

Revelation 5

v1 And I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.

Over thirty times we find the words "I saw" from the apostle. Here we have the opening of a new vision, a book and its seals. We must again remind ourselves that this is the **same book** that we find in Daniel chapter 12, verse 4, a book which is sealed until the time of the end (Daniel 12:4, 12:9). John is given the same book but it is for the purpose of having it opened and revealed, for the time of fulfillment has arrived. The book itself is the unfolding of history, a very special history because, as we shall see, only One Person is able to open this book.

In Ezekiel 2, we see a pattern similar to the one in Revelation. There too we have a book (Ezekiel 2:9) and the contents are described for us. It is a book unfolding lamentations, mourning, and woe for Israel. The same type of unfolding will occur with this book in Revelation 5. The greatest of lamentations, mourning, and woe to come upon Israel according to our Lord is the time of the great tribulation, God's wrath upon Israel (Daniel 9:24-27; Matthew 24:15-21 cf. Luke 21:20-24; also Matthew 23:29-39, compare Revelation 7:14; 11:1, 11:2, 11:8-13).

Here we meet up with "seven seals." This idea of sevens in Revelation (plagues, bowls, etc.) implies completeness. The word "seven" is used over thirty times just in Revelation. As a side note, the parallels between Ezekiel and Revelation are profound, interesting, and most important of all, the parallels give us solid direction in the interpretation of Revelation (compare Ezekiel 1:26ff with Revelation 1:13ff, Ezekiel 2:9f with Revelation 5:1ff, Ezekiel 3:1ff with Revelation 10:9ff).

Some Greek notes: The Greek word translated "written" is in the perfect tense (which is quite common in the New Testament), and means "thoroughly written" or "stands written". There is a perfective idea, an idea of completeness when using the perfect tense. How appropriate to use such a tense when speaking of God's Word which stands forever. The Greek preposition *kata* before "sealed" means "sealed thoroughly" or possibly "sealed securely." No wonder we shall see John weep in 5:4. To think that here in this book lies truths that are "thoroughly written" and "thoroughly sealed!"

v2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice,
Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals
thereof?

There is a great and lofty idea in the way this question is put forth and in the way the angel is described. It is a *strong angel* with a *great voice*. And the question is **WHO IS WORTHY?** Who is worthy to open these seals which are bound so greatly? Who is worthy to open the book and unfold history? Who is worthy to govern history? These mysteries go back to Daniel, back to multiple portions of the Old Testament. Now the time has come to bring the decrees of God to bear on this world. Now is the day of vengeance of our God (Isaiah 63:1-6; Luke 21:22), orchestrated by the One who sits at God's right hand.

v3 And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the
earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.

Note that the Scriptures have gone from "Who is worthy" (Greek, *axios* - 5:2) to "no man...was able" (Greek, *dunameo*). It seems here we should understand "worthy" as having the authority/power in 5:1 and 5:2, because John tells us that to be "worthy" gives one ability or authority. But because it is the opening of a strongly sealed book, the language leans more naturally to "ability" or "power" rather than "authority" (the Greek word might have been a third word, *exousia*). No one is found in the universe that can open this sealed book, reveal, and bring to pass what is written therein. The great reason that Daniel is not allowed to unseal his book (Daniel 12:4,9) must be that the Son of God may be glorified in this "unsealing" work; that "in all things, He might have the pre-eminence," Colossians 1:18.

v4 And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to
open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

John cries out greatly with strong tears because of the problem before him. No one is worthy to open, see, or read the book. No one is found who can unloose the seals and unfold history. Here John is brought face to face with the great distinction between Jesus Christ and all of creation. Only the Lamb of God will be found worthy (5:9).

v5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the
Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed
to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

What a glorious statement. An elder comes to John and proclaims "Stop weeping!" Behold! Look! He has conquered! He has prevailed! The Lion of the tribe of Judah has overcome! He is worthy! He will unseal! He will open the book! *Because He alone can*. The whole of this verse is a glorious shout to break the silence. The Son of God, the Lion and Lamb can claim victory over all and is both worthy and able to do all things (Matthew 28:18 cf. Philippians 4:13).

