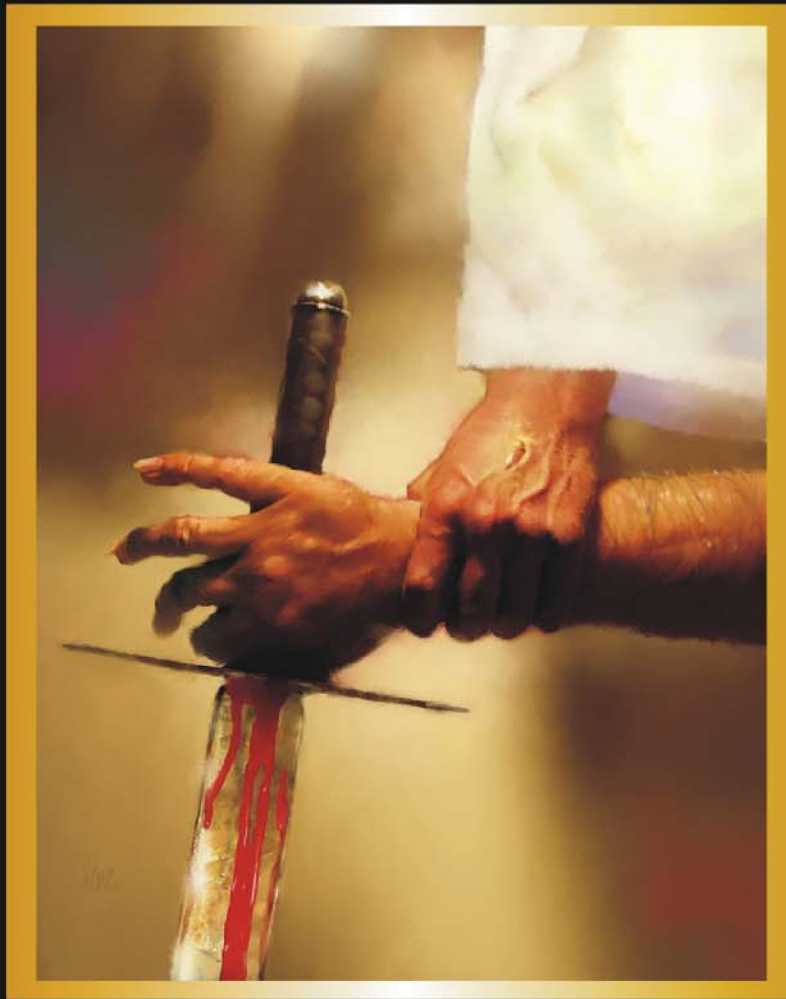


The Revelation



Chapter 6



REVELATION 6

Revelation is all about the end times and what will go on then. It is all about the final triumph of God over evil. It is not about the whole span of human history, although it refers to it. Rather, The Revelation pulls together all of the threads and bits and pieces from all of Scripture about the climax into one place, then fills in the gaps. It is a detailed picture of what Daniel describes in Daniel 7 and Jesus in Matthew 25. Satan's Kingdom of Darkness is judged as falling short and God, through Jesus moves to establish final control over Planet Earth and bring evil to its final end.

The Lamb is a Lion!

The Revelation is all about Jesus. In every chapter and section, if we don't see him most prominently, then we are missing the point and are probably not understanding what God is trying to tell us.

There are two complementary pictures of Jesus that balance in The Revelation. Like the Yin and Yan of Asian culture, they complement each other to create a whole. Without either one you have only a partial picture.

In The Revelation Jesus is the Lamb who came to earth and died to ransom anyone who chooses to be free from the Kingdom of Darkness. And, he is the Lion, the King of Light, who defeats darkness once and for all and ends its tyrannical rule of earth. The Lamb is a Lion because the Lion is a lamb. He rescues those who he ransomed. He re-establishes heaven's authority over the universe, and specifically over this earth, because he earned the right to do so at Calvary.²³⁹

In The Revelation, we see the final battles in the war between God and Satan. War

239 Hebrews 2:5-9

is never pretty. The first battle recorded in the Bible was violent and bloody.²⁴⁰ Ever since, the earth has been littered with spiritual and physical casualties. So, you would not expect the final battles to be any less so.

