

# The First Cosmic Disturbances

📖 Revelation 6:9-17

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Last time we looked at the first four seals in Rev 6:1-8. I suggested that each of the four horses is ridden by the same rider, the anti-Christ, and that each gives a sequential sketch of his early career in the Tribulation as he rises to become world ruler at the mid-point. In 6:1-2 John saw the Lamb breaking the first seal. Nothing was read but unquestionably one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come," is a reflection of what was revealed by the scroll. The command to "Come" was directed toward a horse and its rider. And in 6:2 John "looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer." The white horse signifies peace because the second seal in 6:4 removes peace from the earth. The rider who will establish this peace is the anti-Christ. He has a bow but no arrows signifying conquering but without weapons. His method of conquering will be the propaganda of world peace by way of disarmament. According to 2 Thess 2:9ff the world will be under strong delusion and they will embrace the propaganda in hopes of establishing world peace. Then they will have peace, but as Paul said in 1 Thess 5:3, "While they are saying "Peace and security!" destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape." The second seal in Rev 6:3 will be broken by the Lamb, a second living creature will say "Come," and another horse will go out, this one a red horse, signifying warfare and bloodshed. The rider is again the anti-Christ. It says he "was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another, and a great sword was given to him." The anti-Christ will begin his warmongering on his march to rule the world at this time, early in the first half of the Tribulation. This fits with Daniel 7:24 which said that the anti-Christ would rise among ten kings and subdue three of those kings. Once he has done that he will be one of eight world kings. But his war machine will be so great that he will begin to become greater than all of them so that by the midpoint of the Tribulation he will be the only world king. We might add that Israel will feel quite safe at this time, because they are in a covenant with him, dwelling in peace and security in the land, rebuilding their Temple and preparing to offer sacrifice. Little do they know that they have entered into a covenant with death. The third seal in Rev 6:5 will then be broken by the Lamb, a third living creature will say "Come," and another horse will come forth, this one a black horse, signifying economic recession. The rider is also the anti-Christ. This is a picture of his economic sanctions which bring about a global recession. He is taking control of the world economy, bringing people to their knees. In 6:6 John heard something like a voice in the

center of the four living creatures. This is probably the Lamb. He is reading from the scroll, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not tamper with the oil and the wine." The price controls will be so strict that a full day's labor will only be able to purchase enough food for one person. Oil and wine will be completely sanctioned. The third seal is economic sanctions that are bringing the world to their knees before the anti-Christ and preparing for even stiffer sanctions at the midpoint when no one will be able to buy or sell without taking the mark and worshipping him. The fourth seal in Rev 6:7 is then broken by the Lamb, a fourth living creature will say "Come," and another horse will come forth, this one a pale ashen-green color, signifying death. The rider of the horse is the anti-Christ. He is given authority to bring about the death of over one fourth of the world's population. He does so by means of the sword, which is warfare, famine, which is starvation, and with pestilence, which is disease. No doubt his argument will be that the world cannot sustain such vast populations and that something must be done to eliminate people to bring harmony back to nature. Those who die will quickly be shuffled into Hades awaiting their final judgment at the Great White Throne.

So much for the first four seals. The anti-Christ is well on his way to becoming world dictator. We now come to the fifth seal in Rev 6:9. Here we see the Lamb break **the fifth seal**, but we do not see a living creature announcing to a horse and its rider, "Come..." Something is different. Garland said, "With the opening of the fifth seal, we break from the judgments associated with the four horsemen." Seiss made the same observation and gave the reason. "There are no voices of command from heaven under this seal, and no messengers dispatched from the throne; for the reason that bloody persecutions of God's servants come from beneath—not from above." What has happened on earth to these Tribulation saints who are now in heaven is they've been murdered by the anti-Christ and his followers. What John **saw underneath the altar** in heaven was **the souls of those who had been slain on earth because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained**. These are people who believed in Christ after the rapture. At the rapture all believers were removed from the earth. The result was the apostasy, the absence of any faith on the earth. Soon after that, though, people will begin to believe in Christ. These believers are going to start reading and studying the **word of God**. They're going to find out very quickly from studying Daniel and Matthew 24-25 and 2 Thess 2 and Revelation that they are living in the Tribulation. Those who pay close attention to the sequence of the four seal judgments and this rising world ruler will realize he is the anti-Christ, they will calculate the number of his name and deciphering that it adds up to 666. When they do this they will begin to expose him according to the word of God. As a result, the anti-Christ is going to try to eliminate them. As he eliminates them from earth by murder they appear as souls in heaven. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. That is where John sees them at the time of the fifth seal, in heaven, **underneath the altar**.

