

# When the Sky Began to Fall

Four Horsemen and the Coming World Madness – Part VI

Revelation 6:12-17

## Introduction

Chicken Little delivered a prophecy. She was eating her lunch one day and an acorn fell on her head. She went into a panic, running around yelling, “The sky is falling! The sky is falling!” And she headed out to warn the king.

This old fable is mistakenly attributed to *Aesop’s Fables*, but actually originated in the Far East, six hundred years before the birth of Christ.

In the English version that dates centuries ago, the chicken runs toward the palace, gathering all sorts of animals along the way. She convinces them the sky is truly falling and they all get in a panic.

All of these animals had rhyming names, as you may remember. They had names like, “Henny Penny” and “Turkey Lurkey” and “Goosey Loosey”.

We are really going deep today!

Then who comes along? “Foxy Loxy.” Do you remember him? He promises the animals that he can protect them from the falling sky. However, he lures them into his trap and eats them, except for Chicken Little who escapes with her life.

In every version – except the newest Walt Disney movie version which actually reverses the moral of the story – the basic theme has always been, “Don’t believe everything you hear.”

In past generations, the story was even given a political makeover. The silly chicken jumps to the wrong conclusion and whips the populace into mass hysteria, which then allows conniving foxes an opportunity to manipulate and harm the innocent but misguided.<sup>1</sup>

What has survived over the centuries from this tale of “Chicken Little,” among other things, is the phrase we use to speak of an alarmist who predicts the worst. We say, “They think the sky is falling.” This is sort of a mocking gesture, “Oh, they think the sky is falling, the sky is falling.”

In other words, “Do not believe the doomsayers. They are deluded people, running around like silly chickens. The sky is *not* falling and the sky will *never* fall.”

It is interesting to observe in our generation, however, that there is a change in attitude in most people – the tune has changed.

One author put it this way, “Forty years ago, Hollywood’s futuristic movies were utopian” – life evolved into something perfect and wonderful – “but today, they are apocalyptic.”<sup>ii</sup>

In other words, movies about the future have changed. The world is not getting better – the world in the future is now a world of wild creatures, with earth either uninhabited or unlivable, and the planet filled with danger or a barren wasteland.

So it is not unusual anymore to hear a philosopher like Alfred North Whitehead say, “It is the business of the future to be dangerous.”<sup>iii</sup>

Carl Sagan, the astronomer and secular humanist whose television program was watched by an estimated six hundred million people, led people to basically worship the universe. In fact, his pseudo-science laid the groundwork for the current rage in which people are told to communicate their wishes to the universe. The universe will then, by the laws of attraction, fulfill their wishes. About ten years ago, Carl Sagan died and met his maker, but he wrote in 1980, “We may have only a few decades until doomsday.”<sup>iv</sup>

George Wald, a professor of Biology at Harvard University and a Nobel Prize winner, said, “Human life is threatened as never before in the history of this planet; not by one peril, but by many. And they are all working together, coming to a head about the same time. I am one of those scientists who find it hard to see how the human race [will survive much longer].”<sup>v</sup>

No one accuses any of these men of being “Chicken Little”. “The sky is going to fall,” is being said, and the average person today knows it is true.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a great opportunity to deliver the truth. We can announce to our generation that their inborn fear of the future; their sense that doomsday is coming; their suspicion that earth and the human race cannot keep going forever without encountering global, apocalyptic terror is all true!

There is a coming day when the sky will begin to fall!

## The Day of the Lord

Let me point out where this begins. Let us rejoin our study with the opening of the next seal in Revelation chapter 6. Look at verses 12-17.

*I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood;*

*and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.*

*The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.*

*Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains;*

*and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;*

*"for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"*

The prophets, who were often ridiculed or ignored for their prophecies of coming judgment, spoke centuries ago with predictions of this coming day of wrath.

