The darkening of the moon as blood.
The falling of stars from heaven.

During His earthly ministry Jesus foretold the very same signs, which should not be surprising since it is Jesus who opens the seals in Revelation: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:29-30).

Because these signs take place under the sixth seal, we should look for them sometime after the dark ages of papal persecution and yet prior to the second coming of Christ. With amazing accuracy these signs did occur, in precisely the order and during the time foretold.

1. The Great Earthquake

The Great Earthquake found its fulfillment on November 1, 1755. Commonly called the Lisbon Earthquake because it centered in Lisbon, Portugal, this was the greatest catastrophe the world had ever seen since the flood of Noah’s day. Not only was Lisbon destroyed with the loss of an estimated 60,000 to 90,000 lives, but the quake was felt by the greater portions of the continents of Europe, Africa, and even America. Two cities in Africa, 400 miles away, were leveled. A tidal wave struck the island of Barbados in the Caribbean, over 4,000 miles from Lisbon. The sea rose fifty feet above its normal level. If a modern quake of this magnitude were to occur in San Francisco, not only would Frisco be destroyed but so would Los Angeles. And the rumbling would be felt throughout America and on continents across the oceans.

2. The Darkening of the Sun

The Darkening of the Sun was fulfilled on May 19, 1780. In history books it is called “The Dark Day.” R. M. Devens, in his book entitled, Our First Century, pp. 89-90, says this about the event: “Almost, if not altogether, alone as the mysterious and yet unexplainable phenomenon of its kind, in nature’s diversified range of events, . . . stands the dark day of May 19, 1780—a most unaccountable darkening of the whole visible heavens and atmosphere in New England.” In Noah Webster’s American Dictionary of the English Language (1882 edition), we find this entry under the dark day: “The true cause of this remarkable phenomenon is not known.” Since then some have suggested that the dark day can be accounted for by natural causes. But of course, God has often used the powers of nature to accomplish His purposes. The point remains that, from whatever cause, the sun was indeed darkened on May 19, 1780.

3. The Moon Turned Blood

The evening of May 19, 1780, after the dark day.

4. The Falling of the Stars

The Falling of the Stars occurred on November 13, 1833. The American Journal of Science and Arts, 1834, records: “The morning of November 13th, 1833, was rendered memorable by an exhibition of the phenomenon called SHOOTING STARS, which was probably more extensive and magnificent than any similar one hitherto recorded . . . Probably no celestial phenomenon has ever occurred in this country, since its first settlement, which was viewed with so much admiration and delight by one class of spectators, or with so much astonishment and fear by another class. For some time after the occurrence, the ‘meteoric phenomenon’ was the principal topic of conversation in every circle.” Charles A. Young, a Professor of Astronomy at Princeton University says: “Probably the MOST REMARKABLE of all the meteoric showers . . . was that of the Leonids, on November 13, 1833. The number . . . was estimated as high as 2,000,000 an hour for five or six hours.” At just the right time, when God’s prophetic time-clock struck the hour, the signs of the sixth seal occurred.

What’s Next?

We are now between the thirteenth and fourteenth verses of Revelation 6. The next item on the agenda is an earthquake of even greater magnitude than the first one revealed under the sixth seal. Verse 14 says of that future quake, “every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” It seems that the signs listed in verses 12 and 13 are merciful beacons of warning for the wise. The stupendous amplitude of the earthquake in verse 14 seems to say, “It’s all over.” It must be scheduled to occur sometime very near, if not just prior to the, second coming of Christ. For shortly thereafter the sixth seal portrays the terror of the unperturbed world as they witness the coming of Christ in the heavens.

The sixth seal closes with the sober question, “For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (verse 17). Chapter 7 is devoted to answering that question. It brings to view the 144,000 and the great multitude, which will be the subject of our next study. After the question is answered in chapter seven, the opening of the seventh seal is brought to view in Revelation 8:1.

The Seventh Seal

“And when He had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour” (Revelation 8:1).

All the seventh seal reveals is silence in heaven. But it is not difficult to discover its meaning. The sixth seal closes with the second coming of Christ. So the silence of the seventh seal must be intended to reveal the solemnity of that glorious event. All of heaven will be emptied. Jesus proclaimed of His coming: “He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:26).