Now recall that the true temple is in heaven. The one Moses constructed was only an earthly copy of the true one in heaven. During the OT sacrificial system at the temple, when a bull was slain on the bronze altar, some of its blood was poured out at the base of the altar. Here in heaven the significance of these being underneath the altar is that the lifeblood of the martyrs has been poured out at the base of bronze altar in heaven.

When it says John saw their **souls** some think that requires them to have resurrection bodies. They think the seeing of **souls** is evidence of an intermediate body between the present body and the resurrection body. However, there is really no evidence of an intermediate body. John was in an ecstatic state and enabled to see things in the spiritual realm similar to the way Peter, James and John at the Transfiguration were enabled to see Jesus, Moses and Elijah. The truth is these martyrs have not yet been resurrected. Rev 20:4 says that they will receive their resurrection bodies in connection with the Second Coming, just prior to the Millennial Kingdom. What John saw were their **souls**.

Now the reason they were slain is **because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained**, which are really one and the same. They stood up for the word of God, they maintained their testimony. In the Revelation we are going to see the word translated **and** here, which usually separates to clauses, used in an ascensive sense to connect or equate to clauses. Just be aware of that. **Because of the word of God**, that is, **because of the testimony which they had maintained**. The point is these believers recognized who the anti-Christ was and would not back down from the testimony of the word of God even in the face of death by the anti-Christ, who no doubt, required that they deny **the word of God** in order to save their lives. Here we see that he has eliminated them from earth but they now appear in heaven, victorious over him.

When were these believers martyred? Some think they were martyred during the second, third and fourth seals, but it is difficult to avoid the plain reading of the text which places it after the four seals, as the fifth seal. Further evidence that they were not killed during the previous seals is that they were not slain by the effects of the fourth seal; war, famine, disease or wild beasts, but by someone who did not like it that they maintained their testimony of the word of God. Therefore, it is best to view this as happening after the first four seals. This means they are Tribulation saints who recognized the anti-Christ and begin to expose and oppose him. Some have thought that they will be killed because they refuse to bow down and worship the anti-Christ. However, no one is killed for that reason until after the abomination of desolation and the abomination of desolation does not take place until the midpoint of the Tribulation which is described later in Rev 11-13. Fruchtenbaum correctly stated, "In Revelation, that midpoint begins with chapter eleven, when the Temple is taken over by Gentiles for 42 months (the second three and one-half years). Then Antichrist proceeds to remove all opposition by killing the two witnesses (Rev. 11+) and persecuting the Jews (Rev. 12+). He then proclaims himself to be God and sets up his image (Rev. 13+). Only those saints in and subsequent to chapter thirteen are "killed for refusing to bow down and worship the Antichrist." These in chapter 6 are killed because of their faith in the word of God. Because they maintained their testimony against His plans for world domination he had them killed.