Isaiah wrote of this time,

*... [men] will go into the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs before the terror of the Lord and the splendor of His majesty, when He arises to make the earth tremble. (Isaiah 2:21)*

In chapter 13, Isaiah prophesied further,

*For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light. (Isaiah 13:10)*

Hosea spoke of the day men will beg,

*... to the mountains, "Cover us!" And to the hills, "Fall on us!" (Hosea 10:8b)*

The prophet Nahum said,

*Mountains quake because of Him and the hills dissolve; indeed the earth is upheaved by*

*His presence, the world and all the inhabitants in it.*

*Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire and the rocks are broken up by Him.*

*(Nahum 1:5-6)*

Let me give one more – the prophet Zephaniah prophesied,

*Near is the great day of the Lord, near and coming very quickly . . .*

*A day of wrath is that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness,*

*a day of trumpet and battle cry . . .*

*. . . [who] will be able to deliver them on the day of the Lord's wrath; and all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy, for He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one, of all the inhabitants of the earth.*

*(Zephaniah 1:14-18)*

You need to understand that this phrase, "the day of the Lord," is an expression often used to describe different periods of time when God intersects a group of people, a nation of people, or, as in the final day of the Lord, the entire world with great judgment.

The phrase, "the day of the Lord" is not limited to future, final wrath, but sometimes refers to imminent historical judgments.

Joel provides an example of this. In chapter 2, he describes the final universal day of the Lord, but in chapter 1 he describes an actual locust plague that came on Judah. This act of judgment was intended by God to preview the day of the Lord which would come on Judah in the coming invasion of Babylon, seen in chapter 2:1-17. And the invasion by Babylon presented a preview of the ultimate day of wrath discussed in the latter part of Joel chapter 2.<sup>vi</sup>

So the phrase, "the day of the Lord," can be used for near events and yet, illustrate even greater, future events.

The Old Testament uses this phrase nineteen times. It is found in the New Testament four times, which broadens it even more.

Paul tells the Thessalonians, in I Thessalonians 5:2, that the day of the Lord begins in the Tribulation period.

The apostle Peter even uses the phrase, “the day of the Lord,” in II Peter 3:10, to include the end of the Millennial Kingdom. This is a little longer than a thousand years. It is no wonder that Peter addressed the length of this time period by reminding us,

*... with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. (II Peter 3:8)*

By the way – and you need to know this for the test – any effort to limit the day of the Lord to the middle part of the Tribulation or to the Battle of Armageddon at the end of the Millennial Kingdom is simply not defensible by the record of Scripture – beginning with the prophets and ending with the apostles.<sup>vii</sup>

One thing is certain – when the first seal is broken and the first rider rides out and the early days of the Tribulation begin to unroll, days that soon include war, murder, famine, and pestilence, so much so that one fourth of the world’s population dies – men and women will assume the end of the world is near.

In the gospel of Luke, Christ said of these final days,

*There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves,*

*men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world . . .*

*(Luke 21:25-26a)*

The word translated “fainting” literally means, “to breathe out or to stop breathing”.<sup>viii</sup>

In other words, when the day of the Lord comes, beginning with the Tribulation, and all these things begin to unfold, people are going to literally drop dead from fear. Those who are left will try to end their lives in terror of what might happen next.

This is the wrath of the Lamb – the awful, terrifying day of the Lord.

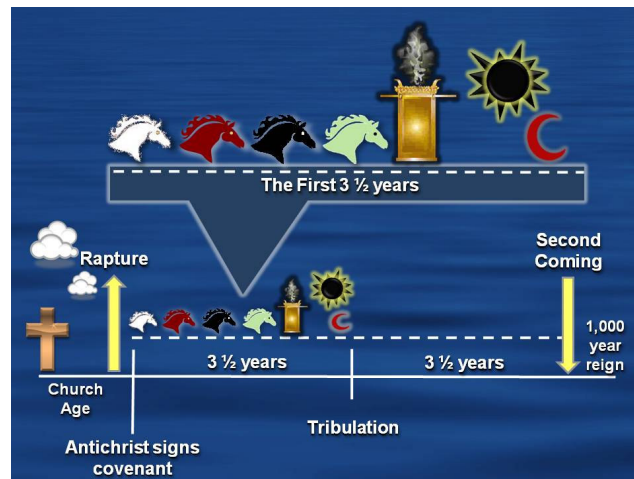
There are those that believe the rapture will occur during the time at the end of Revelation 6. Following the opening of the sixth seal is a trumpet call and some believe it is the trumpet call of the rapture. This view is referred to as the “pre-wrath” view. I am frequently asked about this view.