v6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

John looks in the midst of the elders and the throne to behold The One he loves, with a title found only in his own gospel – "The Lamb of God." John beholds the Lord as a Lamb slain yet standing. This mysterious sight bespeaks glory and worship, which is just what follows (5:12). Although the Lamb is the Son of Man, He is also the Son of God who sends the Holy Spirit into all the world and abides in the midst of His people (Matthew 18:20). It is interesting that although the Holy Spirit is almost always given the title "Spirit of God," He is also called "the Spirit of His Son" in Galatians 4:6 as well as "the Spirit of Jesus Christ" in Philippians 1:19. The "seven horns" represent fullness of power and strength (cf. Psalm 18:2), just as "seven Spirits" imply fullness of the Spirit (For the "seven Spirits going forth into all the earth," see Zechariah 4:10).

v7 And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.

The authority of Christ is here. He takes this authority unto Himself (see also Revelation 11:17; 19:6). Who but the Savior has such majestic sovereignty? Who but the Savior is so worthy? A similar statement of authority, such authority as we see in this vision (authority given to the Son by the Father), is set forth as fact in Matthew 28:18 and expounded upon in 1 Corinthians 15:22-26. This mediatorial reign of Christ is seen in an interesting way in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:36-43). It is stated in Our Lord's exposition of that parable that the angels go forth and *take out of Christ's kingdom* all things that offend (Matthew 13:41), implying that Christ's kingdom is here now (cf. Colossians 1:13) – prior to His coming – and that the Lord is reigning in that kingdom until all enemies are out under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:25).

Again, the book taken here speaks of the history that the Son of God will unseal (cf. Ezekiel 2:9ff; note Ezekiel does not take the book as Christ does here but instead it is spread before him).

v8 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four [and] twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

The fact that anyone was found worthy to unseal history and then such a one as This One, illicit worship. The twenty-four elders and the creatures behold the Lamb and their immediate response is one of adoration. The elders have both harps for praise and golden vials full of prayer, all of this redounding to Christ's honor and glory.

- v9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.

The fact that the elders are redeemed by Christ's blood gives us all the more reason to believe that they represent saints, whether all saints or in particular those who have witnessed and been martyred for the faith in the context of the book of Revelation (cf. Revelation 14:13-14). The idea of singing a "new song" is common in the Psalms, and means a fresh, glorious song which is sung in light of a fresh new sight of the nature and works of the Lord (Psalm 33:3; 40:3 etc.).

The new sight of the Lord's work they sing of is one of redemption, a song that finds its Old Testament parallel in Exodus 15. But it is a very new scope to this redemptive theme. The redemption of the book of Exodus was a redemption limited to Israel, whereas this redemption is from every tribe, tongue etc., or, as John loves to express in his gospel, it is redemption for the *world*, love for the *world*. Again, as we saw in Revelation 1:6, there are very important themes from the Old Covenant that have new meaning under the New Covenant.

- v10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

For "kings and priests", see Revelation 1:6.

Christ overcomes and reigns, and His saints do the same (see Daniel 7:18, 7:27 cf. Revelation 3:21; 20:6; 22:5).

- v11 And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;

For "thousands upon thousands," see Daniel 7:10. See also 1 Kings 22:19 for a similar vision.

Here is the entire heavenly court raising to praise the Son of God. They are proclaiming to all that He is forever worthy, the Lamb that was slain. For all eternity there shall be praise given by God's creatures to the Lamb. Forever honor, glory, majesty, and dominion shall be given to the Lord of Glory. We should treat the "thousands" and "ten thousands" as being equal to Hebrews 12:22 and the expression "an innumerable company" (this also applies to such numbers in Revelation as the 200 thousand thousand of Revelation 9:16). It is curious and sad, not to say blasphemous, that even in our day there are those who deny the Deity of Jesus Christ our Lord. Such praise as we see here is not given to creatures or angels (see Revelation 19:10).