In 6:10 as **souls underneath the altar...they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"** The cry, **How long...?** has been the cry of saints down through history (Ps 74:10; Jer 12:4; Hab 1:2; Zech 1:12). It is understandable that believers grow tired of seeing evil overcome good. They want justice to prevail. Some have

cringed at these verses, saying, we should not want vengeance upon evil doers. Jesus taught us to love our enemies. In response, Wiersbe said, "I have no doubt that, when they were slain on earth, these martyrs also prayed for their slayers; and this is the right thing to do (Matt. 5:10–12, 43–48)."<sup>1</sup> But that does not remove the fact that what they have done is evil and God is eventually going to judge them in order to establish kingdom righteousness on the earth. When He is going to do that these martyrs don't know. They want to know. It's also important to note that they are not crying out for God to exact vengeance. They are crying out for Him to execute justice. Their murderers have spilled innocent blood upon the earth. How long until the **holy and true Lord** will execute justice.

Who are these murderers? The end of verse 10 refers to them as **those who dwell on the earth**. This is the earthdwellers, the technical phrase in the book of Revelation for persistent unbelievers. The Greek words mean "to sit down upon the earth." It always refers to those who have taken a firm seat upon this earth. In other words, the earthdwellers are not going to believe the gospel. The offer is still there but they are persistent in their unbelief. They want the faith removed from the earth. That is why they join the anti-Christ in murdering these believers.

Having cried **How Long, O Lord**, in 6:11, **there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also**. Some may find an incongruity in God for Him being holy and true and yet put off judging evil. However, as Garland said, "Here again a most difficult reality presents itself. God Who has the power to step in and end this holocaust at any moment instead *chooses* to allow it to play out in all its gruesome detail. Although we will never fully apprehend His divine patience, we know that it is explained, in part, by His great mercy toward those who have not yet turned, the glorious testimony being accrued by the martyred saints, and the filling up of the cup of injustice of the perpetrators. If He were to move immediately in vengeance at the time of their request, then some would be eternally lost that are yet to become their *brethren*." In short, what Garland is saying is that God puts off judging for two reasons; first, to give more time for the gospel to penetrate people's lives so that they become believers, and second, to allow the iniquity of the world to fill up to the point where God's patience runs out and judgment ensues. The judgment these martyred souls are looking for is the return of Christ at the Second Coming to establish His kingdom righteousness. They want to rid the earth of their murderers. In reality, all true Christians should desire this. It is part and parcel of seeking the kingdom first and His righteousness.

To pacify them a little longer, each of them was given **a white robe**. Again, some people think they find evidence in this for an intermediate body. They say that only bodies could wear **a white robe**. But this is reading too much into the spiritual realm. John was given eyes to see into the spiritual realm, just as three of the disciples were given eyes to see Jesus, Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration. Thus, there is no justification for reading an intermediate body into this passage. That is reading an ancillary point into the passage. The real

point is not that they were given intermediate bodies, but that they were given **white** robes. They were also **told that they should rest for a little while longer**. The word **rest** means “take it easy.” They had difficult lives and horrible deaths. It is comforting to know that the Lord knows this life is difficult and we need a break and will get one.

But what exactly is the judgment of the fifth seal? No judgment upon God’s enemies happened on earth as with the first four seals. What then is the fifth seal judgment? This most important issue has eluded many commentators. Garland said, “This then, is the judgment associated with the fifth seal—that petition of God by the martyred saints seals the fate of those who put them to death.” In other words, the judgment is not the martyred saints but the prayer of the martyred saints. By means of their prayer the ultimate doom of the earthdwellers is sealed. This illustrates an important principle of prayer. God conditions some things in His plan upon human prayer. Because these prayed for God’s judgment upon them He will do it. Their prayers become the means by which God’s judgments are realized. Interestingly, one of the duties of the nearest of kin was to avenge the blood of a family member who had been murdered (Num. 35:19-21; Deu. 19:6; Jos. 20:3). The nearest of kin to these martyrs is the Lord Jesus Christ. He will avenge their blood at the proper time in answer to their prayer. When? Verse 11 says, when **the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also**. There are more Tribulation saints to **be killed**. It is part of the plan of God for them to be martyrs for the faith in that time. When they have all been killed, then God will answer the fifth seal prayer. I think the prayer will be answered at the Second Coming.