We will deal with these trumpet calls in detail at a later time. There are actually seven of them.

Now, however, I will just point out that this paragraph alone should end this particular view simply because the rapture does not even rescue these people from the outpouring of wrath and terror.

Furthermore, notice what most of humanity says, in Revelation 6:17,

*for the great day of their wrath [the wrath of the Lamb] has come . . .*



The tense of this verb “has come” is aorist indicative which means that these people are concluding the wrath of the Lamb has been poured out, not only in this sixth seal, but in all the previous seals. In other words, they are correctly concluding that everything which has happened up to this point – for three and a half years – the bloodshed, the war, the famine, the pestilence, and now the cosmic disturbances are in fact, the obvious wrath of God.

Now, before I go any farther, let me address a question most believers in our larger church world would have.

Why do we even bother studying this information? In fact, why does God give us information about all the terror, bloodshed, death, earthquakes, blackened sun, blood-red moon, and falling stars? Is He trying to ruin a good night’s sleep?

Someone might be tempted to ask, “What good does all this information do me? It doesn’t help me understand my third grader – unless I redefine the word ‘earthquake’ – you should see his room. Seriously, all this wrath and doom doesn’t help me understand my spouse or even give me some sort of little nugget to help me deal with my crabby boss on Monday morning, although he could certainly use a little of God’s wrath.”

Part of the reason we think this is all just “take it or leave it,” and I for one never once heard a sermon

on the sixth seal, or any seal for that matter, is that our attention, church wide, like never before, is riveted on ourselves.

We are consumed with us; we are focused on our lives. Now, we expect the world to be focused on themselves, but in the church, like never before, most of the sermons and books are focused on overcoming the aches and pains of life and how to resolve everything from having had bad parents to solving bad health and bad credit.

The irony of this is that our world is now admitting the stress of acute guilt and the feeling of a sense of dread about life and a sense of hopelessness toward the coming future, while the church is absorbed with how to have your best life now. Yes, that is the title of a best seller.

Guess what? Instead of being like our forefathers who at least sounded a warning, we are completely missing the moment!

There is more to this than raising third graders or getting out of debt.

Do not misunderstand, these are good and noble duties, but there is a bigger picture to understand! In fact, understanding the larger purpose of God for planet Earth and human history actually deepens our passion to invest in the work of the church prior to the end of the church age.

Understanding the coming terror gives us a greater desire than ever to not just raise civilized third graders – if it is even possible – but to lead them to the truth of the gospel of this righteous and soon-coming King!

However, think of the irony of this tragedy today. At the very time in our generation when people are fairly convinced that doomsday is coming – that something bad is going to happen; that the human race needs rescuing from itself and an aging planet – we are determined never to talk about what? Doomsday – wrath and judgment.

We are missing the moment. This is the moment we can say to a receptive audience, “Listen, that thought you have about coming trouble; that sense you have of doomsday coming for the human race; that movie you just watched about the end of civilization as we know it, the basic idea is actually true. In fact, let me tell you why you do not want to be here when it happens!”

There is the promise of rescue from the wrath to come (I Thessalonians 1:10) – and it is by believing in the Lamb of God who can forgive your sin and secure your future with Him forever.

Frankly, studying the coming wrath of the Lamb develops in me a greater gratitude for the grace of the Lamb.

## The Sixth Seal

Now, let us take a closer look at what happens as this sixth seal is broken and the scroll unrolls a little further. I will call these “Five Disturbances on Earth You Would Rather Watch from Heaven”.

### 1. The first disturbance is a great earthquake (Revelation 6:12a).

The original language calls this a “mega seismos” (μεγας σεισμος). We use the word “mega” to refer to something large – this is a mega earthquake. The Greek word for “earthquake,” or “seismos,” is used to this day for seismology, which is the science of studying earthquakes.

