage includes a series of images drawn from the OT Day of the Lord (Isa 13:10-13; 34:4; Jer 4:23-27; Ezek 32:1-8; 38:19-20; Amos 8; Nah 3:12). These are the final consequences of the curses of the covenant.

In the NT, Day of the Lord imagery is applied to the cross, Pentecost, and the events surrounding the Second Coming of Jesus.

Whether or not these were the primary fulfillments of this passage, God used natural events in 1755, 1780 and 1833 to stimulate a tremendous interest in the prophecies of the Bible. This resulted in a movement that ended up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Rev 6:12-14 (Spiritual Lesson)--

According to the Old Testament, when the Day of the Lord comes, God will take care of His people (Isa 54:10; Nah 1:5-8).

Rev 6:15-17 (Introduction)--

The seventh object of judgment in Rev 6:12-15 is the human race, which is here described in a seven-fold manner.

This scene does not portray the Second Coming of Christ, but is in that context. This scene parallels the mourning of the tribes of the earth in Matthew 24:29-30 and Revelation 1:7.

Rev 6:15—

All humanity in opposition to God is summed up in seven categories here. The kings and great ones represent the rulers of the ancient world and their associates in government.

People use military power and wealth to shelter themselves from the troubles of this world. At the End these will be of no use.

Slave and free together sum up the totality of the “common people” in the empire, including those bound to others as indentured servants, and those free of such bonds who made their way at the bottom end of the social scale.

Perhaps the number of the “wicked” here is seven rather than six because it represents the totality of all the opposition to God in this world.

Hiding in the rocks and caves is reminiscent of Isa 2:19-21. The lost seek to hide in the very places they had forced Christians to hide on account of the persecutions of John’s day and after.

Rev 6:16—

Reminiscent of Hos 10:8 and Luke 23:30. The desire to hide from God echoes the actions of Adam and Eve in the Garden (Gen 3:8).

While John 5:22 asserts that the Father has given all judgment to the Son, this text suggests that the Father is very much involved in the judgments surrounding the Second Coming.

The wrath of the Lamb is summed up in Rev 21:8 as the second death. The only example of second death in history is the cross of Christ. The wrath of God is a sad turning away from those who do not want Him. Christ died under the weight of human sin.

Rev 6:17—

There is no difference in character between the God of the Old Testament and that of the New. Both the Father and the Son are infinitely powerful and equally gracious.

The question, “who will be able to stand?” seems based on Mal 3:2 and Luke 21:36. They will stand justified and not condemned before the judge of all the earth.

Rev 6:15-17 (Spiritual Lesson)—

Those who have relied upon wealth, rank, or power to survive in this world will find themselves defenseless in the day of spiritual testing.

Rev 6:12-17 (Conclusion)—

The sixth seal does not give us a completed picture. We are brought to the brink of the Second Advent, but we do not actually see it described. The great day of wrath has come but we do not see the wrath actually poured out. The End is not shown until the people of God are seen (chap. 7).

The allusion to Isa 13:9-13 makes the sixth seal the first reference to Babylon in the book of Rev.