In Rev 6:12 we now come to the sixth seal. For clarity this is still in the first half of the Tribulation, probably a year and a half into the Tribulation. John says **I looked when He broke the sixth seal**. Once again the Lamb is the one who breaks the **seal**. It contains another judgment. What is unique about this judgment is that it is not anything that man has seen in any form before. The first four seals are things men have seen in history; times of peace, times of war, times of economic recession and times of death by plague, war and famine. The only difference with the four seals and prior similar difficulties is the scale. But they at least have a historical connection. The sixth seal has no historical connection. **And there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind**. It may sound like it has a historical connection, because the translation says a great earthquake, and we have seen earthquakes. But this is not an earthquake as I will show. Furthermore, verse 14 says, **The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”** In other words, it’s at this time that the earthdwellers realize that the things that are happening are the wrath of the Father and the Lamb.

Before this, during the first four seals, they did not detect it because there were historical precedents for these types of events.<sup>2</sup> But these judgments have no historical precedent. The judgments here are so plainly supernatural that the only explanation is that it is the wrath coming from the Father and the Lamb. This does not mean that the previous seals were not the wrath of the Father and the Lamb. It means that the earthdwellers did not recognize them as the wrath of the Father and the Lamb. Having mentioned the term “wrath”, remember that the wrath is connected with the Day of the Lord. Most accept that. What they often differ on is when the Day of the Lord’s wrath begins. We’ve looked at the wrath and the day of the Lord in this series earlier on. We said that the day of the Lord’s wrath was future and that the Church is not destined for wrath. In 1 Thess 5:2 we are told that the Day of the Lord’s wrath will come like a thief in the night when the world is saying, “Peace and safety.” When is this time of peace and safety? If the Day of the Lord’s wrath began at the sixth seal, there is no prior period of peace and safety during the previous seals until you work your way back to the first seal. Therefore, the only logical place to place the beginning of the day of the Lord’s wrath is at the first seal. 2 Thess 2 added that the Day of the Lord would begin with the revealing of the anti-Christ. This most likely also occurs at the first seal. Clearly by the fifth seal the martyrs under the altar had detected the anti-Christ’s career path in the first few seals and made an effort to obstruct his progress. My point is that the day of the Lord’s wrath begins at the first seal and not the sixth seal, because this is the only place that will fit with all the other Scriptural details. This is important because some think that the day of the Lord does not begin until the sixth seal. The reason they think this is because in 6:17 the earthdwellers say **the great day of their wrath has come**. But, again, this is not a statement of when it came, only a statement of when they detected it. The reason is what I explained before and Garland said clearly, “Up to now, the effects of the first five seals, although unprecedented in their global impact, could still be explained away as an intensification of what history already records: conflict, war, death, famine, disease, and martyrdom. With the opening of the sixth seal, all such explanations vanish for the signs which attend this seal are unmistakable in their uniqueness and scope.” In reality the only explanation for all the seals is that they are the day of the Lord’s wrath. It is only at the sixth seal that the earthdwellers can’t explain it away. So at this time they admit this is the wrath of God and the Lamb.

Let’s look at the sixth seal. John says **I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake**. Most take this to be an actual **earthquake**. The Greek word is *σεισμος* and most commonly it is used of an earthquake, but it is also used in Matt 8:24 of a storm on the sea. So it can have other senses. The reason I don’t think this is an earthquake is the context. The effects of this are cosmic in nature; extending to the sun, moon and stars as well as the earth. The Greek word actually means “a violent shaking or commotion,” and can be translated “*shock, agitation*.” I think of this as more of what physics refers to as a shock wave. A shock wave is a type of propagating disturbance that moves through a medium, such as our atmosphere or water. It can carry tremendous amounts of energy that cause changes in pressure, temperature and density of the medium as it passes through. The energy dissipates the further it travels from the source, just as ripples from a stone hitting the water. This shock wave is extremely large and supernaturally induced as it effects the sun,

