***An Earthquake, Darkness, and Meteorites

RV126-01***

We now move to the sixth seal in Revelation 6:12-17. This is segment number one.

**The First Five Seals**

The first five seals broken by Jesus Christ on the scroll described the tribulation era works of rebellious mankind himself. The first five seals dealt with what the man himself was doing, and bearing the consequence of creating his own grief. The first five seals, as you remember, occur in the first half of the tribulation period. The tribulation period, which begins with the rapture of the church, is a seven-year period. The Bible divides it into two periods of three-and-a-half years each. We started at the rapture, and we have been progressing one seal after another, and we dealt with the fifth seal. At this point, coming into the sixth seal, we cross over into the second half of the tribulation period. Later on, we will be seeing events on the earth described under the symbol of trumpets and under the symbol of bowls. The trumpets and bowls will take place largely at the very end of the tribulation period. Things will really wind up, and the whole fabric of human society will come apart, and things will just be a total nightmare.

So, to anchor you to our progression, the seals have taken us through the first part of the tribulation period. Already, the earth at that time, and human society, has experienced some very devastating things. The reason we say that it falls into that period can be indicated by Matthew 24:4-7: "And Jesus answered and said unto them (speaking to His disciple), 'Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My name saying, 'I am Christ,' and shall deceive many.'"

Now, the context here indicates that he is speaking about something that is going to happen in the tribulation era. Verse 6 says, "And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you do not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nations shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdoms, and there shall be famines, and pestilence, and earthquakes in various places." That's exactly the things that we have been reading about in the first five seals.

Verse 8 says that these things that he has just described are: "The beginning of sorrows." "The beginning of sorrows" is the first part of the tribulation period (the first 3-and-a-half years). In verse 9, we read, "Then they shall deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you, and you shall be hated of all nations for My namesake." Now, Matthew 24:9 there is describing what we have read previously here in Revelation 6:11, under the martyrs who are in heaven, calling for justice against them. So, following Matthew 24:8 that says, "These are the beginning of sorrows" (the things described in the first part), He then starts describing things that lap over from the first part of the tribulation to the second. The fifth seal is actually on the center point, and it's moving over from the first part of the tribulation period to what is called in the second part, the great tribulation period.

So, seal number six moves on into the last three-and-a-half-year segment, and this time (in this seal), we now see a work of God against mankind which is being described, rather than just something which man is doing. Matthew 24:15 gives us the dividing line of the tribulation, because there it describes the event when the antichrist sets up himself in the form of an image as the God that the people of the tribulation are to worship. That happens here in the middle of the tribulation. He then double-crosses the people of Israel, whose protector he has been, and we enter the last three-and-a-half years. The fifth seal laps over, and we are now into the sixth seal. And out of the seventh come the trumpets and later the bowls.

So, seal number six reveals the future judgments of God on the tribulation rebels who rejected the Word of God (that is, the Bible) and who killed God's witnesses.

**Actual Events**

When the Lord Jesus breaks the sixth seal, John sees a preview of cataclysmic events, in the world of nature, of cosmic proportions produced by God Himself. The God who is out there, but ignored or opposed, suddenly becomes active on earth, and people discover that He really does exist. The Creator God has not been silent from heaven, and now He proceeds to enforce His Word. People discover that He meant what He said. The events of the sixth seal are so horrible that Bible teachers have often tended to spiritualize these events and say, "Well, you don't take these as literal things that God is actually going to do to the earth and to mankind." But, of course, that violates the basic principle of interpreting Scripture, which is, first of all, literal interpretation, unless there's the clear indication that we are dealing with something symbolic. There is no such indication in the sixth seal. So, we must therefore take these things as actual events.