John is an eyewitness to a monster quake; literally, a shaking of the earth.

### 2. The second disturbance is the total eclipse of the sun and moon (Revelation 6:12b).

John records,

*... and the sun became black as sackcloth . . .*

This is literally, black as hair. It is a reference to the black goat hair worn by those at a funeral, mourning the loss of their loved ones. It is as if the sun is covered with the sackcloth used in mourning the dead.

The moon is eclipsed as well and the description John provides is that the color of the moon is like blood – “hos haima” (ως αιμα) – which fits perfectly with the deep reddish color of the moon during an eclipse.<sup>ix</sup>

These disturbances bring terror to the planet – ash and debris spewing up from the effects of the earthquake would not create any new sense of terror – but an earthquake followed by total darkness would.

The world at large still attaches great superstitious and religious beliefs to an eclipse.

In 1989, in Nigeria, a solar eclipse brought rioting as Muslim gangs burned and looted homes, trying to atone for the sins of the infidels.

Just two years ago in this same country, a solar eclipse made many believe it was the conjuring of witches and wizards.<sup>x</sup>

Many Hindus of India are busy before a solar eclipse placing leaves on food items to ward off the demonic rays; pregnant women are kept indoors, afraid to scratch themselves at any time during the

eclipse, believing that if they do their newborn will have scars.

One Indian newspaper advised expectant mothers not to go outside during the eclipse to avoid having a blind baby.

The *Hindustan Times* reported that those who are holding a knife or axe during the eclipse will not be able to keep from cutting themselves.<sup>xi</sup>

Many will take to the holy rivers to cleanse themselves after the eclipse.

You might say that these people are ignorant of basic astronomy. The *Times* of India says this is not so. One article interviewed a thirty-two year old computer executive who said she believes that during an eclipse the number of germs increases and therefore, no food is eaten or cooked during an eclipse and any food cooked before the eclipse is thrown away.<sup>xii</sup>

In other words, millions of pounds of good food throughout India and other countries are literally thrown away, in the belief that they are contaminated.

A lunar eclipse has been believed by millions in the Far East to be the gobbling of the moon by some cosmic beast, and the creeping red color is believed to be the moon's blood spreading across its face.

Certainly the civilized world can explain lunar and solar eclipses, but no one can explain them happening at the same time, accompanied by the shaking of the earth.

For all of humanity, this will be terrifying. Yet, there is more to come.

**3. The third disturbance is the stars that begin to collide with planet Earth (Revelation 6:13a).**

John writes in verse 13,

*and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.*

The word "stars" – from  $\alpha\sigma\tau\eta\rho$  – refers to any luminous body in the sky other than the sun and moon. The stars referred to in this verse are what we would call "shooting stars". These could be meteors or asteroids that literally pummel the earth.<sup>xiii</sup>

On November 13, 1833, eyewitnesses testified that hundreds of shooting stars could be seen simultaneously. People actually fell to their knees and begged God for mercy.<sup>xiv</sup>

NASA scientist Don Yeomans, who manages the Near-Earth Asteroid Tracking program, said, "The probability of an asteroid impacting Earth is low, but

it is also a high-consequence event." (Don't you love the way scientists talk?)

The last major asteroid to cause damage on Earth occurred in a sparsely populated region of Siberia in 1908. Its impact literally toppled 700 square miles of forest.

Imagine this scene. The size of the cities of Raleigh and Cary combined is 130 square miles – the impact of one asteroid leveled 700 square miles of forest.

It was humorous to read the words of one scientist/astronomer who works for a research laboratory in California. He said, "The most sensible thing to do about earth-striking asteroids is to try not to think about them."<sup>xv</sup>

In my research I saw an illustration of what an asteroid collision would look like. It is stunning and terrifying at the same time. It is literally a ball of fire hurtling through the atmosphere, striking the earth with the power of a nuclear bomb.

