

The Day of Jesus Christ's Return

Revelation 6:12-17

In the fourth and fifth chapters of The Revelation of Jesus Christ (last book in the Bible), we read of Him as the slaughtered and worthy Lamb ascending to God's throne in heaven and receiving His decree for the events that would occur from the time of His exaltation. We then read in chapters six through eight of Christ opening the seven seals, and the events associated with each (1st in 6:1f; 2nd in 6:3f; 3rd in 6:5f; 4th in 6:7f; 5th in 6:9-11; 6th in 6:12-16; interlude in ch.7; 7th in 8:1-5). We here consider this sixth seal.

I. Christ's return is the day of the sixth seal (v.12a): "*I looked when He opened the sixth seal ...*" (v.12a).

1. In the *first* seal (vv.1f), Christ on His *white* horse graciously conquers God's elect, who are by nature at enmity against Him, and causes them to become His disciples.
2. In the *second* seal (vv.3f), the rider on the *red* horse represents those who slaughter Christ's disciples.
3. In the *third* seal (vv.5f), the rider on the *black* horse represents those who persecute Christ's disciples who are not slain by the preceding rider.
4. In the *fourth* seal (vv.7f), the rider on the *pale* horse represents those who kill Christ's disciples, along with much of the rest of mankind, through warfare, pestilences, famine, and beasts.
5. In the *fifth* seal (vv.9-11), Christ comforts His martyrs/witnesses until the day in which He avenges their blood on their enemies.
6. In this *sixth* seal (vv.12-17), the day Christ returns has come.

The day of Jesus Christ's return to earth is known by many names:

1. "the great and awesome day of Jehovah" (Acts 2:20, cp. Joel 2:31)
2. "the day of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10)
3. "the day of God" (2 Peter 3:12)
4. "that great day of God Almighty" (Revelation 16:14)
5. "the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:10; 2:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:2)
6. "the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6)
7. "the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 5:5)
8. "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:8) – as His *people* call it
9. "the great day of the Lamb's wrath" (Revelation 6:17) – as His

enemies will call it

10. "the day of Jehovah's vengeance" (Isaiah 34:8) – for it is the day in which Christ's martyrs see the answer to their prayer "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6:10).

II. Christ's return is the day of unprecedented universal cataclysmic phenomena (vv.12b-14). This should not surprise us. No day before that day will be like it. And all these phenomena are prophesied with "the day of Jehovah" in the Old Testament (e.g., Isaiah 13:6, 9f, 13; 34:4, 8; Joel 2:1, 10; Amos 5:18, 20). Furthermore, that day will be as it was prophesied by Jesus in the parallel accounts of Matthew 24:29-30 and Luke 21:25-28. If we put these accounts together, they might read as follows:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days [the present days, during which Jesus' people are being martyred], there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars: the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. And on the earth there will be distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring. Men's hearts will fail from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven. All the tribes of the earth will mourn when they see Him coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

Consider the particulars of these universal cataclysmic phenomena. (However, beware of applying strict and physical literalism to all these phenomena.)

1. "... and behold, there was a great earthquake ..." (v.12b). An earthquake occurred at Jesus' *death* (Matthew 27:51) and *resurrection* (Matthew 28:2). The earthquake at Jesus' *return* will be the greatest earthquake ever (Revelation 16:18, 20).

The imagery will now pass from the earth to the heavens:

2. "... and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair ..." (v.12c). "Sackcloth" is a material made from the black hair of goats or camels. When the sun is as "black as sackcloth of hair", it no longer can be seen.

3. "and the [full] moon became like blood" (v.12d). This "sign in the moon" (as Jesus called it) perhaps portends the forthcoming

bloodshed to be inflicted upon the wicked, who had shed the blood of Christ and His martyrs. The prophecy of Joel 2:31 tells us “The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, *before* the coming of the great and awesome day of Jehovah” (cp. Acts 2:20). We therefore are not surprised that this will also occur *on* the day of Jehovah.

4. “*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*” (v.13). These “late/untimely figs” are those which did not ripen at the proper season, and are still hanging from the tree in winter, and easily fall from the tree when “shaken by a mighty wind”. In similar manner, the stars of heaven will fall when the heaven is shaken at Jesus Christ’s return.

5. “*Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up*” (v.14a). The sky presently is like an unrolled scroll on which is written God’s *glory* and *wrath*: “The heavens declare the *glory* of God” (Psalm 19:1) and “the *wrath* of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Romans 1:18). But at the last day the scroll is rolled up, as though it has served its purpose and is no longer needed. Perhaps this portends that God’s *glory* is then to be *manifested*, not merely *declared*, and that His *wrath* is to be *experienced*, not merely *revealed*.

The imagery of this passage, which passed from the earth to the heavens in verse 12, now passes back from the heavens to the earth – and to the sea:

6. “*and every mountain and island was moved out of its place*” (v.14b). The earlier earthquake (v.12) shook the mountains and the islands, but they then settled back into the original places. Now they are moved to different places. This evidences that the confusion and overthrow of the natural order are now complete.

III. Christ’s return is the day of His wrath upon the wicked (vv.15-17). It will be a blessed day for Christ’s people. Jesus tells His disciples “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” (Luke 21:28). But that day will be dreadful for the wicked.

1. *The wicked of all classes will try to hide themselves* (v.15): “And the kings of the earth [chief governing authorities], the great men [secondary governing authorities], the rich men [self-satisfied and wealthy men], the commanders [of military forces], the mighty

men [who usually scoff at fear], every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains.”

Here is a fulfillment of the prophecy against idolaters in the day of Jehovah recorded in Isaiah 2:19: “They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of Jehovah and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily” (see also vv.10, 21).

2. *The wicked would rather suffer death through natural catastrophes than face divine judgment* (v.16): “and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne [God] and from the wrath of the Lamb [Jesus Christ]!’” (Cp. Hosea 10:8 & Luke 23:30.)

They who now “make war with the Lamb” (Revelation 17:14) and vent their wrath against Him will then see Him coming to make war against them and subject them to His divine and just wrath. They will see the shaking rocks and mountains and pray that these will crush them before divine wrath falls upon them.

3. *The wicked will know their doom is certain and deserved* (v.17): “For the great day of His [the Lamb’s] wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

“Who is able to stand?” Here is an allusion to Malachi 3:2: “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?” The wicked know they cannot.

“Who is able to stand?” They are identified in the next chapter (ch.7). We there read that, before Christ returns, His angels are sent to “seal the servants of our God on their foreheads”, and that they will number “one hundred and forty-four thousand” (7:1-4). (This number is *symbolic*; this “Israel” is *spiritual*.) These “one hundred and forty-four thousand” are all “having [the Lamb’s] Father’s name written on their foreheads”: “These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God” (Revelation 14:1-5). These will stand on that day!

Will you *stand* or *hide* when Christ returns?

– Daniel E. Parks (April 9, 2017; #972)