moon and celestial bodies referred to here as stars, but with reference to meteors and asteroids in our solar system. Some kind of shock wave occurs here, a *σεισμος μεγας*, a great shock wave. Not incidentally, Jesus mentioned shocks in Matt 24:7 as part of the beginning of birth pangs (24:8). This is no earthquake, this is a shock wave that causes the earth to quake. Together this is further evidence that Matt 24:4-8 is parallel to the six seals.

When you think about this as a shock wave you realize how the effects can extend to what John saw next; **the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth.** The sun is 93 million miles from earth and the moon is ~250,000 miles away. There is nothing we can do to really affect them. But God can. What is important about this goes back to creation. God created these celestial bodies on the fourth day for two reasons; first, for signs and second, for seasons and days and years. For signs means that God will sometimes cause supernatural changes in the sun, moon and stars to indicate divine activity. Things like the sun turning as **black as sackcloth made of hair** or turning the **whole moon** into something **like blood** are indications of divine judgment. I think if I saw a moon as red as blood I would understand that what the future holds is bloodshed. What is seen here is not brief. This is not what many called blood-moons last year. This will probably go on for months. Also, the **stars of the sky fell to the earth** like **a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.** This means meteoroids will enter the earth's atmosphere and reach the earth's surface in sizes that are not inconsequential. Today most only reach earth in the form of dust, but these will be hitting earth and causing devastation. The earthdwellers understand these are signs from God since in vv 16-17 **they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"** The second reason God made the celestial bodies is for seasons and days and years. The sun, moon and stars were given so we could keep track of time. The sun rises and sets giving us the 24-hour day. The moon has a certain rotational period around the earth that is related to biological clocks. The constellations in the stars have been used for centuries to tell the season of the year. Today we depend upon technology to keep track of time. We often forget that our ancient counterparts used these celestial bodies to keep track of time. But when a shock wave of this magnitude interrupts our technology, as well as the sun, moon and stars, what will happen to man's ability to keep track of time? This is one reason why in the Olivet Discourse Jesus said of the Second Coming, "But of the day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone." The context is about the day and hour of the Second Coming. Most people think we could know the exact moment of the Second Coming because it's exactly 7 years after the treaty between anti-Christ and Israel. Thus, they make this verse about the Rapture. But the rapture is not in the context at all of the Olivet Discourse. The disciples question has nothing to do with the rapture. It has to do with Christ's coming in His kingdom. One of the reasons no one will know the exact moment of Christ's coming in His kingdom is because there will be a tremendous shock wave that will radically affect our technology; the sun, moon and stars and the earth, even to the point that all the houses and dwellings on earth

will be destroyed. One that at the sixth seal people are not dwelling in houses, they are hiding in the rocks; kings, commanders, the small and the great. The reason is because they have no house. The shock wave has destroyed them all. There is nowhere else to hide.