As we journey by way of the eye of prophecy through the cosmic battlefield, like tourists examining pictures of Antietam or Bull Run or the Ardennes Forest or Hiroshima right after the blast, it is easy to get fixated on the details and to miss the large picture.

The big picture is the point and the emphasis of The Revelation. While we will glance at the details, we will maintain that meta-focus on the larger picture as we journey through the rest of the book - and especially as we examine the seals and trumpets of Revelation 6-11. It is there that we will see Jesus in all of His glory and will be reminded again of the Good News that is the focus of this book.

Revelation 4-12 contain the prophecies of the Seven Seals and the Seven Trumpets.

First of all we discover meet God as a real individual - not some ethereal entity or cosmic force. He is worthy of power and honor and glory because he is the Creator of everything.

There is a reason why this picture appears at the beginning of this section of The Revelation. The rest of the book can be pretty scary and unsettling. You begin to wonder if anyone can survive events on earth as it reels and staggers under the final onslaught of Satan, the King of Darkness' anger and frustration. In the face of all that is coming, the God Who Creates promises to shelter and provide for anyone who will accept his protection and guidance. In his hands, we don't have to be afraid of final events. He will take care of his own. He promises that we are more than just conquerors, we will flourish, through the one who loves us! He promises that "neither death, or life, or Satanic messengers and soldiers, or regional administrators of the Kingdom of Darkness - things present, things to come or any other powerful force or entity - above, below, behind or before - nothing at all in the whole cosmos can separate us from his love for us in Jesus!"²⁴¹

Revelation 5 begins with the introduction of "The Lamb" who will be our guide

240 Revelation 12:7-12

241 Romans 8:37-39

through all that happens in the rest of the book. The context makes it clear that this symbolic lamb, slaughtered as the ransom payment which Satan demanded in order to set us free, is Jesus. He too is worthy of honor and glory and power and praise. His blood spilled to pay the ransom demand allows God be able to do everything else that he does in the rest of the book; in Jesus, God won the right to reclaim Planet Earth and to set free any of Satan's prisoner-slaves who want to be freed.

The Revelation is in one sense, the final Emancipation Proclamation for Planet Earth and the road-map to freedom.

Revelation 5 ends with great rejoicing in heaven because a sealed book can finally be opened. The only book in the Bible having to do with end time happenings that is ever "sealed" is the book of Daniel. That book contains life and death information about "The Time of The End" which was sealed until the time arrived.²⁴² So, we can know that when these seals are striped away and the book is opened, that that time has arrived.

God in his gracious mercy doesn't want anyone to miss out on eternity in the Kingdom of Light - so humanity gets one final chance to make a decision as to which side in the battle between the Kingdom of Darkness and the Kingdom of Light they are on.

As the time of the seals begins, we see God preparing for the final battle of this millennia long war. In fact, the first seal begins the beginning of the end. Under the rest of the seals, God withdraws his restraining hand from more and more of the affairs of this world. Satan is increasingly less constrained by God's power we get to observe society, ecology and the natural world as it would have been had he been given free reign from the beginning.

In the first four seals, a voice thunders to John, "You! Come and observe!" God wants John to watch what happens, to observe it carefully so that he understands and can describe not only what is happening, but what it means. By the last three seals, John to need to be encouraged to watch carefully, He begins each seal with brief, "I saw!"

242 Daniel 12:4,9)

There are at least three schools of thought concerning these seals and the trumpets and plagues which follow them.

a. There are those who believe that the vision of the Seals refers to events which occurred in the past - specifically in the first-century. As a book concerned with the “time of the end” this view does not square with the immediate context or that of the whole book.

b. As noted before, there are those who believe that the seven churches, while written for seven literal churches in Asia Minor, are also descriptive of seven epochs or dispensations of time from John’s day to the end of the world. They apply various details of the letter to the events and conditions in the world and church during those periods of time. Most who take this position would equate:

1. The first seal with the Apostolic period.
2. The second seal with the period of persecution throughout the Roman Empire.
3. The third seal to the period characterized by a progressive spiritual decline and compromise which led up to the Dark Middle Ages.
4. The fourth seal with the spiritual decline and persecution of the faithful during the Medieval period.
5. The fifth seal with the period of the Protestant Reformation and the seventh and eighteenth centuries which followed it.
6. The “time of the end” which directly precedes the Second Coming of Jesus to earth.
7. The actual events of the end.