**The Sixth Seal**

So, we begin with verse 12. John says, "And I beheld." We'll give you the Greek background so that you'll know what God the Holy Spirit has actually said here. The word "beheld" is the word we've often had. It's the Greek word "horao." This is the word in the Greek for looking that talks about a panoramic overview. John is having a broad view of this scene now that is taking place on the earth. He has been having a panoramic overview of these horsemen in heaven, and these other things that have taken place in heaven. Now he's looking back down on the earth where he sees, in broad scope, something taking place. It is at the point that he observes it. It is active voice, which tells us that he himself, with his own human eyes, is actually seeing these things taking place.

The point that he sees this, we are told, is when He (that is, Jesus) had opened the sixth seal. The word "opened" is the word "anoigo." This word here means "to break." At a certain point, Jesus Christ breaks open the next seal on the scroll (number six, in order), and He does this Himself because no one else is qualified to do this. What he breaks is the "sphragis." The "sphragis" is the device on the scroll (like sealing wax) to prevent the scroll from being unrolled further beyond that point. The seal, in effect, keeps secret what is behind it until it is broken. This is number six in order. The numbers which are placed before the word "seal" (the "sphragis"): the "one;" the "two;" the "three;" and, so on, are very important, because they indicate to us that the events that they describe take place consecutively: first one; then the next one; and, the next one. These things don't all happen at the same time.

Now, it is true that what happens under one seal continues on when the next seal is broken open. The effects and the activities will continue on. But they begin one after another in an orderly fashion. So, what happens on earth, you must understand, starts on a sort of a low key. Something goes wrong, and people say, "Oh, this is a problem. We have to straighten this out." And about the time they are dealing with the events of the first seal, the next seal breaks, and the problem becomes worse, and that's what's happening. The whole impact is God gradually applying greater and greater pressure on rebellious mankind.

So, John says that, in an overview picture, he looks down on earth, and when Jesus Christ breaks open the sixth seal, he sees something. He sees that: "There was." This word "was" is not the normal word for "was" in the Greek language. It is the Greek word "ginomai," which actually means "to become." It is something that comes into being. It is something that develops. It is an event here that actually takes place on earth. He describes this event as "great." The Greek word is "megas," indicating that this is bigger than average. This thing has happened before on the face of the earth, but never like this.

**An Earthquake**

It is an earthquake. The Greek word is "seismos." "Seismos" actually means "a violent shaking." The idea is "moving to and fro in a rapid fashion." To illustrate this word's meaning, it is used in Matthew 8:24: "And behold there arose a great tempest (and there's the word) in the sea, insomuch that the boat was covered with the waves, but He was asleep." This is describing the event when Jesus was crossing over on the lake, and the storm developed on the Sea of Galilee. The tempest here ("the great tempest) is this great violent moving back and forth of the sea.

In the case here in Revelation 6:12, it refers to the violent movement of the earth's surface, resulting in fractures with volcanoes spewing out their fire, smoke, and dust into the upper atmosphere.

When I was in Alaska a few years ago, some of the people showed me some movies which were taken of the Alaska earthquake that had taken place a few years previously. In the movie there was this an open field, and at first, I thought it was a shot of the ocean. I thought it was a shot over water, because it just was undulating up and down like waves. Then they said, "No, that's the land area." And it just looked like it had turned into a huge sea, and the land was just heaving up and down as waves on the ocean.

That's the picture you have here. The whole outer crust of the earth is suddenly thrown into a convulsive heaving. Furthermore, this is worldwide. That's why it's a "megas seismos." It's great because it's worldwide in its effects so that the whole surface of the planet is in violent tremor like waves on the water. The magnitude, of course, indicates the enormous destruction and death which will take place worldwide.

Unless you've been in an earthquake (a situation where the ground is crumbling under your feet), it's a little hard to relate to this. You're just going to have to vicariously try to experience what it will be like to suddenly find the whole surface of the earth in a convulsive, violent shake. You can see the terror that that is going to create.