v12 Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

Another detail of the original Greek, very important to remember for our lives, is that the adjectival participle "slain" is in the perfect tense. This implies that the Lamb has been and continues to be seen as the slain Lamb, His most important title. How important is this title? Ponder this; the only *perpetual* ordinance practiced in the church according to Scripture (that is, the only ordinance performed more than once for a Christian) is the Lord's Supper in which we remember the Lord's **death** until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:25ff). Far too often in Church history the cross and its benefits have been overshadowed in preaching with moral, social, or similar themes not to be compared with preaching Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2, again perfect tense for the word "crucified"). We must never exalt the birth, teachings, resurrection, kingship, the second coming, or any other biblical theme above **Christ** and Him **crucified**! We must forever *preach* and *praise* the Lamb that was slain, now in glory with the wounds He bore to redeem us (1 Peter 2:24). The dying Lamb risen again is **THE** Christian's meat and drink (John 6:54ff). He is our life (Colossians 3:4), our basis for true abundant life (John 10:11 cf. 15:1ff). But this is only true as the Savior slain**.

** The cross is **the** moving force in Christian holiness (cf. Ephesians 5:25; Philippians 2:1-8). This is why a cold heart is a certainty when we exalt any doctrine above the cross.

v13 And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, [be] unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

Here the hosts resound in praise towards the One who laid the plan for man's redemption before the foundation of the earth (cf. Ephesians 1:3-4)**, and to Christ who laid down His life such that He might take it again, doing the will of the Father in redeeming the sheep (John 10:11, 10:17-18.). All glory, laud, and honor to thee Redeemer/King. Sweet songs ring from every corner of God's creation at the mention of the cross and all that it means: "Thine O Lord is the greatness and the power...and thou art exalted as head above all" (1 Chronicles 29:11).

** These verses in Ephesians make clear that election is the first of a Christian's many redemptive blessings. We were chosen by God's sovereign grace, and we are the poorer if we neglect the study of this doctrine which is found in the first chapter of almost every New Testament epistle!

v14 And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four [and] twenty
elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever
and ever.

All that might be said about this conclusion of beauty is Amen and
Amen. May such be our praise of the Savior.

Revelation 6

v1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.

The unfolding of Revelation's prophetic history begins with the unfolding of the seven seals. The truths sealed up in Daniel's day were now to be expounded because the "last days," or the "time of the end," had arrived (compare Daniel 12:4, "shut up the words, and *seal up the book, even to the time of the end*" with Hebrews 1:1-2; 9:26; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 1 Peter 1:20; and note especially 1 John 2:18, "*this is the last hour*," and 1 Peter 4:7, "*the end of all things is at hand*")! This is appropriate language in light of Daniel's 70 weeks which our Lord references in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:15). In Gabriel's words to Daniel, there is a note of finality stamped on the wording of Daniel 9:24 (note in Daniel 9:24 this terminology of finality: "...**to finish...**, ...**to make an end...**, ...**to seal up...**." The beginning of the end which Gabriel spoke about to Daniel, and which Matthew identifies in Matthew 24:15 of his gospel is now to be unveiled starting with Revelation chapter six**.

As to the imagery used in these verses, it seems to be derived from Zechariah 1:8ff and Zechariah 6:1ff. Before embarking on the visions that are to unfold, we must be settled in our minds that: 1) There is a direct relationship between the prophetic gospel chapters of Matthew 24 / Mark 13 / Luke 21 and the fulfillment of these prophetic verses in Revelation, and 2) The first and major subject of the prophecies of Matthew/Mark/Luke is ***the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:1-3; Mark 13:1-4; Luke 21:5-7)***! As the first seals unfold (war, famine, death, etc.), there will be a noticeable parallel between these seals and the beginning of sorrows mentioned in Matthew 24:8/Mark 13:8/Luke 21:9***.

** To reiterate, please note carefully that the subject of Daniel's prayer as seen in Daniel 9:16 and Gabriel's response and answer in Daniel 9:24 has reference to the people and the city of Jerusalem. If we miss this point we will misunderstand the character and meaning of the great tribulation as expounded in Matthew 24/Mark 13/Luke 21 and all of Revelation.