Every angel of heaven and the Father Himself will attend Jesus to earth. No wonder there is silence in heaven! Not only will the third heaven be silent, but the first heaven that belongs to earth will be silent as well. With stunned awe, every living human being will gaze in speechless wonder as the sky above is filled with the glory of Christ, His Father, and all the angels.

To some He will appear as the avenging Lion to execute justice. To others He will come as the merciful Lamb to ransom and reward His waiting followers.

May the words of Isaiah be found true for you and me in that day:

“And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him. We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (Isaiah 25:9).
Clearly, the four horses represent events that transpire on earth, by God’s orchestration or allowance.

In Revelation 7:1-3, we see that there are four angels who hold the four winds in check until God’s people are sealed. Once they are sealed, the winds will be released and great tragedy and destruction will occur on earth. The four horses in Revelation 6 and the four winds in chapter 7 represent the same thing—events of earth acted out by mankind— with one significant difference. The four horses represent events that transpire before human probation closes, while the four winds represent events that will transpire after probation closes. The four horses reveal the experience of the Christian church and the worrisome circumstances that envelope the world as Satan works to crush the movement of Christ. The four winds reveal the total, unrestrained destruction that will occur after the gospel commission is completed and the Spirit of God ceases to hold the winds at bay.

The first horse represents the early Christian church riding forth conquering the hearts of men and women for Christ with the pure gospel truth of Christ’s righteousness (see Psalm 51:7; Isaiah 1:18 on the meaning of white). The bow and the rider’s hand represents the arrows of conviction that pierced hearts as the followers of Christ preached. The hearers were made to realize their guilt as sinners and their need of the Savior. David describes the Lord’s convicting influence on his heart as arrows: “For Thine arrows stick fast in me, and Thy hand presseth me sore” (Psalm 38:2).

The white horse of conquest was followed by the blood red horse of judgment and death. The rider represents death itself, not the domain of the Devil. The rider’s name is Death and the grave followed him. As a result of the gospel message of the blood of Christ, many people died during this time. The black horse represents the major part of the sixth century. The rider’s name is Death, and Hell followed with him. The white robes given to the martyrs under the fifth seal have been approved by God and are sure of immortality. The truth of the gospel was made obscure. False doctrines were many.

The Fourth Seal—The Pale Horse

“And I beheld when He had opened the fourth seal, I heard the fourth beast say, Come and see. And there went out a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with beasts of the earth” (Revelation 6:8).

The pale horse represents the deepest depths of apostasy into which the church fell during the Middle Ages under papal supremacy. The rider’s name is Death and the grave followed him. As a result of the church’s evil rule, nations descended until they were void of spiritual and moral life. All of Europe was plunged into war and famine and disease. Approximately 50 million people were martyred for their faith by the church that claimed in vain the name of Christ. Some historians have estimated that as much as one-quarter to one-third of Europe’s population died during this time.

The Fifth Seal—Martyrs Under the Altar

“And when He had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled” (Revelation 6:9-11).

Following the pale horse of death, the fifth seal opens to reveal the martyr’s story of persecuted and oppressed justice. Of course they are not literally confined under the altar, nor are they literally praying for vengeance against their enemies.

That they are symbolically represented as under the altar calls our attention to the fact that theirs was a sacrifice for Christ. The altar was the place of sacrifice in the Old Testament sanctuary, representing this earth, where Jesus would be crucified. Some of the blood of the sacrifice was poured out at the base of the altar (see Leviticus 4:7). As Jesus laid down His precious life for our salvation, the martyrs laid down their lives for their Savior. Their blood symbolically cries out for justice from the earth as did the blood of Abel against his brother Cain who murdered him (see Genesis 4:10). Their blood cried out as the Protestant Reformers arose to defend the cause of truth for which they died. As the story of their faithfulness is told today by those who share their faith, their blood still cries out for justice.

White robes were given to the martyrs. We take this to mean that the martyrs under the fifth seal have been approved by God and are sure of eternal life.

The Sixth Seal—Signs in the Heavens

“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 blood; 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. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island was moved out of their places. 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; 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: for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Revelation 6:12-17).

When the sixth seal was opened a series of attention-getting events occurred. They are commonly referred to as signs because they indicate where we are in the panorama of time.

- A great earthquake.
- The darkening of the sun.