While there is no textual evidence for this position, there is no harm in using

these seven mnemonically to remember and characterize 7 arbitrary periods of time - as long as one doesn't imagine that it is explicit or even implicit in the text or is the intention of the author.

c. That the seals, trumpets and plagues are all associated with the final events on earth. As the book that is unsealed is concerned with final events and as that is the burden of The Revelation, this position makes the most sense and is most faithful to the text itself.

At the time when John wrote his book, seals served at least 5 functions.

a. To keep something sealed away from access by any one of a number of different kinds of intruders. - ie prying eyes, bugs, robbers, those who would change something which did not belong to them. This is similar to the seals placed on electric meters, canning jars and Jesus tomb by the Roman authorities after his crucifixion.

b. To show ownership.

c. To designate something as official - it was a type of signature - ie a king's seal.

d. To show that something was authentic - much the same as a notary seal today.

e. To preserve something until a particular time or event. Similar to a seal or note on a Christmas present, today, saying "Do not open until Christmas.."

All of these probably apply in one degree or another to the Seven Seals of Revelation.

Revelation 6 is devoted to the first six seals on the scroll we read about in Revelation 4 and 5.. It is also the first instance of a very interesting literary pattern found in the Revelation: First of all John will discuss the preliminary steps or symbols leading up to a climax, then there will be an interlude, an aside in which details

are given which aid one's understanding of the progression. This is then followed by the climactic event. This is true when it comes to the 7 seals (Revelation 6:1-8:6) and the 7 trumpets (Revelation 8:7-11:19)

Revelation 12-14 are in themselves an interlude in the middle of the book that precede the 7 bowls of wrath which contain no interlude. In that case, it is as if John realizes that there is so much to explain that an interlude won't do, so instead he inserts a preamble.

Revelation 6:1-2 - Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say, as with a voice of thunder, "Come!" And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and its rider had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

Jesus, the focus of all that happens in the Revelation, now begins to open the seals on the book he has taken from God's hand. Every eye is on him as the adventure which is The Revelation begins to unfold.

You can almost hear the drum roll sounding as everyone cranes their necks in anticipation, the lamb opens the first of the 7 seals. As the seal is broken, one of the four creatures before God's throne thunders out "Come!" and a white horse comes galloping out onto the glassy pavement of the throne room and skids to a stop in front of God's throne. Its rider is carrying a bow and he is given a crown and he gallops out "conquering and to conquer" - present and future. He is given a crown - literally the wreath of a conqueror.

When you realize that The Revelation is about the final triumph of God over evil - the conquering of Satan's Kingdom of Darkness once and for all - then it makes sense as we start the final countdown for the first rider to go forth "conquering and to conquer."

The angel that has summoned John to watch gives no explanation for what is happening, so we have no option but to settle back and watch the drama with John - trusting that at some point we will discover the meaning of what is happening.

Revelation 6:3-4 - When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living crea-

ture say, "Come!" And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another; and he was given a great sword.

The lamb opens the second seal and the second living creature thunders "Come!" and a second horse, bright red this time comes galloping unto the scene. It also stops before the throne where its rider is given a "huge sword." He is permitted to take peace from the earth so that humans would kill each other.

It is interesting to note that it isn't the rider who kills humans - this is not some heaven sent scourge such as the destroying angel of the Exodus. Rather, it is a removal of restraint and the people of earth's Kingdom of Darkness begin doing what they do naturally.

Revelation 6:5-6 - When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And I saw, and behold, a black horse, and its rider had a balance in his hand; and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; but do not harm oil and wine!"

When the Lamb opens the third seal John heard a third of the living creatures thunder "Come!" and a black horse charges into the throne room. Its rider carries a scale used for weighing in his hand and a voice which appears to come from one of the group of living creatures says "A quart of wheat or three quarts of barley for a day's wages," but do not harm oil and wine!"