*** We must be careful to compare Matthew/Mark/Luke and the way each phrases the Olivet question. Although Mark matches Matthew *in content*, he matches Luke *in the question being answered*. This comparison should put to rest the idea that there was more than one subject discussed in the parallel accounts of the Olivet discourse in the synoptic gospels, or that Matthew never answers the question regarding the destruction of the temple (a position not uncommon in today's expositions of Matthew).

v2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

The language here is the language of war: horse, bow, conquering and to conquer (see Zechariah 9:10). This is in perfect harmony with what our Lord preached were the "beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:8; Mark 13:8) in His Olivet Discourse. There is much speculation about the rider and the white horse. Is this our Lord (as in Revelation 19) or is it some other figure? It seems as though it makes no real difference how we see the rider and horse, since it is ultimately Jesus who rules - Jesus who is Lord of Lords and King of Kings - and is therefore the moving force of history whether seen personally here or working through another (see Proverbs 21:1 cf. Daniel 4:34ff). It is Christ that will decree the desolation unfolding in war (see Matthew 23:29-39, especially as it relates to Jerusalem in vv37,38. Also note Daniel's 70 weeks and its issue, the desolation of the holy city, Daniel 9:24-27 esp. v26b and 27c).

With reference to the rider, he went forth "conquering and in order that He might conquer." The greek word *stephanos* is a victory wreath, in particular given to those who overcome in Revelation. This might mitigate against Christ being the rider since this "crown" is more related to human victory as opposed to a kingly or royal crown (Greek, *diadema*).

Again a reminder: As this drama unfolds, and we begin to compare Revelation and Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, we must be sure to look at **all three** of the synoptic accounts of the tribulation.

v3 And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.

There is no reason to believe that there is any significant time interval between the opening of seals #1 and #2 or any of the "sevens" we will encounter in Revelation. If there is, we will be notified of such (see Revelation 8:1).

v4 And there went out another horse [that was] red: and [power] was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

The second horse and rider bring war and slaughter, red the obvious color for this horse. We are still following the pattern set by our Lord in the Olivet Discourse, which speaks of "wars and rumors of wars" (Matthew 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9) prior to the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-22 cf. Matthew 24:15; Daniel 9:26-27). In the phrase "peace was taken from the earth" in our verse, the definite article is used (literally "the peace"). The articular use of the Greek *eirene*, "peace," is relatively uncommon in the New Testament ("peace," is found over ninety times without the definite article in the Greek, fifteen times with the article). The Greek definite article is often used to designate something special about the noun it is modifying. As the well known Greek axiom goes, "the presence of the article identifies, the absence of the article qualifies." If John wanted to identify a *particular* "peace" in his day, the use of the article would be the best way to accomplish this end.

Indeed, history speaks volumes about the famous "Pax Romana" or "Roman Peace" of Augustus Caesar and some of his successors, a peace which was shattered by the Jewish Wars of 66 A.D. and the later Romans civil wars of 68-69 A.D.. In our case, with subject being the coming destruction of Jerusalem, the peace in Palestine is probably what is in view here. As noted in Revelation 1:7, the word translated "earth" here can as easily be translated "land" (such that John's intent is to tell us peace was taken from the *land*). It is interesting to note that "peace" is only used in John's salutation in chapter one and here. This is not surprising in Revelation, a book of judgment, for there is no peace for the wicked (Isaiah 48:22; 57:21).

There have been various comments about the "sword" given to the rider. Some have it as a sort of sacrificial knife, some as a sword. It would seem the latter fits the context. It is difficult to see why a "great" knife would be given to this rider, particularly in light of the subject of war. The word for "kill" in the original Greek is not used outside of Revelation with the exception of 1 John 3:12. It seems to imply more than kill, but violent killing, possibly slaughter (it is used extensively in the book of Leviticus in the Greek Testament [Septuagint] for sacrificial slaughter).

v5 And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.

