

INTRODUCTION to REVELATION chapter 6

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1 THE THEME

CHRIST SETS THE APOCALYPTIC EVENTS IN WORLD HISTORY IN MOTION

The seven seals reveal and execute the victorious course of Christ and his gospel in world history and its consequences for believers and unbelievers.

2 THE STRUCTURE

See introduction to section 2.

a. The long main New Testament period (6:1-11a)

The long main period consists of breaking the first five seals of the scroll (6:1-11a).

b. The short period at the end of the New Testament period (6:11b)

The short period of violent persecution consists of the peak of the fifth seal of the scroll.

c. The end of the New Testament period (6:12-17)

The end of the New Testament period consists of breaking the sixth seal.

The seventh apocalyptic event (silence in heaven) represents the reasons why Christ's second coming is delayed so long (8:1 ff).

d. The seals, the trumpets and the bowls are parallel!

See introduction 2.

The first to the sixth seals are opened (chapter 6) – followed by a vision in between (chapter 7) – and finally the seventh seal is opened (8:1). The sixth seal depicts the final judgement.

Then the first to the sixth trumpets are blown (chapter 8 and 9) - followed by a vision in between (chapter 10 and 11:1-14) – and finally the seventh trumpet is blown (11:11-19). The seventh trumpet also depicts the final judgement.

Then the first to the seventh bowl are poured out (chapter 16). The seventh bowl again depicts the final judgement.

Although this is the order in which John sees the visions, this is not necessary the chronological order of its contents! The visions in the book of Revelation are *not arranged in a linear-chronological order, but arranged in a parallel-progressive order*, and at least the sixth seal, the seventh trumpet and the seventh bowl are parallel!

It is clear that the seals span the whole New Testament period of time, from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming (Christ's one and only return). And it is also clear that the seals are very much related to the execution of God's eternal plan (the establishing of his kingdom until its final phase) through Christ in world history. God "made known to us the mystery of his will . . . , which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment – (namely) to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him (Christ) we (believers) were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Ephesians 1:9-11).

3 THE CONTENTS

a. The history of the world must be seen against the background of what takes place in heaven!

The contents of the scroll in heaven (5:1) are not really prophecies in the sense of predictions of identifiable future events. The things written in the book are real and have been lying ready to happen from all eternity (2 Kings 19:25; Isaiah 14:24,26,27; 46:9-11; Ephesians 1:9-11). By his death and resurrection Jesus Christ has removed the obstacle, has broken the enchantment or illusion that things are not what they really are and has set the fulfilment of the final things in motion.

From the first until the second coming of Christ the history of the world has an apocalyptic character. This means that the establishment and growth of the Church, the persecution and oppression of Christians, the general disasters and wars, the victories and defeats, the tensions and anxieties reflect the breaking of the seals and the setting in motion of the events that have been written in the scroll. *The history of the world stands no longer by itself, but must be seen against the background of what takes place in heaven!* Things that have been there in principle all along are happening now. The all-encompassing triumph of the Lamb is in the process of being realised in every resistant sphere on earth. At Christ's second coming God's eternal plan will be fully realised and completely visible!

Nevertheless we observe all kinds of delays and elements that slow down this process. If it were only a matter of power, God's eternal plan would be instantly realised! But the reality is much more complex. *All things in history are growing and must first reach ripeness* (a state ready to be reaped). Throughout the book of Revelation we notice events in history that push ahead towards the final end. There are influences from heaven that speed up this process. But every time the final end seems to be near, a new series of factors or powers are revealed that moves the end further away: the revelation of the seven seals are followed by the revelation of the seven trumpets and these are followed by the revelation of the seven bowls. *This is the unfathomable phenomenon of delay or of slowing down the movement of history towards the end.* The book of Revelation contains two opposite tendencies. On the one hand everything is ready: the Lamb has been slaughtered and has received the authority to open the scroll in heaven. On the other hand all kinds of resistances hinder the speedy fulfilment of its contents. The confrontation of these two tendencies is a theme of the Book of Revelation.¹

The seven seals reveal and execute the victorious course of Christ and his gospel in world history and the consequences this has for those who believe in him on the one hand and for those who reject him on the other hand. When Christ opens the scroll and breaks the seals, he governs the universe in the interest of his Church (Ephesians 1:22). Then God's glorious, redemptive purpose is being realised. And then the contents of the scroll come to pass in the history of the universe. Because the seals are opened, God's servants are protected in the times of bitter trials (persecutions) and temptations (seductions). Then God's judgements are

¹ cf. Bavinck, pp. 151-154

executed upon a persecuting world. Then Christians are led to ultimate triumph. And then the new heaven and new earth finally come into being.

b. The message of the first seal

The first seal represents Jesus Christ riding forth victoriously, conquering and to conquer, especially through the proclamation of the gospel, the gospel of grace, which is at the same time the gospel of the kingdom (Acts 8:12; 19:8-10; 20:24-25; 28:23,31). This happens throughout the whole New Testament period.