**Sackcloth**

Secondly, John sees something else. He looks up from the earth, from his seat in heaven, and he takes a look at the sun. That is the "helios." This is the Greek word for the large star around which our solar system revolves. Again, something comes into being here. It becomes, he says, "Black," which is simply the Greek word for "black" ("melos"), and then he uses the word "hos," meaning "as," indicating analogy. The sun does not actually turn into this, but it appears to turn into this. And what it appears to turn into, he calls "sackcloth." "Sackcloth" is the Greek word "sakkos." "Sakkos" is cloth which was originally made of camel's hair. Later it was made from the wool of a black goat. The result of weaving cloth out of this kind of hair is that it becomes opaque. You produce a cloth simply through which the light will not come.

**The Sun**

It is the type of cloth which 2 Samuel 3:31 tells us is associated with mourning. Also, Revelation 11:3 indicates that sackcloth is associated with a bereavement; a tragedy; or, an experience of death. So, putting yourself in the place of the people who live on earth at this time, you look up at the sun, and talk about a total eclipse, this apparently is not even going to have the corona around the side (the splash over light when there is a total eclipse. It is just going to be wiped out. You can imagine the reaction of all these sophisticated New Age people who have been running the earth, and suddenly the earth turns black (opaque), and, to them, that is a bad omen. The Bible doesn't explain to us how this is brought about, probably just by an act of God's omnipotence. But it, of course, is something that is really a rerun on the part of the Lord, because He's done this before.

You remember the time in the Exodus 10:21, where God used this device to bring the Pharaoh to his knees: "And the Lord said unto Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt." Now that is dark! "And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven, and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another, neither rose any from his place for three days, but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings." There was no problem for the children of Israel. When it was supposed to be daytime, it was pitch black outside, but in the land of Goshen, there was bright sunshine inside their houses. You talk about a miracle – that was a miracle! You're not going to explain that scientifically. That's the sort of thing that God is going to do again. He's just going to reach up there like you do with a switch; He's going to turn off the sun; and, it's going to be gone.

Matthew 27:45 tells us how God did this when His Son hung on the cross in death, and He surrounded the countryside in this kind of total darkness.

So, the sun will simply cease to illuminate the earth for a period as if someone has thrown this kind of sackcloth material over it, so that its illumination was hidden. Of course, the light will return, because later on, in some of the other events that are to follow, the sun will again be struck in another way.

The Lord Jesus already predicted this very thing in Matthew 24:29: "And immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened." This is the very thing that He was talking about. This is the very thing that He was describing.

**The Moon**

Then John's eyes move off to the other side of the earth, and his eyes catch hold of the moon. This is the Greek word "selene." The "selene" refers to that satellite of the earth which reflects the sun's rays to illuminate the night. The Greek Bible adds a word that isn't translated in the King James Version. That is this word "holos" which means "whole." The entire planet of the moon is again going to become as (it's not actually going to become this, but this is a simile) blood ("hima"). This word refers to the red fluid which is in the veins of living creatures. The moon, instead of having its normal silvery appearance so that people can talk about and sing about the silvery moon, becomes blood red in color, and consequently, with its light diminished. That's going to be another cause for terror on the earth.

So, you have a combination of the lack of light. The sun is blacked out during the day period, and when the night comes, you get this ominous red glow from the moon. Talk about a real Halloween scenario! This one is a wing-dinger for sure. And talk about fear and terror and concern! People will just go bananas. They will not know what is happening, because suddenly one thing is going to start coming through to them: They can't do anything about it. They can't reach up there and stop it. Please remember that the central attitude of the New Age movement, as it will be expressed in the tribulation period, is that man can do anything. Man is his own god. There is nothing that he cannot think of that he cannot do.

Well, God is up there, with His great sense of humor, turning off the sun, and saying, "Try to do something about that, fella!" Then He turns the moon to blood red so that glows like somebody developing pictures in a dark room, and He says, "Try to do something about that, fella!" The phenomenon, again here, is not explained. Perhaps this red color comes from the debris which has been cast up by the earthquakes. Of course, blood red is the universal symbol for death, so this would no doubt be viewed also as an ominous sign in the tribulation era. Revelation 6:4 and Revelation 19:2 associate blood red with death.