The seals seem to unfold one upon another. Conquering, war, and now comes the balances that point to famine, the terrible fruit of war.

v6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and [see] thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

We have here a picture of poverty conditions. Basic foods are selling for a day's wages, and it is just enough to keep individuals alive and families under starvation conditions. With the more expensive and luxurious items – oil and wine – we are told that these items are not to be hurt. The word "hurt" is *adikeo* in the Greek which can mean: 1) something that legally is unrighteous, and therefore translated "unrighteous," or 2) an unrighteous action which is hurtful, and therefore translated "hurt" (see Revelation 7:2-3 etc.). If the legal/lawful aspect of the word is what John had in mind, then the subject may relate to the righteous uses of oil and wine in ceremonies of the Old Covenant still going on in Jerusalem at this time. In other words, the religious structure involving oil and wine were available, but the essentials of life were not. This passage might even be a warning not to deal unrighteously or profanely with the elements of the temple set aside for sacred use.

The lack of food and the presence of starvation conditions during the siege and destruction of Jerusalem (67-70 A.D.) are well documented by the Jewish historian Josephus. We also know these were prophesied conditions by our Lord ("famines," Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11), as well as curses threatened under the Old Covenant (Deuteronomy 28:38; 28:53; see also Ezekiel 4:9ff).

v7 And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see.

More seals, more tribulation coming upon the land, and with great rapidity and force. There is this sense of great movement toward a dramatic end, the great desolation of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-38; Luke 21:20; cf. Revelation 17:16; 18:19).

v8 And I looked, and behold 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 the beasts of the earth.

The term "fourth part" is used only here in Revelation. It implies from its use in the Old Testament a significant part of something. We see Death and Hades riding and destroying a fourth of the land. It is a natural summation and climax of the first three seals. The historian Josephus writes that 1,100,000 Jews died or were enslaved during the siege and desolation of the holy city and the surrounding region in the war from 67-70 A.D.. God had detailed, as part of the Old Covenant, the curses He would bring upon Israel if they were disobedient. He would bring a people to destroy Israel, and they would have no regard

for the innocent (Deuteronomy 28:49-50). Such was the case of the Romans and their slaughter of Israel and Jerusalem as prophesied by Christ (Luke 19:41-44). Again, such awesome tragedies prophesied are confirmed in Josephus. It is of interest to note that the verse speaks of killing with "sword, hunger," etc., which is much the same tribulation God brought upon Israel in the past for her disobedience (Ezekiel 14:21). This time though the disobedience was the greatest of sins, crucifying the Lord of Glory, God's own Son (1 Corinthians 2:8 cf. Luke 20:9-16; note the resultant actions of the Lord of the vineyard for murdering the beloved son, vv13-16)!

v9 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:

Martyrdom for the gospel is an integral theme in our book (Revelation 2:10; 11:1-11; 12:11; 20:4), being a part of what would occur during the desolation of Jerusalem (Mark 13:12; Luke 21:11).

v10 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?

This is not a general cry, but a cry for *vengeance*. And if Luke eighteen is a parallel passage (Luke 18:1-8), then God will answer speedily (that is, in the time frame of Revelation). Now the New Testament vengeance that is threatened is vengeance against Israel for her persecution of the people of God and the murder of the Lord of Glory (Matthew 23:34ff; Luke 11:49ff; cf. "vengeance" upon Israel for these crimes, Luke 21:20-24; note esp. v22, vengeance that fulfills all God had prophesied prior - example, Isaiah 65:12). Further, see Matthew 22:1-14; esp. verse seven, "But when the King heard thereof, *he was wroth*: and sent forth his armies, and *destroyed those murderers*, and *burnt up their city*". This theme will be expounded in visions later in the book when God pours out His wrath upon Babylon (Revelation 18:20; 19:2).

In the original Greek, there are two attributes that are made to stand out in the saints description of the God whom they worship and pray to. First, He is given the title of "Despot/Lord" (Greek, *despotes*), a title not common in the New Testament (only five times is God called *despotes*). He is the absolute Ruler. This title is then modified by two adjectives, which are themselves made special with the definite article. A paraphrase of this prayer might be "O Absolute Sovereign, You who are Holy, You who are True, O Lord how long...". There is a sense of Habbakuk's cry here, "O Lord my God, my Holy one...Thou art of purer eyes than to look upon iniquity" (Habakkuk 1:12-13). Habbakuk has a complaint and brings before the Lord His glory, His greatness, and His holiness as a basis for an answer to his request. The saints are saying to their Lord much the same thing in our verse as Habakkuk

did: "Lord, you are holy and true and the absolute sovereign... Avenge our blood at the hands of the unrighteous."

v11 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.