Wheat and barley were the mainstays of the diet of Palestine in those days. The wealthy aristocracy ate mostly wheat while the poorer classes ate mostly barley. The price advertised by the voice from the creatures is the denarius, a day's wage for the common man. The inflated price, in the language of supply and demand, indicates a scarcity of these commodities weighed out in the rider's scales.

In those days when an army invaded, if they wanted to obliterate a nation and its people they destroyed everything so that there was no agricultural base to provide sustenance for the people who might survive the sword. Every tree was cut down, especially those which provided food and other necessities such as olive oil, and the

vineyards were yanked out by the roots and burned.

If, on the other hand, they wanted to milk the invaded nation on a regular basis, like an ant milks an aphid, for its food then they just destroyed the annual crops - either as a by-product of the invasion in order to provide food for the invaders or to make it difficult for the country to resist their advance.

Whatever the circumstance referred to in this passage, it apparently was not a scorched earth invasion like Sherman's march to the sea during the War between the States. This figure in black apparently describes a time of scarcity and possibly famine but not total destruction.

Revelation 6:7-8 - When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" And I saw, and behold, a pale horse, and its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him; and they were given power over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.

When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, the fourth living creature thunders "Come!" John watches as a fourth horse, pale or colorless, comes galloping into the room. This horse had two riders. The first rider's name was Death and behind him rode Hades (the place of the dead or the grave). They were given power over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and famine and pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.

These two riders are now given the mandate to do what the first, second and third had either done or allowed to do. The first rider is given a sword and he rides out to conquer. Now the fourth rider is told to use that sword to destroy. The second rider is told to remove peace from the earth and to allow rebels to do what rebels against God's kingdom naturally do and to destroy each other, now these last two riders are told to kill one fourth of those same rebels. The third rider carries famine not annihilation. Now a fourth of Satan's followers are to be destroyed by famine. Finally, these two riders are told to destroy with pandemic plagues and epidemics and contagious disease often carried and transmitted by the animal kingdom, including other humans, such as the Black Death, Ebola Hanta Virus, the flu, Yellow Fever, AIDS, Dengue Fever and Anthrax.

Revelation 6:9-11 - When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?" Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, those who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

A subtle change takes place when the Lamb opens the fifth seal that is easy to miss if one hurries past this picture too quickly. No more horses and riders come hurtling into the room, skidding to a stop in front of the throne. One of the four living creatures who are before God's throne no longer thunder out the mandate to be carried out by those riders.

When the Lamb opens the fifth seal it is now the souls of those who have been martyred for their allegiance to God and for their witness to others about the King and Kingdom of Light which cry out with a loud voice from underneath the alter, "O Lord, you are holy and true. We acknowledge your rule and trust you; but why, why are you waiting so long to judge earth's rebels and avenge our blood on those who have killed and persecuted us?"

This question is not a challenge but a desperate request for clarification and understanding. "Satan and his followers have ruled earth for far too long," we hear them cry; "too many people have already died for their faith; far too many people have been hunted and hounded and harassed and hassled and hated and hung for their allegiance to you. You have the power to bring it all to an end and to stop the bloodshed. Why don't you do it now and get it over with before anyone else has to suffer our fate? We need to understand!"

The issue in this passage is not the condition of man in death. To make that the focus is to completely miss the point of these texts. Revelation is a symbolic book and this is obviously a symbolic not a literal passage. Whatever or however a person understands the make-up of the "soul" and the "spirit" which goes back to God at death to be,²⁴³ the Bible is explicit and unambiguous about the fact that in the con-

243 Ecclesiastes 12:7

dition of death there is no thought and planning²⁴⁴ and, even for those who are part of God's Kingdom of Light, there is no praising of God.²⁴⁵ Whatever the soul and spirit are, without the body they are in an unconscious state with no interaction with anyone including God.

