

Revelation 6:12-17 The Sixth Seal

THE SIXTH SEAL: NEW TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

In **2 Thessalonians 2:1-11** Paul expressly warned of a falling away (*apostasy*) from the truth in first century ecclesias. He warned this system would deceive many and eventually be controlled by one man, the "Man of Sin." This Pope in Rome would become unsurpassed in power and prestige. He would even become a political and military power through an alliance with emperors in the east. The Man of Sin would continue through time until Christ destroys him at his return. Paul quotes **Dan 11:36** in saying he would oppose and exalt himself above God, and call himself God.

This "mystery of iniquity" was already working in the first century. It would be characterised by deceit, counterfeit miracles, signs and lying wonders. Paul in **2 Thess 2:6-7** prophesied that paganism would be removed by his system. Some key Scriptures about this are **Dan 7:7-11; 8:23-25; 11:36-39; Acts 20:31; 2 Cor 11:2-4; 2 Tim 2:18; 2 Pet 2:1-3; 1 Jn 2:18-19; 4:1-4; Rev 2:18-22.**

How could this happen? How could a persecuted minority sect become the most powerful political and military power in the world? **Revelation 6:12-17** and **12:1-12** provides the answer. False Christianity found itself a **military champion** in the Roman Emperor **Constantine**. He made the Catholic Church **the government** of the Roman Empire.

SIXTH SEAL: CONSTANTINE'S REVOLUTION AD312-324

v12 Great earthquake; A great political upheaval. The first of 3 great earthquakes in Revelation. See also **Rev 11:13; 16:18**. Earth in Scripture represents people: **Isa 1:2,10; Dan 2:43; Rev 12:16**. **Sun black:** Symbol of government being eclipsed: **Ezek 32:5-8; Joel 2:31; 3:15; Mt 24:29**. The symbology is clearly not literal in these Scriptures. The symbol is again used in **Rev 12:1** where the Christian community is "clothed with the sun". So here we have the collapse of Paganism and the "Christianising" of the empire. **Sackcloth:** Represents mourning: **Gen 37:34; Isa 15:3; Lam 2:10**. **Moon as blood:** The moon derives its light from the sun indicating a less powerful organisation, normally a religious system: **Joel 2:31; 3:15; Mt 24:29; Lk 21:25**. The pagan religion was overthrown by bloodshed and loss of life.

v13 Stars of heaven fell to Earth: Government rulers. Stars are often mentioned with the sun and moon: **Joel 3:15; Dan 12:3; Mt 24:29; Lk 21:25**. A clear interpretation is given in **Isa 1:2,10** "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah." See also **Isa 14:4,12; 19:11,14; 20:11; 21:1-3; 34:4-10; 51:6; 65:17**. See also **Rev 12:1; 14:17; 19:11,14; 20:11**.

As a fig tree casteth her untimely figs: AV margin "green figs" i.e. those not ripe in the proper season which drop off the tree. Similar expression is in **Isa 34:4**. **When shaken of a mighty wind:** Military influence as in **Jer 4:10-13**.

v14 Heaven departed as a scroll:

See notes on **6:13**. The significance of Constantine's victories. Similar expression in **Isa 2:10**. **Every mountain, island moved:** Symbols of political powers: **Jer 4:23-24; Mic 6:1-2**. The war which Constantine fought against his military rival Licinius was openly declared by both sides to be a war between the pagan gods and Jesus Christ. Constantine proceeded to win every battle he fought until he became sole emperor of the Roman Empire.

v15 Kings of the earth: Emphasises that all the important rulers in every part of the empire were eclipsed as Constantine took control. **Hide themselves:** Same language in **Isa 2:10**.

v16 Fall on us, hide us: Ironically this expression is used when Rome invaded Jerusalem in AD70: **Hos 10:8; Lk 23:30**. **Him that sitteth on the throne:** Constantine took control of the empire and moved its centre to Constantinople. **From the wrath of the Lamb:** The pagans saw the battle as Jesus Christ versus their gods. cp. **Isa 34:4,5; 13:10; Ezek 32:7,8**. It was **the pagans** who said this, not believers.

v17 Great day of his wrath is come: Pagan Rome judged for persecution of believers: The sixth seal emphasises the **political** aspects of Constantine's triumph. **Rev 12:1-12** emphasises the **religious** aspects. The Christianising of the Empire came as a result of super-imposing pagan doctrines into Christianity, which ultimately became the Catholic Church.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE SIXTH SEAL

Christians no longer remained separate from politics and military service. Multitudes of Christians went to war to fight in his armies. The Christians now considered that the Kingdom of God was fulfilled in the Church. Emperor Maxentius previously ruled in Rome but it was in AD312 that Maxentius was defeated in the battle of Milvian Bridge. Constantine, whilst gaining control of Western Europe, took some time to control the East where Licinius ruled. Constantine claims he saw a vision of a Cross in the sky with the message "In this sign, conquer!" (see picture on top RHS). He subsequently painted this Christian monogram on his soldiers' shields. The battle of Adrianople in AD324 eventually resulted in Constantine becoming sole ruler of the Roman Empire.



Emperor Constantine

12 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;

13 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.

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

15 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;

16 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:

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



Battle of Milvian Bridge. Constantine sees a cross in the sky

In Roman Catholic history, Constantine has the title of *First Christian Emperor*. They claim that with his victory, Christ's rule on earth was established. As Israel became spiritually corrupt at the time of Christ, so too Christianity in the Sixth Seal. The pride and arrogance of Constantine and the change in religion was also predicted in **Daniel 8:23-25; 11:36-39**.

Just prior to the battle of Adrianople in AD324, Constantine's chief rival Licinius assembled friends in a sacred grove and offered sacrifices, saying "If the foreign god, whom we now deride, should appear the mightiest, we must acknowledge and honour him, and bid farewell to these to whom we have vainly lit wax tapers. But if ours prevail, which is not to be doubted, then, after the victory, we must proceed to war."

"Constantine's Christianisation of the Roman Empire in the fourth century is **one of history's mightiest revolutions**. He chose a persecuted minority sect, an illegal, subversive intruder into the Roman state, and made it the cornerstone of a world shaking power: Christendom. It was the old Pagan Roman world Christianised and turned upside down, the kingdom of heaven on earth" (National Geographic, Dec 1983).

"There have been many bargains during the history of the last twenty centuries; but few have been so brazen as the compromise by which Christianity came to power." (Liberation of Mankind, p80)

"The Conversion of Constantine is generally hailed as the final victory of the new faith. It may equally be regarded as the triumph of totalitarianism. The church no doubt won not only tolerance and relief from persecution, but also wealth and the right to persecute. The price was clerical endorsement of the existing order on earth." (G Childe, What happened in History)

The Roman military power in Constantinople was **established** during the **6th seal**. It was **removed** by Ottoman Turks during the **6th trumpet**: **Rev 9:13-21**. It will **return** to Constantinople when Russia moves into Turkey just prior to Armageddon in the **6th vial**: **Dan 11:40-45; Rev 16:12-16**. These are our days!

Colour code: Blue (God and Jesus Christ); Red (sin/devil/judgment of wicked); Green (Kingdom); Orange (important words & phrases); Purple (return of Jews to the land); Yellow (practical exhortation). Acknowledgement: Expositor verse by verse notes by HP Mansfield Prepared for Rathmines Bible School Teenagers.