Again, this event was predicted by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 24:29, where he says, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give its light." So, the Lord has been preparing His disciples for this event, because Matthew 24:29 is a part of Scripture, the context of which is talking about this tribulation period.

Then in verse 13, John looks further out in space, and he gets interested in the stars (the "aster"). This is the word for the heavenly bodies, and again, to show you how literal all this is, the Greek Bible also says, "The stars of heaven" (of the "ouranos"). So, it is very clear what we're talking about. We're talking about the things that you actually see out there.

A couple of weeks ago, I was down in south Texas, and we stopped at an overnight place. When we got out of the car, and it was one of those isolated, away-from-everything places, and it was an absolutely cloudless sky. You looked up in the heaven, and everybody gasped at the beauty (the magnificence) of what you saw. Everything was just out there sparkling – clear and twinkling. The Milky Way just splashed over. It was tremendous. This is what we're talking about – all of the interstellar regions of the second heaven. This is the heaven that is being referred to – where all the stars are.

**Meteorites**

John looks at those, and then he sees a real Fourth-of-July scene. For suddenly he sees the stars falling. The Greek word is "pipto," which means "to be cast down." The stars of heaven are being thrown down to the earth. They actually are falling at a certain point in time. Suddenly the stars just begin descending in a shower upon the earth. The Bible explicitly says that it comes "unto;" that is, the Greek word "eis," which gives you the direction to the "ge," which is the earth, so that these things are splattering all over the earth.

When a meteorite hits the earth, that is a momentous event, and it has drastic effects if it hits where you happen to be. So, this is a very serious thing. You don't want to be where things are falling and hitting the earth from outer space.

I remember many years ago when my number two son was in the third grade, and I was driving the academy school bus. Since he didn't get to ride the school bus, he wanted to ride it that day, so he was sitting behind me, and talking to a friend. They had been studying about space and rockets. It was just the era where we were just coming into the rocket program and the space vehicles, and they were discussing outer space. Steve said, "Sometimes stars from outer space fall onto the earth." The other boy said, "Yes, but they get burned up by the atmosphere when they come through. Steve said, "Yes, the Lord makes it that way so that nobody will get hurt on the earth."

Now, that was a dramatic illustration of what Christian education does. They do all the scientific facts, but there was a great difference in how they had learned them. They have learned them from a godly, biblical, divine Creator frame of reference. But they were concerned for the very thing that we're talking about here – being on the earth with a shower of meteorites striking you from all directions.

**Like a Violently Shaken Fig Tree**

Furthermore, to try to give a picture of what this is like, John goes on to say that, to him, it looked like a fig tree, which is a "suke," which is the noun for the name of that tree. He said that it was like when a fig tree casts ("ballo"), which means "to throw down," and it's in the present tense, which means like a fig tree constantly doing this. The tree itself is casting something off of itself. And the thing that he sees falling from the tree he calls "untimely figs." The Greek word is "holunthos." "Holunthos" means "unripe figs;" that is, figs which are not ready to come off the tree. They are figs which would not normally fall. It is a piece of fruit which would stay on the tree. And the reason for this is because he says, "The tree is being shaken." The word "shaken" is the Greek word "seio," meaning to move violently back and forth. Again, this is present tense, indicating that it is constantly doing this. It's passive. The tree doesn't shake itself; that is, the wind is doing this. Here, he says, "This is just as if a mighty wind." And that's the word he uses – an "anemos:" as if a mighty wind (referring to the movement on the earth's surface) is shaking this tree, and all of these unripe things are falling from it.

This is an analogy. This is a comparison to the streaks of light that are falling from heaven as the stars fall, and they are striking the surface of the earth. Now, that's a nighttime display that can only cause men's hearts to respond with fear, because they know that someone out there is shaking those stars – someone who has the capacity to shake those stars, and to make it feel like the wind can shake a fig tree, and make unripe fruit fall off the tree.

This event, again, was predicted by the Lord in the Matthew 24:29 passage: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars fall from heaven, and the powers of the heaven shall be shaken." That's the next event.