Now I think it's important to bring up that this is one of many cosmic disturbances that Scripture describes as taking place in this time. You can't make them all one and the same cosmic disturbance just because there are similarities. For example, here in Rev 6:12-17, at the sixth seal, a shaking takes place that darkens the sun, makes blood red the moon and causes the stars to fall from heaven. In Rev 8:12, at the fourth trumpet, a third of the sun, moon and stars will be darkened. In Rev 9:1-2, at the fifth trumpet, the sun will be darkened by smoke. In Rev 16:8ff, at the fourth bowl, the sun will scorch people with fire and fierce heat. Even a casual survey shows these are not the same cosmic disturbance. Therefore there must be multiple cosmic disturbances during this future time. Thus, when we read a description of cosmic disturbances like that in Isa 13:6-12, we realize that this is a general description of the future cosmic disturbances, and not a reference to any one of them. "Wail, for the day of the Lord is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. <sup>7</sup>Therefore all hands will fall limp, And every man's heart will melt. <sup>8</sup>They will be terrified, Pains and anguish will take hold of *them*; They will writhe like a woman in labor, They will look at one another in astonishment, Their faces aflame. <sup>9</sup>Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. <sup>10</sup>For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises And the moon will not shed its light. <sup>11</sup>Thus I will punish the world for its evil And the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud And abase the haughtiness of the ruthless. <sup>12</sup>I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold And mankind than the gold of Ophir." That's a general description of cosmic disturbances that will characterize the future Tribulation. We also read of cosmic disturbances in Joel 2:30-31. "I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, Blood, fire and columns of smoke. <sup>31</sup>"The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes." This one mentions cosmic disturbances before "the great and awesome day of the Lord." The adjectives "great and awesome" modify day of the Lord, referring to the exact day of Christ's arrival on earth at the Second Coming. These cosmic disturbances occur before that day. In the context the armies of the world are gathered against Jerusalem for the Battle of Armageddon and God pours out His Spirit upon them. This occurs after the sixth bowl judgment, which is the gathering of the armies of the world against Jerusalem. So we know this reference does not tie to Rev 6 or 8 or 9 but to an event after Rev 16:16. It probably refers to the same one referred to in Zech 14:6 which is the day of the Second Coming, when Jesus comes to fight on behalf of Israel. It says, "In that day there will be no light, the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night." And which is also described in Matt 24:29, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky...." Because then the sign of Messiah will appear in the sky and He will come on the clouds of heaven. So there is a way to show parallels between some of these cosmic disturbances, but other descriptions are general for the time period and



the reason is because there are multiple times when cosmic disturbances will take place during the Tribulation. But all of them are divine signs that will bring hardship on people so that they will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved before He comes in great power in judgment. But under the sixth seal that is not how they respond. Their response is to hide from Him who sits upon the throne and from the Lamb, in the same way that Adam and Eve hid from God when He confronted them in the garden. So much for the cosmic shock wave's effect on the heavens.

In the middle of verse 14 the effect is that **every mountain and island were moved out of their places**. Some argue that this is hyperbole because there would be no rocks to hide under if this really took place. But I don't see why there wouldn't be. A shock wave will simply change the topography of the earth. But you can see from the immensity of the effects of this shock wave the reason people no longer have houses to hide in. The infrastructure on earth is in near total decimation. Again, Jesus in the Olivet Discourse, mentioned earthquakes (Matt 24:7), which is better said to be a shock, and He said this was part of the beginning of birth pangs (24:8). These are early in the first half of the Tribulation.

The main points we want to make today, by summary, are two. First, that at the fifth seal judgment we see martyrs in heaven. These are people who became believers after the rapture and came to understand that the main player in seal one, two, three and four was the anti-Christ. They stood up for the word of God to oppose and expose him. He murdered them, but they have victory in heaven. The actual seal judgment is the martyr's prayer in heaven that seals their ultimate doom. Prayer, therefore, is a means that God uses to fulfill His purposes. Second, at the sixth seal there is a great shock wave that affects the heavens and the earth. The sun, moon and stars do not give their light, causing loss of orientation in time and great fear. The earth will be shaken violently so that the infrastructure is totally decimated and men are forced to hide in the rocks and crevices on the earth to hide from what cannot be explained away any more. That the events on earth are the wrath of the one who sits upon the throne and the Lamb. And with such a scale of judgments the last question of the chapter is *apropos*, **"Who is able to stand?"**

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 588.

<sup>2</sup> Tony Garland agreed, saying, "Up to now, the effects of the first five seals, although unprecedented in their global impact, could still be explained away as an intensification of what history already records: conflict, war, death, famine, disease, and martyrdom. With the opening of the sixth seal, all such explanations vanish for the signs which attend this seal are unmistakable in their uniqueness and scope."