What we now call death God says is nothing more than restful sleep until the end of time. There is nothing to be feared from that condition; in fact those in the Bible who truly loved and trusted God looked forward to it because then their troubles would be over.²⁴⁶ What Jesus said we should worry about is the "Second Death"²⁴⁷ - the condition of complete separation from God which Jesus experienced on our behalf on the Cross.²⁴⁸

These martyrs are given a white robe and told to rest a little longer. God is not anxious for anyone to die²⁴⁹ and is going to hold out as long as there is any hope of any rebel anywhere accepting the ransom he paid to save us so that we could become a part of the Kingdom of Light.

In essence God says "Be patient! There are still some sheep who have not returned to the fold. I am waiting for them. I can't bear the thought of any of them missing out!"²⁵⁰

God does not have an arbitrary number of saints who must die before Jesus comes bck to earth. Rather this is like a father who holds the door of a rescue flight out of a war zone open as long as he can, hoping that he can rescue even one more of his children.

This might be a good place to take a moment and to consider the larger message of the seals as a whole.

244 Ecclesiastes 9:5,6; Psalms 146:3,4; Isaiah 38:18,19

245 Psalms 17:15

246 ie. Philippians 1:23

247 Revelation 2:11; 20:6,14; 21:8

248 Matthew 10:28

249 2nd Peter 3:9

250 2nd Peter 3:9

The first four of the seven seals are a chain of steps of increasing degeneration of the world and its inhabitants until it seems that nature has turned against on itself in a final autoimmune spasm that threatens to destroy life on our planet. This situation finally leads any logically or emotionally thinking person to ask: “How much longer are you going to let this go on? You have the power to stop it, Why don’t you?”

It is in this context that we hear God’s answer ring out through the universe in the 5th Seal: “Please be patient a little longer. There are still a few out there who are deciding which side they are going to be on. I can’t bear missing anyone who would want to be part of my Kingdom.”

The sixth and seventh seals are the beginning of God’s answer to their question.

Revelation 6:12-17 - When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale; the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the generals and the rich and the strong, and every one, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?”

When he opened the 6th Seal . . . :

In the 6th Seal God says to those impatient ones, “I am preparing to end it all. I am not ignoring what is going on planet earth. This is what is preparing to happen:

“I looked down at earth and saw a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth and the full moon became red like blood and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as a fig tree sheds its winter fruit when it is buffeted by a strong wind; the sky disappeared like a scroll you loose control of which instantly rolls up on its own and every mountain and island was removed from its place. As this transpired every single rebel on earth, including the kings and all of the prominent people and the generals and the rich and the strong scrambled for any secure hiding place they

could squeeze into, begging the buildings to fall on them and the mountains to collapse and cover them to hide them from the face of God and the anger of the Lamb. They realize that their rebellion has ended and that the ones they have rebelled against are on their way to bring Satan and his Kingdom to an end.

Those who choose to make these six seals correspond to six succeeding eras of time are usually inclined to associate the events of verses 12 and 13 with the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, the day of May 19, 1780 when the sky became as dark as night and the full moon turned red over much of the eastern United States, and a particularly prolific display of the Leonid Meteor Shower which occurred in November of 1833.

While these three events fit roughly into that scheme of things, this view ignores four very important considerations when it comes to interpreting this seal:

First of all, there have been earthquakes before and since which have been much more destructive over a much larger area than the Lisbon Earthquake with much more devastating results for the inhabitants of earth. The Leonid Meteor Shower, which this particular meteor shower corresponds with, comes around on a regular basis with varying degrees of spectacularism such as the one on November 17, 1966. Granted this was a particularly prolific display but not necessarily a harbinger of the eminent return of Jesus. Further, it is doubtful that Bible prophecy would focus on the effects upon the atmosphere and therefore the view of the moon created by a western forest fire or a volcanic eruption or dust blown into the sky across the North American Continent by a particularly large meteor strike in a far-flung part of the world totally removed from the context of the rest of the prophecy as a harbinger of the eminent return of Jesus - as much as we in North America might like to imagine that everything in the Bible centers around us -.

Second, it is an artificial distinction - much like the gap theory imposed on the text in the seventy-week prophecy of Daniel by those who believe in the Secret Rapture. There is no internal evidence in the chapter or in the seal which would impel us to make relatively local happenings (in the global scheme of things) to be major milestones in the series of events leading up to the return of Jesus.