For the next thing John sees, as he is awed by this display of falling stars, is that something happens to the heavens, and that is that he suddenly sees that what he describes as heaven as "departing." This is a little hard to envision. The word "departing" is "apochorizo." "Apochorizo" means that something is being rolled up. It's like you grab a roll-up curtain; you pull it; you let it go; and, it just rolls up. Or it is as if something was pulled tight; it was nailed to the sky; it was slit in the middle; and, the two ends just rolled apart and flew apart. Something happens before John's eyes that he compares to a scroll (a "biblion") – that same thing that is in the hand of Jesus at this time, as if this scroll was rolled together. This is the normal word that is used for rolling up a scroll: "elisso," so he is describing somebody rolling up this manuscript on one of its supporting sticks. Somehow, the sky tears loose and rolls itself up as one would roll up a scroll. And the action is continual. It just churns and rolls. It's in the present tense. It's passive voice, indicating that God is doing it.

Now, the human race is shocked by seeing the sky go into this kind of a rolling convulsion, whatever it will appear like, and whatever is actually happening. 2 Peter 3:10 describes how, after the millennium, God is going to do something similar to this as he prepares a totally new heaven.

The scientists who detonated the first atom bomb at the White Sands proving ground were themselves very much concerned about this very kind of thing being triggered in the atmosphere when they set off that bomb. They mathematically did all the figuring, and calculating, and everything else they could, and they concluded that they could explode the bomb without turning some kind of a chain reaction loose in all of the atmosphere. But they were not absolutely sure. Because it was a wartime condition, they said, "We'll have to take the gamble. We think we can do it. We're almost absolutely certain we can do it." But until they actually detonated that bomb, and stood there, and watched what was going to happen, and saw that it exploded, and that was the end of it, they were not sure that they were not going to create something that was going to roll up the whole atmosphere along with it.

However, now when God comes into the picture, this is exactly what He's going to do. And this is what the Lord Jesus, in Matthew 24:29, at the very end, was referring to when He says, "And the powers of heaven shall be shaken," so that these dramatic things are taking place all at the same time.

Now, the earthquake has another effect that he describes in the last part of verse 14, where he says that, "Every mountain is affected." That's "oros." That's simply a geological bulge on the earth's surface. Along with it was every "nesos." That's the regular word for an "island." An island is simply the top of a mountain which is under water. So, we're talking basically about mountains: some on land; and, some under water. Every one of them is going to be "moved." The word is "kineo." It means "to set in motion." We get the English word "kinetic" from this. Kinetic energy is energy which is in motion. The word "kineo" indicates that, at some point in time, God moves the mountains and the islands. Again it is passive voice, indicating that they don't move themselves. Some power capable of doing this does this, and it moves them, it says, "Out of their 'topos,'" meaning "places" – from the location. From wherever they are on the surface of the earth, the mountains are moved.

So, the whole Rocky Mountain chain is going to go shifting to a different position. The islands of the sea are going to go moving around with all the turmoil that that will cause in the water at the time. It will be an awesome topographical change on the surface of the earth. The shocks and the movements will be felt by the tribulation world everywhere, and mankind is going to stand helplessly watching the accompanying destruction of mountains on the land and under the water that move about.

**God is not Part of the Creation**

Whatever else one may say about this picture that John sees thus far, does demonstrate clearly that God is not part of the creation. Hinduism says, "There is no separate personal God. He is just part of the force out there." But here, God makes it very clear that the New Age movement is structured upon that concept, which will be in force at the tribulation – that there is no personal living, thinking, breathing, capable God out there, but that there is only an impersonal force that is part of creation itself. God is going to demonstrate that He is the Creator; He is separate from His creation; and, He has the capacity to do whatever He wishes with that universe.