If you can, imagine this scene. The earth is shaking and then, the sky goes black. The moon appears in a red, blood-like color, and through the darkened sky, screaming toward earth are fireballs the size of boats. All that can be seen through the darkness are what appears to be stars scorching hot, racing toward earth.

You hear the collisions, you see the bursts of flame, you feel the rush of hot air from some nearby impact, and you see trees bursting into flame along with homes and skyscrapers alike.

And people can only think of one thing – the sky is falling – it is the end of the world.

**4. The fourth disturbance is in the atmosphere (Revelation 6:14a).**

The sky splits apart and rolls back in two opposite directions.<sup>xvi</sup>

It is as if the atmosphere high above the planet is shriveling like paper.

This is the best way that John can describe the horrific effects of this fiery ordeal.

**5. The fifth disturbance is the change in geography (Revelation 6:14b).**

John writes in verse 14b,

*. . . every mountain and island were moved out of their places.*

The planet is still shaking, the sky is still dark, the earth is pummeled with fireballs the size of busses that explode to the earth, and everything is in so

much upheaval that mountains are moving and islands are disappearing.

The crust of the earth begins to shift and move. And the devastating natural disasters accompanying the sixth seal that John does not even mention – hurricanes that are caused by this; tsunamis that sweep inland drowning untold numbers – are the most terrifying yet.<sup>xvii</sup>

The devastation of this is unbelievable.

## Who is affected by the Sixth Seal Disturbances?

Now, just who is affected by these disturbances? John gives six categories of people impacted by the sixth seal in Revelation 6:15.

### 1. First, the kings of the earth are impacted.

These are the heads of state – the rulers, presidents, prime ministers of the nations of all the earth. At this moment, they recognize that their power is powerless.

### 2. Secondly, John mentions the great men.

These are high ranking officials – senators and senior ranking officials from all walks of life.

### 3. Thirdly, John says that the commanders are caught up in the panic along with everyone else.

The word for “commanders” is the same word used elsewhere for the Roman officers who commanded a legion of men.

These are unflappable generals who are experienced in battle and keep their composure.

This is like General Douglas MacArthur, who used to, during World War II, go out on the hill near his bunker and watch as the Japanese pilots would fly in low and strafe the ground with bullets. There he would stand, unmoved and unafraid. At one point, according to his biography that I recently finished, General George S. Patton visited him as a bombing raid was taking place. They were standing out in the open, and Patton wondered if MacArthur would even blink as bombs fell around them. Finally, one particular bomb came screaming through the air and landed very close to where they were standing. Patton winced, to which MacArthur winked and chided him by saying, “Now General, you never hear the one that hits you.”<sup>xviii</sup>

MacArthur was legendary among his troops for standing as close to the enemy lines as he could without every crouching down.

These are the kind of men spoken of in this verse – commanders who are battle worn, five-star, medal-decorated warriors – who are now cowering in caves with everyone else and crying like children for help.

### 4. Fourthly, John mentions the rich.

John uses the words from which we get the phrase, the “hoy poloi”. This is a reference to the rich and famous.

Their wealth cannot buy safety for them now. Their money is worthless on a planet where everything seems to be on fire.

### 5. Fifthly, John mentions the strong.

This is a reference to those who influenced people. They could be thought of as “mighty”.

These were the “movers and shakers” of the planet. Now, however, they are on a planet that is being moved and shaken by an unseen hand.

### 6. Finally, John sort of wraps up everyone else in the reference to slaves and free citizens near the end of verse 15.

This is a reference to all classes of people – free and enslaved; free and imprisoned. This is the way to say, “and everyone else” in the human race. Even these people are without relief.

In other words, from kings to common laborers – all are running to try to find safety somewhere, anywhere. They are all screaming, literally out of their minds, as we can only imagine. Many are dropping dead of heart attacks from the sheer terror of it all.

Now what happens next is utterly amazing to me. Notice Revelation 6:15b-16a.

*. . . [they] hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains;*

*and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us . . .”*

In other words, all these terrifying events spark the biggest prayer meeting the world has ever seen. This is a universal call to prayer and all of humanity is praying it.