Third, the seals are essentially an expansion of Jesus' final discussion with his disciples on Mount Olive just before his crucifixion. In that discourse we find the same

events foretold in the Sixth Seal. - the falling of the stars, the moon as red as blood and the cataclysmic earthquakes are sandwiched between the “great tribulation” or time of terrible trouble when the global destruction is so widespread that if Jesus didn’t return the entire population of the world would be annihilated²⁵¹ - and the coming of Jesus in great power and glory.²⁵²

Jesus was commenting on the passage in Joel 2:30-32 when he gave his sermon in Matthew 24. Again in the Joel passage the three omens are set in the context of the “Great and terrible day of the Lord.”²⁵³ Placing the three global harbingers of Jesus imminent arrival on earth in the time period between 1755 and 1833 is not in harmony with the parallel passage in Matthew 24.

Finally, this view ignores the immediate context of the verses which precede and follow it. As already stated, John is shown what is about to happen when everyone on earth has finally made their final decision about which king, the King of Light or the King of Darkness, they are loyal to. These verses are immediately followed by what is obviously Jesus’ arrival at earth the second time accompanied by his Father and the reaction of rebels to their return.

This is no secret sneaking back to earth to rapture his people; this is no private hidden arrival. The Bible knows of no such appearing. This is the triumphant arrival of the Creator God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit! They are not sneaking back to earth like a teenager tiptoeing into the house after curfew. The earthquakes described accompany every mountain and island disappearing as continents start shifting and sliding in the force of the presence of God who is so powerful he controls the strong and weak forces of the whole universe.

The events often described by some from the point of view of 19 th century New England just aren’t big and wide ranging enough. The events predicted are global if not solar system wide events. They are the cataclysmic world impacting events of the second coming of Jesus. They are Jesus’ answer to the souls who impatiently cry out from beneath the alter asking how long God is going to let Satan’s Kingdom of Darkness continue it’s reign on earth You can almost hear God thunder the answer:

251 Matthew 24:21

252 Matthew 24:30

253 Joel 2:31

“This is what I am going to do about it!”

To recap: The Seven Seals describe the time at the end of earth history as we know it when God’s Spirit starts to be withdrawn from the world in preparation for the end. People finally see what it would have been like if Satan had been given free reign and the choices they have made begin to stand out with all of their implications and consequences in stark contrast. And, we see in their last actions their reaction to their last opportunity to choose God over Satan.

One question remains to be asked - Why? Why did God include the Seven Seals in the Revelation and what do they tell us about Jesus?

There is an old gospel song that goes, “He’s got the whole world in his hands . . . “

As society and the ecology of this earth disintegrate and Satan’s character is finally revealed in all of its stark reality, it would be easy to imagine that there is not hope, that the direst prognostications of the most negative doomsayers are coming true and that earth and all on it is going to implode until it is without form and devoid of all life. Society as we know it is going to completely break down; nations and people groups are going to fragment into warring factions bent on destroying each other; parents will betray their children and children their parents; epidemics will sweep over the earth like the waves of a poison sea; famine and drought will be the norm; earthquakes will crackle the surface of the earth like crinkled cellophane and buildings designed to withstand any earthquake will fall like a child’s toy blocks; mountains will flatten as tectonic plates slide and new mountain chains will form; volcanoes will fill the atmosphere with sunlight obscuring dust; islands will sink into the ocean and new ones will form; tsunamis of a scale never seen will sweep into the coastlands and wash the coastal cities into the central basins of the continents and meteors will begin to crash into the planet; plants won’t grow and those that exist will mostly be destroyed.

It will be very easy to forget - that these things are the prelude to the greatest event in the history of the universe! Jesus told us ahead of time so that we would remember and he introduced us, once again for the first time, to he and his father and reminds us that the one who died for us will not abandon us or let us go; that the one who created the universe has promised to take care of us.

He also reminds us that he is not the one responsible for all the pain and destruction and death - it is the one who introduced death to the universe, the one who created the atmosphere where

abuse and sickness and pain and death could flourish.

And, it is God's promise that that Kingdom of Darkness has been weighed heaven's scales and has been found wanting in anything good or worth saving, and it is coming to an end!

Now, we arrive at the first interlude.