So, today we see dramatic things happening in nature. But you want to remember that God is not primarily today executing judgment upon the sin of our world. Today, instead, is the era of divine grace – divine grace from salvation to divine grace as a way of life. Salvation is apart from human doing; salvation is received as a gift; and, salvation is received no other way. God says, "I cannot save you unless I can be permitted by you to save you on grace." If you interject some religious ritual, like water baptism or the Lord's Supper, and make that part of your basis of salvation, you will go to hell: "I cannot save you unless you come to Me with empty hands ready to receive a gift of eternal life from Me."

That's why with the Mormons are doing now, in establishing this temple, and this great effort in the Dallas Metroplex area, is so serious, because the Mormons make no bones about the fact that they teach a way of salvation that requires your personal conduct, or you do not go to heaven. It requires your personal efforts. They constantly speak about a person being worthy of receiving this kind of blessing from God.

So, right now, God is talking to us in grace. He's not really judging sin. He is giving you and me, as members of the body of Christ, a chance to learn what it is to live in freedom and perfect liberty without being legalistically hung up. That is a great dramatic truth. We have the example, as explained in Romans 8, of moving through life under the hand-holding guidance of the Spirit of God who indwells you.

So, divine retribution today is limited, really, to protecting the human race from self-destruction under Satan's influences. So, God brings in herpes, and He brings in AIDS for sexual immorality in order to put some brakes on man's evil, and to preserve the human race. But He's not really judging it. Furthermore, the Godly are not really largely being rewarded. Godly people today are not being honored. They're being rejected. Their service of well-doing is being scorned and ignored, and it takes a great deal of civility on the part of a Christian worker to know that he is serving as unto the Lord.

In the next few days, you're going to be receiving a sheet of paper from Britain Memorial church on which we will be asking you to indicate areas of Christian service that you feel you have an ability in, and that you feel you have a heart for – that you would care to do. It will tell you how often you would be expected to do this. You will be given a wide variety of opportunities to choose from as we line up the ministry for the new year.

The people that we don't want checking into a ministry are the people who don't have staying power – the people who cannot get in there, and without anybody putting a blowtorch to their tail, simply move ahead and do the job as unto the Lord, without having to look to men to be appreciated; to be thanked; or, to be anything else – just doing it as unto the Lord. That kind of person is the kind of person that you would expect would be welcomed and honored. But you must be prepared to realize that, while you are that kind of a self-motivator, and that kind of a stable, consistent performer and executer of Christian service, you are not being honored and rewarded now. That's still in the future.

So, the evil isn't being dealt with in a severe sense. The godly are not being rewarded in full extent. In the tribulation, when God really proceeds to settle His accounts with mankind, as after the believers have been withdrawn, they will be honored in heaven, and the people on earth will then get the full impact of divine wrath. You must remember that God's love is always associated with His Holiness. It is a false notion to suggest that a God of love would not bring these kinds of terrible judgments upon the human race. That's why people try to symbolize these, and to spiritualize them away as simply referring to some kind of movements and forces rather than actual events. But the rejecters of Jesus Christ and the rejecters of the Bible, I can assure you, are doomed, and they will, in time, receive the maximum divine wrath and the eternal consequences of their choices.

John 3:36 puts it this way, when it says, "He that believes on the Son has everlasting life. He that does not believe (that is, does not trust the Son) shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides upon him. I remind you again that every human being on the face of the earth is responsible to know what the Bible teaches. You may rest assured that God will hold each of you responsible for what is in the contents of the Bible. You are furthermore held responsible for responding to it with positive volition response.

**Old Testament Passages**

To John, the things that he saw made one thing very clear to him because of his knowledge of the Old Testament. I'd like to close briefly with reading a few Old Testament passages which present these very things happening to the earth that we have read here in the book of the Revelation. In the Old Testament, the Jewish people were told that when these things take place, it will be the signal that God is knocking at the door. It will be the signal that the return of Christ of the Messiah is at hand. It will be the signal of judgment day that God is now going to bring it all together.