In 62 A.D. the Parthians on their small and fast horses and with bows conquered a Roman army. However the vision in Revelation 6:1-2 does not represent the Parthians. The rider on the white horse does not represent cruel war (like the rider on the red horse), but the peaceful triumphant march of the gospel all over the world. This does not refer to war with burning cities, fleeing citizens, captured slaves, plunder, rape and tyranny, but rather blessing, peace, joy and expectation of life. Amidst the wars, famine and earthquakes (Matthew 24:4-13), Matthew 24:14 says that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world and then the end will come. Also in prophecy Christ is likened to 'a sharpened sword and a polished arrow' (Isaiah 49:2).

The intended meaning of the rider on the white horse is that Christ through his Word hits the heart and causes wholesome wounds that save people. The sword character of the Word is for close encounter (Ephesians 5:17), but the arrow character of the Word is to reach people far away (e.g. by the written word, by radio or by missionary journeys). The Church always has a missionary calling and responsibility: its feet must be fitted with shoes that represent the readiness to proclaim the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15). The Church must be wise by making the most out of every opportunity (Ephesians 5:15). The Church is God's chosen people, the priests and kings and prophets that declare God's praise (1 Peter 2:9-10). And the Church has the responsibility to proclaim the gospel of Christ's kingship as a testimony to every nation in the context of 'the last things' (Matthew 24:4-14). Whenever throughout the whole New Testament period the realisation in the Church grows strong that we are living in 'the last days', the missionary activity of the Church also grows the strongest. The rider on the white horse is the first sign of the coming kingdom in its final phase.²

c. The message of the second seal

The second seal represents slaughtering during wars in general and during the religious persecution of Christians in particular. Christians are slaughtered simply because they hold to the testimony of Jesus Christ (12:17). This slaughtering happens throughout the whole New Testament period.

The rider on the fiery red horse represents in general the outbreak of terrible wars all over the world as a consequence of people not knowing the prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. And it represents in particular the bloody religious persecutions (holy wars) especially against Christians as a consequence of people reacting against the gospel of peace.

The short Roman sword is a symbol of violent death (slaughter). With it men slay each other and peace is taken away from the earth (6:4). Throughout the history of the world all the wars and bloody persecutions prove that it is impossible for man or nations to establish a kingdom of peace and blessing on earth! Every war and every bloody persecution point to the final destruction of this present earth and to the kingdom of God in its final phase (the new earth). Wars and bloody persecutions will penetrate even the furthest places on earth and people and nations will destroy one another en masse.

This rider does not appear by itself in history. It is God who sends him and gives him power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other (6:4)! It is God who interferes with the history of this world and speaks his word. It does not mean that it is God who actually instigates people to war and cruel slaughter or causes wars and slaughter, because the Bible says that God makes wars to cease to the ends of the earth, breaks the bow, shatters the spear and burns the shield (Psalm 46:9). It is people who in their pride, madness and greed make war with one another (James 4:1). Throughout the whole New Testament period God gives nations and people over to what they have been doing all along. They brought violent wars and persecutions

² cf. Bavinck, pp. 154-166

along and finally God hands them over to their own destruction (Romans 1:24,26,28; Galatians 6:7-8). God no longer holds back the hand of man that is raised to destroy his neighbour. The increase of violent war and slaughter in the world in the end-time thus has a theological ground, namely, the proclamation of Jesus Christ.³

d. The message of the third seal

The third seal represents injustice and oppression causing economic hardship, poverty, inflation and hunger for everyone in general and for Christians in particular, because Christians live according to the gospel. This happens throughout the whole New Testament period.

The rider on the black horse represents poverty, inflation and hunger throughout the whole New Testament period. Money loses its value, the ordinary necessities of life become more expensive and finally a labourer can just supply for his own need. Even if people switch from the more expensive wheat to the cheap barley they still cannot support their family, because prices will be about eight times the normal price.⁴

e. The message of the fourth seal

The fourth seal represents the universal calamities which Christians suffer along with the rest of the world for the simple reason that Christians live in the present world which is characterised by gross selfishness, arbitrary freedom and arrogant independence. This happens throughout the whole New Testament period.