However, they are not praying to God – they are praying to objects of nature. They are praying, as it were, to Mother Nature and not to the Creator God of nature. In the unbelievable rebellion of these people, like Pharaoh of old, they refuse to submit to the terrors of these plagues and they harden their hearts.

Notice further in Revelation 6:16, they cry out,

... *“Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;”*

In other words, these people know God is behind their terror. More than likely, as these seals have progressed, these people have had access to the book of Revelation and have been studying, summarizing, and correctly concluding that the God of nature is behind these upheavals of nature. Yet, in spite of this, they reject the Rock of Ages and pray to the rocks.

They pray to be hidden from the face of God or to die, rather than face God. One author said it this way, “They would rather hide from God in fear than run to Him in faith.”<sup>xix</sup>

However, these people are tragically wrong. They think that death will provide an escape for them. It will not, for,

... *it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27)*

Imagine this scene. These people have seen enough and it is even implied that they have access to and understanding of the word of God. They have, by now, through these three years of world madness, figured out that God is behind it and it is His wrath. In fact, it is the wrath of the Lamb – the Son of God. And they would rather die than trust in Him.

This is the point at which I believe God judicially abandons them. As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, these will be those who will be sent a strong delusion so that they believe the lie of the antichrist (II Thessalonians 2:11).

After the dust settles, and the earth settles back down and the fires are put out, the antichrist will move in Jerusalem to desecrate the altar of the newly constructed temple, and claim to be God. Perhaps he will claim to have done something to stop these disturbances from continuing.

It will not be long before the beast will take over the planet and begin even greater times of bloodshed and horror.

## Conclusion

Are you ready to be rescued from all of this should Christ come for His church today?

If you know the Lamb, the wrath of God has already been released against Him and you will never experience the terrors of these seals.

If you do not know the Lamb, you may come back to church next week and see only a handful of

people here, wandering around the campus. Believe in Christ today.

You might say, “Well, I don’t like your preaching one bit. I’ve visited here long enough.”

When the Surgeon General of the United States first issued dire warnings that smoking increases the possibilities of cancer, he was not very popular, but he saved lives. I once read about a man who was so concerned from the newspaper articles about the dangers of smoking that he decided to give up the newspaper.<sup>xx</sup>

You can call me “Chicken Little” if it makes you feel better, but it will not change the message. The sky will one day fall – but there is a way out!

There is a way *up and away* from the wrath to come.

<sup>i</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Sky\\_Is\\_Falling\\_\(fable\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sky_Is_Falling_(fable)).

<sup>ii</sup> Richard A. Swenson, Hurting Toward Oblivion (NavPres, 1999), p. 18.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vi</sup> John MacArthur, Revelation: Volume 1 (Moody Press, 1999), p. 200.

<sup>vii</sup> Robert L. Thomas, Revelation: Volume 1 (Moody Press, 1992), p. 458.

<sup>viii</sup> Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 205.

<sup>ix</sup> Thomas, p. 453.

<sup>x</sup> <http://www.news24.com>, 29/03/2006.

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xii</sup> <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>, 8/1/2008.

<sup>xiii</sup> Henry M. Morris, The Revelation Record (Tyndale, 1986), p. 122.

<sup>xiv</sup> Stewart Custer, From Patmos to Paradise (BJU Press, 2004), p. 81.

<sup>xv</sup> Adrian Rogers, Revelation: Unveiling the End Times in Our Time (Broadman and Holman, 2004), p. 92.

<sup>xvi</sup> Thomas, p. 454.

<sup>xvii</sup> John MacArthur, Because the Time is Near (Moody Press, 2007), p. 136.

<sup>xviii</sup> William Manchester, Douglas MacArthur: American Caesar (Little, Brown and Company, 1978).

<sup>xix</sup> Sam Gordon, Revelation: Worthy is the Lamb (Ambassador, 2000), p. 166.

<sup>xx</sup> David Jeremiah, Escape the Coming Night (W Publishing, 1990), p. 127.