Isaiah 34:4: "And all the hosts of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled like a scroll, and all their hosts shall fall down as the leaf falls from the vine, and like a falling fig from the fig tree." Isn't that amazing? I mean, here, hundreds of years before, the prophet has written exactly about what John, up in Heaven, looks down and says, "2,000 years down the line, this is going to happen, and I see it happening before my eyes." Then the passage in Isaiah leaps to John's mind, and he says, "That's exactly what Isaiah said was going to happen in this era." And if you follow the passage down, you'll find that this is associated with the return of God to exercise judgment on rebellious humanity.

Notice Ezekiel38:19-20: "In my jealousy, and in the fire of my wrath, I have spoken. Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel (earthquakes), so that the fish of the sea, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field, and all the creeping things that creep upon the earth, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth shall shake at My presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground."

We haven't mentioned what's going to happen to all these nice downtown Dallas buildings when this earthquake occurs. Can you imagine? I know some of these guys that are building those things. They're not all that good. These things are going to come tumbling down.

Take a look at Joel 2:10: "The earth shall quake before them. The heavens shall tremble. The sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining.

**The Day of the Lord**

Joel 2:30: "And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood; fire; and, pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood before the great and terrible day of the Lord come." The great and terrible day of the Lord" is a technical phrase: "the day of the Lord. I hope you know what it means. The day of the Lord begins when the tribulation begins. The day of the Lord is over at the end of the millennium. The day of the Lord begins with the seven-year period of the tribulation. Then it has the 1,000 years of the millennium, and at the end of the millennium, God hits the final judgments on the earth.

Take Joel 3:15. Add that to this: "The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. That is exactly what John sees.

There is one more in the minor prophets. Haggai 2:6 says, "For thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Yet once it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land.'" Here you have this very image of God shaking the heavens like a fig tree so that the stars come falling down.

Well, the appearances of God have in the past (in the Old Testament) been accompanied by awesome disruptions in nature. You have, for example, the visitation on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19:16-19 with the smoke, and the thunder, and the lightning, and the darkness. It just scared the devil (at least for a while) out of the Israelites.

Then there was the darkness surrounding Christ on the cross in Matthew 27:45 and Matthew 51:52. Again, there was an appearance of the presence of God. These always proclaim God's sovereignty and omnipotence over His creation.

The cosmic catastrophes of the tribulation actually reflect God's wrath against rebellious humanity. But how that rebellious humanity responds is absolutely unbelievable, as we shall see in our next session. You would think that with this kind of demonstration before their very eyes, that they cannot deny that there is a God out there; that He has omnipotent capabilities; and, that he is, furthermore, capable of exercising wrath, and bringing justice upon those who have been the perpetrators of evil. You would think that, at that point, they'd fall to their knees and say, "I was wrong. God is right, and I submit." But, as you shall see, they are not concerned with dealing with these terrible things that are happening before them. They are not concerned with admitting that they were wrong. They are only concerned with one thing, interestingly enough. You will find that they are concerned with not having to face God, and they immediately try to take some action to prevent facing God.

People make that mistake all the time. Somebody says, "I can't take anymore of life, I've had it. I want to cut out. I'm going to end it all." So, they commit suicide. Can you imagine the horror and the terror the moment death comes, and the soul leaves that body, and they enter into the torments of Hades, and they discover how much worse they have made their situation, and that they have not escaped any consequences, let alone a God who is there? And when people commit suicide, that's one of the things they're trying to do. They're trying to escape the presence of God. In the tribulation, that same pattern will be followed.

Rejoice in the fact that you have been enlightened. Rejoice in the fact that you would not have come to Christ if God had not first decided to choose you to come to Christ; to call you into his presence; to move your positive volition; to move your volition to be positive toward the gospel; and, to move you to accept it. Why? No one knows. There is no explanation. There is just the fact that He loved us and gave Himself for us. Pity the people of the tribulation, many of whom have heard this gospel, and who have turned their backs upon it. The terrible things that come upon them will be the justice they deserve. Thank God for those who have turned to him, and have nothing but the best still ahead of them.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1984

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[**Back to the Bible Questions index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/allarticles.htm)