

The Sixth Seal: The Sun Turned Black Like Sackcloth

6: 12-17

DIG: What occurs when the sixth seal is broken? What elements of the Day of Judgment are described? What is the reaction of the people on the earth when the sixth seal opens? Who can remain standing under the wrath of the Lamb?

REFLECT: In what area of your life are you trying to hide from God? What do you need to do to come out of hiding? How does this passage make you feel about the end times? Why? How will this affect your actions this week?

Each series of judgments ends with a seizure of nature, and **the sixth seal** is no exception. The whole **earth** will go into convulsions, and the appearance of **the sun** and **the moon** will be changed.²¹⁶ **Yochanan** recorded six terrifying natural disasters connected with the opening of **the sixth seal**.

First, there will be a great earthquake. For the first time in history this will be a worldwide **earthquake**. Seismologists and geophysicists in recent years have learned a great deal about the structure of **the earth** and about the cause and nature of earthquakes. **The earth's** solid crust is crossed with a complex network of faults, with all resting upon a plastic mantle whose structure is still largely unknown. Whether the crust consists of great moving plates is a current matter of debate among geophysicists, so the ultimate cause of earthquakes is still unknown. In all likelihood, the entire complex of instabilities in the crust is a remnant of the phenomena of the great Flood, especially the breakup of **the fountains of the deep** (see my commentary on **Genesis Ci - And Rain Fell on the Earth Forty Days and Forty Nights**).

In any case, the vast worldwide network of unstable **earthquake** belts around the world suddenly will begin to slip and fracture on a global basis and a gigantic **earthquake** will ensure. This is evidently, and naturally, accompanied by tremendous volcanic eruptions, spewing vast quantities of dust and steam and gases into the upper atmosphere. It is probably these that will cause **the sun** to turn **black** and **the moon** to turn **red**.²¹⁷

On the heels of the **earthquake** came **a second catastrophe** as the sun will appear to turn **black like sackcloth made of goat hair**. This will be the second of **five blackouts during the end times** (Joel 2:31, Revelation 6:12, 9:2, 16:10-11; Matthew 24:29-30). Because of the dust and gases from the **billows of smoke** exploding from the **earth's core**, it will screen and reflect light away from the **sun**, making it appear to **John like black sackcloth made of goat hair** (Isaiah 50:3). The same phenomena will occur with **the third disaster** (Joel 2:10), which will be closely associated with the **sun and sky** being blacked out by the **smoke from the Abyss** (9:2).

Then, out of the **black sky** came **the fourth blow**, Yochanan tells us that **the stars in the sky fell to earth**, as **late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind** (6:13). The *Greek* word for **earthquake** literally means *shaking*, and applies equally to the air, the sea, or the land. To those on the **earth** it will seem like the sky is *shaking* and **the stars** themselves are being shaken loose from the heavens. Since most **stars** are larger than **the earth**, no star could fall to the **earth** without destroying it. However, since the word **stars** can also be translated *meteors* in the *Greek*, this would indicate a meteor shower, commonly called *falling stars*. The most likely identification of these particular **falling stars** is that of a great swarm of asteroids that pummel the earth. Such an event has never occurred in historic times, but scientists have long speculated about the probability of either past or future earth catastrophes caused by encountering a swarm of asteroids. A shower of giant *meteorites* might have much the same effect. It might even be the trigger that would set off **the global earthquake**.¹²²

The fifth calamity in this seal will affect the **earth's** atmosphere because the **sky receded like a scroll being rolled up** (6:14a). This is a human perception of the magnitude of this judgment, but is not the final dissolving of heaven that comes later (Revelation 21:1 and **Second Peter** 3:10). This vivid picture is similar to **Isaiah's** description: **All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree** (Isaiah 34:4).²¹⁹ **The stars of the heavens** will never actually be dissolved because the Bible says they will be in place for ever and ever (Psalm 148:3-6). But they will seem to dissolve for the same reason **the sun** will appear to turn **black** and **the moon** will appear to turn **blood red**. The dust and gases from the **billows of smoke** (Joel 2:30) exploding from the **earth's** core will screen and reflect light away from them.

