

Revelation 6:12-17. The Sixth Seal



This is the continuation of [The Last Prophecy: An Abridgment of Elliott's *Horae Apocalypticae*](#).

Dissolution Of The Pagan Firmament – Constantine Establishes Christianity.

[12] And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake;
and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;
[13] And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.
[14] And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.
[15] And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;
[16] And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: [17] For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand? (Rev 6:12-17)

AS THE LANGUAGE of this passage is very highly figurative, it may be well to call in mind what has been said relative to the figures used in this book, and the meaning attached to them. A few examples from other parts of Scripture will illustrate the subject.

When Joseph dreamed that the sun, moon, and stars made obeisance to him, his father and brethren at once understood that the paternal government was intended by the sun; and so of the other parts of the family. Jacob answered, "Shall I, and thy mother, and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee?" (Gen. 37:10) These eleven brethren were to be rulers, or rather founders of kingdoms, or heads of distinct tribes.

We find in Jeremiah the symbol of an earthquake. The prophet saw in vision the destruction of the Jewish kingdom by the Babylonians. "I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the LORD, and by his fierce anger. – For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black – The whole city shall flee for the

noise of the horsemen and bowmen; they shall go into thickets, and climb up upon the rocks." (Jer. 4:23-29) So also in Ezekiel, prophesying of the overthrow of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, "When I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord God." (Ezek. 32:7) In Zephaniah, speaking of the destruction of Judah, "The great day of the Lord is near, a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress." (Zeph. 1:14) In Isaiah, prophesying of the overthrow of Babylon by the Medes, "The day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger; the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine." (Isa. 13:9)

Again, for the hiding in dens and rocks of the earth, look to Hosea treating of Shalmanezzer's attack upon Israel: "They shall say to the mountains, Cover us: and to the hills, Fall on us," (Hos. 10:8) i.e., not to crush, but to hide them.

Have not these quotations anticipated the explanation of the text?

When St. John looked from the altar and its crowd of white-robed martyrs to the landscape, which he had before seen all tranquil, what met his eye? Agitation and trouble. Lo, a great earthquake! The mountains and island rocks sink beneath the shock. The sun becomes black, and the moon blood-red, as in a total eclipse. The stars fall from heaven like figs from the tree during a windy tempest. Kings, warriors, freemen, slaves, all appear in flight, and seek to find shelter in caves and holes. Then goes forth a cry, "Hide us from Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."

Could St. John have doubted the import of these emblems, familiar as he was with Scripture and Scripture symbols? Surely he must have foreseen a revolution of no common kind. No partial change – only such a change as the entire destruction of heathenism before the progress of Christianity could be implied.

Did, then, such a change, in fact, take place at this period of time as will warrant the application?

When the time came that God would deliver his people Israel out of the hand of their oppressor in the land of Egypt, Moses was born. (Acts 7:17-20) Again, when about to deliver them out of Babylon, Cyrus was raised up. (Isa. 44:28) So, when about to raise his Church to a state of power, Constantine appeared.

Constantius, father of Constantine, died at York, in our own country, and appointed "Constantine the Great" as his successor. This prince was already known as a favorer of the Christians, while yet Maxentius was in possession of Rome – the son of the persecuting emperor, Maximian. Ere Constantine (A.D. 306) bore down against Maxentius, he avowed his belief in and his adherence to Christianity. We are told (and before his death he asserted it) that on his march toward Rome, as the sun was declining, there appeared suddenly in

the heavens a pillar of light in the form of a cross, with this inscription, "In this overcome." Constantine immediately adopted the cross as his ensign; that object of hatred to the Pagans was seen "glittering on the helmets, engraved on the shields, and interwoven into the banners of his soldiers."² The emperor's own person was adorned with it. Moreover, there was displayed on his principal banner this once accursed emblem, above which was set a crown of gold and gems, and the initials of Him who suffered on the one and now wears the other were inscribed upon it.