The pale horse represents death as a result of rejecting or resisting Christ and the gospel (the rider on the white horse). The proclamation of the truth of the Bible causes three things to happen to the people in the world:

Their view of nature changes. Their old superstitions are removed and they are set free to do their task consisting of subduing the earth and ruling over creation as God's stewards (Genesis 1:28). They are set free to practise science and industry.

Their view of society changes. They can no longer drown in their rigid traditional communities with its communal convictions and social controls as before. Their need towards personal freedom and independence is awakened which makes them aware of themselves and their inalienable moral convictions about life.

Their view of God changes. Their ignorance about who God is as well as their fear for demons are removed and they acquire a sense of responsibility to relate to the living God.

The proclamation of the truth of the Bible to the nations makes their responsibility bigger and their judgement heavier. However, when their desire for freedom and independence is loosened from the framework of submission to God, their freedom and independence becomes arbitrary and their corruption becomes bigger every day. When through the preaching of the truths of the Bible the old defences behind which they had hidden are broken down and the yoke of their old moral standards is removed, new powers (the sword, famine, the plague and wild beasts) come alive. When the nations begin to proclaim themselves as free and independent people that can and may subdue nature for their own selfish purposes and that can and may do socially, intellectually, physically, morally and spiritually whatever they want, then their advance will lead to their ruin. Freedom and independence without responsibility and accountability lead to rebellion and chaos. When the nations reject Jesus Christ and the truths of the Bible, God hands them over to follow their own ways and their own ways will destroy them (Romans 1:18-32).

Then the following three things happen:

The nations become selfish and claim the raw materials of the earth (wood of forests, water of rivers, oil and metals in rocks, land for cultivation) for themselves at the expense of the poor. Or they misuse God's creation for their own selfish purposes and pollute the air, the water and the earth.

The nations become arrogant in their convictions about freedom and independence. Physically they live unhealthy lives. Intellectually they fall into relativism and all kinds of lies. Socially they discriminate against their neighbours. Morally they sink into the quagmire of corruption and sexual immorality. And spiritually they get ensnared in the lies of the religions of the world.

³ cf. Bavinck, pp. 166-171

⁴ cf. Bavinck, pp. 171-172

The nations become independent, not only from everyone else, but especially from God, his truths and laws in the Bible and from all other rules. They become the captain of their own ship and the master of their own destiny. In short, they become their own god.⁵

f. The relationship between the first four seals

The four seals have a logical connection. The proclamation of the gospel calls wars and especially persecution of Christians into existence all over the world. Wars and persecution call poverty and hunger into existence. And hunger and poverty call death into existence.

The persecution of Christians by slaughtering them or by unjustly oppressing them as well as the universal calamities suffered by all people help Christ and his gospel to accomplish their conquering and victorious course! They open doors and hearts for hearing the gospel, touch hearts and bring them into the narrow, making people broken-hearted and vulnerable, driving their souls to seek God and God's mercy and grace and to receive Christ into their hearts and lives. "Just as man is destined to *die once*, and after that to face judgement, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring *salvation* to those who are waiting for him" (Hebrews 9:27-28) and *judgement* (raging fire) that will consume the enemies of God (Hebrews 10:27)!

Of course, sometimes the result is just the opposite and they will curse God (Isaiah 8:21-22), but with people whom God elected and Christ redeemed the heart is prepared and humbled by difficulties (Psalm 107:12-13; 119:71).

Thus, the second, third and fourth seals are subject to the first seal. Their opening serves to reveal and execute the victorious course of Christ and his gospel throughout the whole New Testament period. The preaching of Christ receives all kinds of opposition and is the cause of many struggles. Whenever Christ or his gospel is rejected or opposed, God comes with all kinds of judgements. The trumpets of judgement are on the one hand God's punishments and on the other hand God's means to bring people to repentance. The first four seals show us the main events in world history and their significance for the victorious course of Christ and his gospel!

g. The message of the fifth seal

The fifth seal represents the martyred Christians comforted in heaven with God. It also shows God's patience in delaying the final judgement of those who oppose or reject Christ and his gospel (2 Peter 3:9). This happens throughout the whole New Testament period, but especially during the great tribulation.

The first five seals picture the victorious course of the conquering Christ and the gospel in world history between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming. But Christ and his message in the Bible are being resisted, opposed, and rejected and cause violent wars and persecution, economic decline and hardship, gross selfishness, arbitrary freedom and arrogant independence. Finally Christians are martyred simply because they possess the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus.⁶

h. The message of the sixth seal

The sixth seal represents the final judgement day, the great catastrophe on the final day of history.