We are told in Revelation 19:8 that white linen/robes are the righteousness of saints. The idea here may be the comfort derived from the saints knowledge of Christ and the righteousness He provided, or that their righteous lives for Christ gave true, everlasting meaning to their death (see Revelation 14:13). In either case, as in Revelation 14:13, the saints are blessed and this is to comfort them as God finishes His work through His people. The basic idea behind the statement of "until their fellow brethren be killed" is probably along the lines of the Jews and 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 and Matthew 23:31-32, particularly the term "fill up" and "fill ye up." The killing of God's people by the Israelites was filling up the store of God's wrath which was poured out to the uttermost in the desolation of the land of Palestine. The crucifixion of the Lord Jesus and the persecution of those that proclaimed His Messianic identity was laid at the feet of the Jews (Acts 2:22-23; Matthew 23:34), and God, hearing the prayers of the martyred saints, will swiftly redress the issue (Revelation 18:20-24; 19:1,2)**.

** Revelation 18 contains such statements as: "God has remembered her iniquities (18:5);" "reward...her double...in the cup which she has filled fill to her double (18:6);" "for in one hour she is made desolate (18:19);" "and in her was found the blood of the prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain on the earth (18:24)." There can be no doubt that this city which is called "the great city" and "Babylon" (Revelation 18:10, 18:16, 18:18) cannot be any city but the great city Jerusalem, for she is the city Christ prosecutes for such crimes (see Luke 11:49-51).

v12 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 as blood;

The sixth seal unfolds an earthquake, which could be either a figure of the turmoil of 70 A.D. (see Haggai 2:6 cf. Hebrews 12:26-27) or of course real earthquakes (which occurred at this time according to Josephus). Either way, it is part of the scenario of Jerusalem's demise (Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11). The sun and moon not giving off light - indeed lack of light - has always meant the judgment of God against Israel or her enemies (Ezekiel 32:7; Isaiah 13:10; Joel 2:10; 3:15; Amos 8:9; Zephaniah 1:14-15). We find Revelation taking up this imagery more than once (see Revelation 8:12), and the same wording is used in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24; Luke 21:25).

The judgment of God is coming against Israel, a covenant wrath (see Deuteronomy 28:49-52 for God's covenant curses based on Israel's disobedience), a wrath that gathers up all of Israel's sins into this one horrible outpouring of wrath because of crucifying their Savior (note the phrase "this generation" in Matthew 23:36 and Matthew 24:34). God had said that all the righteous blood shed upon the land would be required of "this generation" (Matthew 23:34-37, note the phrase in verse 35 "...that upon **YOU** may come **ALL** the righteous blood shed upon the earth..."). This also explains why on the day of Pentecost in Acts two, Peter pleads with the Jews assembled to call upon the name of the Lord (2:21) and to save themselves from **this untoward generation** (2:40) before the great and notable day of the Lord fell upon them (2:20).

v13 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.

The imagery continues to expand with the use of stars falling/darkness and the sun and moon becoming dark (Ecclesiastes 12:2; Job 3:9; Isaiah 13:10; Ezekiel 32:7; Joel 2:10). As with the darkening sun and moon, falling stars were an image of judgment in the Old Testament, and are a fitting New Testament picture of judgment against Israel. As to the fig tree, it may be used to give a Jewish sense of this scene, since the Old Testament did use the fig tree as a symbol of Israel (cf. Hosea 9:10). But the language is probably just a parallel to passages like Isaiah 34:4. This fig tree illustration was used by our Lord in the Olivet Discourse to illustrate the nearness of the events He had been discussing with His disciples (Matthew 24:32-33; Mark 13:28-29; Luke 21:29-31)**.