"By this ensign thou shalt conquer." Well was the promise fulfilled to Constantine. Army after army, emperor after emperor, were routed, and fled or perished before the warriors of the cross. The terror of Maxentius and that of his army, in their flight over the Milvian bridge across the Tiber, is portrayed in sculpture, which may still be seen at Rome on the arch of Constantine. Similar was the terror of the other two commanders, Maximin and Licinius. As memorials of the persecution just before, the two joint emperors, Diocletian and Maximian, had medals struck of themselves, in the characters of Jove and Hercules, destroying the hydra-headed serpent monster, Christianity! Their successors had adopted these titles. When Maxentius went forth to battle, he went fortified by heathen oracles, and in the character of "the champion of heathenism" against "the champion of the cross." Again, when Maximin and Licinius were about to engage in battle, the former vowed to Jupiter that, if successful, he would extirpate Christianity. Licinius again, haranguing his soldiers, ridiculed the cross, and staked the falsehood of Christianity on his Success. In the hour of danger and death, however, his boldness forsook him. "Licinius," says Gibbon, "dreaded the power of the consecrated banner, the sight of which animated the soldiers of Constantine with invincible enthusiasm, and scattered terror and dismay through the adverse legions."

The dying terrors of these persecutors have been recorded. A dark cloud brooded over the death-beds of Maximian and Diocletian; the former of whom, oppressed by remorse, is said to have strangled himself, and the latter to have died raving mad. Galerius, from an agonizing death-bed illness, sent to entreat the Christians to pray for him; and Maximin confessed his guilt in his last moments, and called on Christ to compassionate his misery.

Thus did a sense of the wrath of the Crucified One, the Lamb of God, now seated in glory, lie heavy upon them. When, then, we combine these terrors of the death-bed with those of the lost battlefield, in which all ranks, high and low, must have participated, routed, flying, and perishing, there was surely that in the event which answered to the symbols of the vision, wherein kings and generals, freemen and slaves, appeared fleeing from the face of Him that sat on the throne of power, even from "the wrath of the Lamb."

This was the first shock of the earthquake. The sun of the Pagan power had been darkened; but all the stars of the Pagan firmament had not yet fallen, nor had the Pagan firmament itself passed away.

When Constantine first triumphed, he at once gave liberty to the Christians to exercise the rites of their worship, but heathenism was still tolerated. When he became sole emperor, however, he issued edicts for the entire

suppression of Pagan sacrifices and the destruction of Pagan temples, and no toleration was allowed for any but Christian worship. His successor followed up the same object, and attached penalties to the public profession of Paganism. Before the century ended the stars of Pagan power were fallen. Its heaven, or political religious system, had vanished; and on the Roman earth its institutions, laws, rules, and worship had been all but annihilated. Pagans were now obliged, in fear of death, to seek for dens and caverns wherein to hide their devotions, as appears from the history of the reign of Theodosius.

The passage of Scripture on which we are now commenting has been by many supposed to refer to the day of judgment; and indeed there appears a strong resemblance here to the phraseology used in describing the terrors of that awful day; but a closer examination will show a marked discrepancy between them.

The clearest passage in the Bible descriptive of the final judgment is in 2 Pet. 3:10: "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat: the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up;" and the Apostle adds, "We look for new heavens and a new earth," etc. Nothing of this is said in our text. In such a conflagration the sun would not be black as sackcloth, nor the moon become blood-red; still less could the stars fall on the earth. St. Peter speaks of a real destruction, a real conflagration, an end of the earth. A passage somewhat similar to this of the sixth seal occurs also in the sixteenth chapter, but still not exactly alike. In the sixth seal the earthquake is said to be great: in the sixteenth chapter, "such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake and so great;" accompanied, moreover, by division of Babylon into three parts. And while in the sixth seal men fly and hide themselves, and express great fear of God and of the power sent by him, in the sixteenth chapter, after the earthquake they blaspheme God, when the plague of hail follows. It appears then, that there is a lesser earthquake and a greater described, naturally alike in some things, but differing much in others. Gibbon says, "The ruin of the Pagan religion is described by the sophists as a dreadful and amazing prodigy, which covered the earth with darkness, and restored the ancient dominion of chaos and of night."⁴

The question may be asked, Was it from Constantine sitting on his throne, or from Christ on the throne of heaven, that the runaways are supposed to hide themselves? The passage will admit of either sense. It may mean, Hide us from this conqueror, who with the banner of the Lamb of God is coming to destroy us. But we have seen enough in the repentance, remorse, and terror expressed by the dying persecutors to justify in preference the other construction. We cannot fail to mark what a contrast is thus presented between the deaths of the martyrs of Jesus and those of their persecutors. Truly we would say. in reviewing it, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." Sin is, and has ever been, the only sting of death. Thanks be to God, who gave them the victory through Christ Jesus.

Continued in [Revelation 7:1-8. The Sealing Vision](#)

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