Throughout the whole New Testament period cosmic disasters like earthquakes (floods and famines) and wars are God's final warnings for people on earth to repent. Such disasters have also been predicted in all Old Testament prophecies (Ezekiel 14:21) and in Christ's New Testament teaching about 'the last days' (Matthew 24:4-14).

The judgement which God *allows* is the wars on earth and its consequences of hunger and death. These originate with man and God allows these judgements to come over man. Man reaps what he sows. But the

⁵ cf. Bavinck, pp. 172-176

⁶ cf. Bavinck, pp. 177-180

final judgement which God *brings* is the darkening of the sun, moon and stars and the great earthquake. These originate directly from God.

The catastrophic disasters of the sixth seal are *the final outpouring of God's wrath* on the impenitent world. Throughout world history man has made many technological advances and proud accomplishments. But in the final judgement day every wall man erected will collapse.

Every man will feel his utter powerlessness before God. Man, who did not shrink back from anything and made the whole nature his scientific laboratory and social playfield, will be confronted with his indescribable smallness and weakness. Every city with its towers, banks, businesses, factories and hospitals will collapse. Driven by maddening fear people will flee en masse from every building. They will flee to every place trying to escape and to hide. The religions of the world who have exchanged the God of the Bible for their own devised gods will realise too late that their own devised gods do not exist. Atheists who had persistently denied the existence of God will be confronted with his existence. People who throughout their lives had turned God off as they turn a light off will on that day not be able to turn God off. The God who has been suppressed, exchanged and kicked away, the God who has been argued away by so-called scientific and philosophical arguments will stand before people as the only reality that still matters! The God who has always been the weakest and the least will rise before them above the mountains in all his fearsome majesty. With the breaking of the sixth seal it will no longer be possible to argue or laugh God away. And man will no longer be able to hide from God. They will have to face the wrath of the One sitting on the throne and the Lamb (Jesus Christ).

With the breaking of the sixth seal the hidden things which Christians accepted by faith (the reality of Jesus Christ, salvation and judgement) will be fully revealed. And the things on earth (godlessness and wickedness) which had always seemed to be what they are not will become what they always have been! The terrible reality of the godlessness and wickedness of the world will become visible. But also the perfect reality of the Lamb will become visible! Jesus Christ who had always been the humblest will emerge as the One sitting on the throne, elevated above everything. Through his death he became the Living One and through his defeat he became the Conqueror. The things any man did to Jesus Christ in his life will return to him as a boomerang (cf. Matthew 25:41-46).

i. The message of the seventh seal

The seventh seal (8:1) represents the unfathomable phenomenon of delay or of slowing down the movement of history towards the end. This evokes silent awe in heaven. It symbolises *the reasons for the delay of Christ's second coming and the end of the present age of suffering*.

There are three reasons: the lack of prayer (8:3-5; James 4:1-2); the lack of doing missions (11:3-7; Matthew 24:14; 2 Peter 3:9) and the fruition of the wickedness on earth (22:11-12; 6:10-11; Matthew 13:30).

j. The history of the world culminates in the great tribulation

The disasters unleashed by the breaking of the seals will reach their peak after the gospel of the kingdom has been preached to all the nations (Matthew 24:14). Then the great tribulation will burst over the world. Then God will give the world over so that everything in the world will become what it really is and always have been – only in a more intensive way: the wars on earth will lead to the worldwide kingdom of the antichrist; and poverty will lead to increasing hunger, dissatisfaction, rebellion, bitterness and hate. The desire for power and selfishness will dominate the world.

The only thing that makes this bearable is the fact that the One who in a sovereign way opens the seals is Jesus Christ! As he opens the scroll in heaven its contents happen and are set in motion. He controls all events in history, including the great tribulation! Amidst all the seeming meaninglessness and confusion in the history of the world it is that faith that gives courage to Christians to go through the fiercest persecution.⁷

⁷ cf. Bavinck, pp. 180-189

4 THE BACKGROUND

a. Tribulations

The tribulations in Matthew 24:1-35 and Revelation 6:1-17 are not parallel. While Revelation chapter 6 describes the tribulations that will *follow the first coming* of Christ throughout the whole New Testament period, Matthew chapter 24 describes the tribulations that will *precede the second coming* of Christ towards the end of the New Testament period. The period of the great tribulation will be an indefinite short period of time (Matthew 24:21-25; Revelation 6:11b) and will happen just before the one and only second coming of Christ (Matthew 24:26-31; Revelation 6:12-17).

b. Horses and riders

John's vision is related to Zechariah's vision in Zechariah 1:8-17 and 6:1-8.⁸ In these visions the triumph of God's course is pictured. Zechariah wrote in about February 520 B.C.