** There is a similar (and important) idea put forth by our Lord in Matthew 24:28 when Jesus states "for wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together." In both this statement and the fig tree parable (Matthew 24:32f), our Lord is essentially saying, "When you see one special type of event, you know what other event **must** attend it. When you see tender leaves, summer is near; when you see eagles (vultures), a carcass is near. So when you see the events I have spoken to you about, know that just as tender leaves signal the coming of summer, and flying eagles (vultures) mean a carcass is below, so these events that I have delineated surely mean that *the coming of the Son of Man is at the door*" (24:28-29)!

v14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

With regard to the heavens "rolling up as a scroll."

As with the nations spoken of in Isaiah 34:1ff, we have the symbols of a cosmic change that the writer to Hebrews alludes to twice (Hebrews 1:10ff; 12:25-28). Even the moving of mountains is a symbol of God's work (Habakkuk 3:6). But all of this terminology in Revelation (6:12-14) is to give the reader one great impression; to fulfill God's word of the coming wrath against Israel and the destruction of the whole Old Testament economy. It is a shaking (Hebrews 12:25-26). The whole of the old religious world shall be made desolate because of its "fault" (Hebrews 8:8). The book of Hebrews puts this change as follows, "in that He (God) saith, A new covenant, He has made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old, is ready to vanish away" (Hebrews 8:13).

There will be a radical change of true religion from Israel to Christianity (John 4:20-24). Men will be born of God, not of blood (John 1:13). And God would put His seal on this by destroying the central elements of Jewish religion and establishing the New Covenant, the Kingdom of God which shall never be moved (Hebrews 12:24-28; compare the establishment of Daniel's "everlasting kingdom", Daniel 2:44). NOTE: This is what our Lord told the apostles to expect in His exposition of the fall of Jerusalem and at His coming; "So **you**, likewise, when **you** see these things happening, **know that the kingdom of God is near** (Luke 21:31)." Notice that the themes which surround Luke 21:31 are the fall of Jerusalem (Luke 21:20) and the coming of Christ (Luke 21:27). There would be a consummation of that Kingdom which the apostles had already entered by faith (Colossians 1:12-13).

v15 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;

It makes no difference what stature or power one might possess at this time in the history of the land of Palestine. The Romans came upon all, rich and poor, great and small. As a side note, the terrain described at the end of this verse is very Palestinian. The Romans were coming to conquer the land, and would soon surround the holy city, lay siege, and sack Jerusalem (Luke 21:20). Historically, it was the dens and caves as in this verse that were some of the few places to provide refuge for the few that survived the Roman onslaught of 67-70 A.D..

v16 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 this writer, here is absolute Biblical proof-that the era that is in view as the seals unfold is the destruction of Jerusalem in 67-70 A.D.. In Luke 23:27-31, our Lord is on the way to lay down His life for the sins of sinners. On His way to Calvary, Christ meets some women who were weeping for His plight. His response to these women matches Revelation 6:15-16: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are coming in which they will say 'Blessed are the barren wombs that never bore, and the breasts which never nursed! *Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall upon us' and to the hills, 'Cover us'!* For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?" (NKJV).

The context of Luke 23:27-31 is obviously the coming wrath against the people in Jerusalem, and matches the words of our verse here. Further proof is found in comparing the statement about pregnancy in Luke 23:29 with that of Luke 21:23. All of this gives us confidence that the concluding words of Revelation six consign the entire section regarding seals to the first century, specifically Jerusalem and the land that would be "trodden down by the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24).

v17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

For insight on this verse, we have Acts 2:14-21, where Peter is warning the Jews that had gathered at Pentecost that Joel's promise of the outpouring of the Spirit was the proof of the reality that Christ had risen and was glorified at God's right hand. Those who had crucified the Lord of Glory now could see God's work of bestowing honor upon His Son by making Him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). Seated at God's right hand, the Lord Jesus had sent the Spirit as prophesied by Joel (Joel 2:28ff), and the assembled Jews were to heed the offer of forgiveness (Acts 2:21, 2:38ff). They must flee to Christ (2:21) because of what was coming upon the apostate nation (Acts 2:19-20).