Returning in his vision to what was happening on the **earth**, **John** gives an account of **the sixth disastrous natural phenomenon**, noting that **every mountain and island was removed from its place** (6:14b). We see the same thing in **Nahum** 1:5, **Isaiah** 34:4 and again in **Revelation** 20:11. The entire unstable crust of the **earth** begins to stir and shift. **The**

earth's crust, highly unstable ever since the great Flood, will be so disturbed by the impacting asteroids, the volcanic explosions, and the worldwide earthquakes, that great segments of it will actually begin to slip and slide over the earth's deep plastic mantle. Geophysicists for many years have been fascinated with the idea of *continental drift* (although strong evidence has been accumulating against any such phenomenon occurring in the present age). Several have published theories of a past natural catastrophe involving what they call *the earth's shifting crust*. Some such phenomenon may actually be triggered under this judgment of **the sixth seal**, dwarfing the mighty earthquakes of the past.²²⁰

Anarchy will result as **the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains (6:15)**. Survival will be **their** only concern. **Their** fear will cut across all of society (Psalm 48:4-6; Isaiah 2:10-12, 19). No one will be exempt from **God's** judgment. **Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of ADONAI's wrath. In the fire of His righteous jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for He will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth (Zephaniah 1:18)**.

Unbelievers from all walks of life will be terrified. But will **these** panic stricken people call on **Jesus** to save **them**? No! **They** will call on "Mother Nature" to kill **them**. Acting irrationally, **they** will call out to the mountains and the rocks: **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 our wrath has come (6:16-17a)**. **They** would rather die and spend eternity in hell than turn to **Jesus Christ (Hosea 10:8)**. Up to now **they** may have been able to explain away the previous judgments as natural catastrophes, but with this **seal** that will not be possible. Even **unbelievers** will recognize that the hand of **God** is against **them**.

The wrath of the Lamb is a paradoxical phrase. **The wrath of God is the Day of the Lord**, that **day** that is spoken of all the way through the prophets in the TaNaKh, a **day** that is coming upon **the earth** and is yet future. **The Lamb** is a phrase used of **Christ** in the New Covenant only by **John (John 1:35-36)**. And when we combine the two phrases it's like mixing fire and water, but **the wrath of God** is revealed in **the Lamb**. There is no "mean" **God** of the TaNaKh and "loving" **God** of the B'rit Chadashah. The Bible teaches that **ADONAI our God, ADONAI is One (Deuteronomy 6:4)**. The love of **God** is clearly seen in the TaNaKh (**Jeremiah 31:3**) and the **wrath of God** is clearly seen in the B'rit Chadashah (**Luke 12:4-5**).

The closing words of **the sixth seal** raise an interesting question. **Who can stand (6:17b)?** The prophet Nahum echoed the same question when he asked: **Who can withstand His indignation? Who can endure His fierce anger (Nahum 1:6a, also see Psalm 76:7; Jeremiah 30:7; Zephaniah 1:14-18 and Malachi 3:2)?** The answer is this, only those who

have taken advantage of the grace of **God**. In **chapter 7** we will see two groups who will survive the fury of divine judgment; first, the 144,000 Jewish evangelists, and secondly, their converts, the souls of those martyred during the Great Tribulation **standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb (7:9)**.

If we were honest, we would probably admit that when faced with the prospects of judgment, our first impulse is to **hide**. Just like **those** seen above who will call on the **mountains to hide them**, just like Adam and Eve who hid in the Garden after they had sinned (**Genesis 3:8-10**), we also can be afraid to submit ourselves to the all-seeing gaze of **the face of Him who sits on the throne (6:16)**.

When we read about **the sixth seal** - with its worldwide **earthquake**, blackened **sun**, **blood red moon**, falling *meteors* and other fearsome physical destruction - we may come to the conclusion that the judgment of **Ha'Shem** is a fearful and terrible thing. No wonder everyone on earth wanted to die. How could we possibly survive when such powerful forces expose our weakness and sinfulness? But in the middle of all this confusion and fear, we must not forget that **ADONAI** didn't kill **Adam** and **Eve**. **He clothed them** (see my commentary on **Genesis Bh - The LORD God Made Garments of Skin for Adam and His Wife**) and stayed with **them**, even in **their** exile from paradise. Likewise, in the next chapter **the LORD** will mark those who are **His own (7:1-8)**.

Where do you think you will turn in the face of **God's** powerful presence? You can try to be like **Jonah** and *run away from Him*, hoping that the **mountains** will cover you, or trying to find shelter in barren **caves**. Or you can *run toward Him* for forgiveness, protection and salvation. The judgment of **the Lord** is nothing more than the clarity of **His** truth - and the truth about **Him** is that **He** is merciful as well as just. Running to **Yeshua** is the best thing we could ever do. For **He** has bought us back from hell by **His** death and resurrection. Now **sitting at the right hand of the Father (Matthew 26:64)**, **He** promises that all those who believe in **His** gospel need never be afraid.

*Jesus, I don't want to **hide** from you. I sin all the time, in thought, word and deed. I don't want to, but it still happens. As I wait for you to come again, I give you the freedom to show me my sin so that I cannot **hide** from it. You are my only hope. I confess my sin to **You** right now as I wait for **the day** when I will see **You** face to face. Please come quickly.²²¹*