In Zechariah 1:8-17 there was an explaining angel (Zechariah 1:9), the Angel of the Lord standing among the myrtle trees and the riders on horses. The myrtle trees are evergreen trees and they were standing in a water rich valley. This picture symbolises the dwelling-place of God (as the two mountains of bronze does in Zechariah 6:1-3), because heaven represented as a temple was not yet ready - the (second) temple was not yet rebuilt. The riders on their horses stood before the Angel of the Lord. The leader of the horses was riding a red horse and behind him stood the other riders on red, brown and white horses. They were God's messengers who had returned from all over the world to bring out a report to their Sender, God, through the Mediator, the Angel of the Lord. Each rider reported what he had seen himself. Their report was that "everything in the world was still at rest and in peace". This was evidently not a favourable report for Jerusalem. The Israelites evidently expected a great movement among the nations before the Messianic Age would begin (Haggai 2:3-4,20-22). There had been rebellions in the Persian Empire, and these had raised the expectation among the Israelites that the Messianic Age was about to begin. However, these rebellions were crushed a couple of months before, in the summer 521 B.C. Despite Israel's return from exile in 538 B.C., the Lord's wrath had not yet turned away from Israel (Zechariah 1:1:3,16).

The Angel of the Lord then interceded for Israel (Zechariah 1:12; cf. Romans 8:34; Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:25) and this was a great comfort for Zechariah and his people. He asked how long God would withhold mercy from Jerusalem and Judah. While Jeremiah 25:11 reckons the seventy years of exile from 605 to 538 B.C., Zechariah 1:12 (cf. 7:5) reckons the seventy years of exile from 586 to 519 B.C. This double reckoning already shows that the number 70 is *a symbolic number* - a period determined by God. The explaining angel gave God's answer to the prayer of the Angel of the Lord (Zechariah 1:14-15). The sovereign Lord's burning love for Israel would turn into anger against the nations, who had ill-treated Israel. The expected turmoil among the nations would certainly come and was at hand.

This prophecy was fulfilled in the rebuilding of the temple (519 B.C.) and in the receiving of precious gifts for the temple from the Israelites living in Babylon, and in the return of more Israelites to Jerusalem together with foreigners of the Gentile nations which joined them.

Although Zechariah 1:8-17 is a similar vision to Revelation chapter 6, there is no evidence that it has a similar meaning as Revelation chapter 6! In Zechariah chapter 1, the colours of the horses have no specific symbolic meaning as in Revelation chapter 6. Also the rider on the red horse is not to be identified with the Angel of the Lord. The only identification between these two visions is the relationship between the four horses in both visions. In Zechariah chapter 1, the riders on the second, third and fourth group of horses stood behind the rider on the first horse. They were associated with the rider on the first horse and were in the service of the rider on the first horse. Likewise, in Revelation chapter 6, the riders on the second, third and fourth horses are pictured to be in the service of the rider on the first horse.

In Zechariah 6:1-8 there were horses before four chariots, and they represented the four winds or spirits of heaven. They had stood before God in order to give a report of what they had done in his service and in order

⁸ Dr. J. Ridderbos, *Korte Verklaring der heilige Schrift, De Kleine Profeten*, Kampen, 1952

to receive new orders from God. The horses were powerful and straining to execute their commission. They received the command to go and they went forth throughout the earth. They went towards the four directions in the world. The black horses represent the Spirit of God working in the north, just as the Hebrew word indicates, because it is the region of dark skies. The red horses represent the Spirit of God working in the east, where the sun rises. The white horses represent the Spirit of God working in the west, because there the sea is a shining and foaming surface. The dappled horses represent the Spirit of God working in the south - the association is not clear. Zechariah 6:8 explains that this vision represents the Spirit of God going out into the whole world to execute God's eternal plan for the whole earth. Thus God's command causes his Spirit to be carried as it were on chariots of wind to all places in the world to execute God's eternal plan.

The black horses went to the north, that is, to Babylon. In Zechariah 5:5-11, wickedness was carried and *let down* in Babylon and in Zechariah 6:1-8, the Spirit of God was carried and *let down* in Babylon (same Hebrew word). Wherever the Spirit of God works, he will work both with a view to *judgement* of the wicked and with a view to *salvation* of God's people. Also in Isaiah 4:4, God would cleanse Jerusalem by 'a spirit of judgement and a spirit of fire' and in Haggai 2:3-5 and Zechariah 4:6-9, God would strengthen his servants and people especially with a view to rebuild the temple, through his Spirit which remained among them. Thus, God would also work in Babylon with a view to judgement and salvation. When the Spirit of God was let down in the midst of wickedness, his work was judgement towards the wicked and salvation toward his people still living in great numbers in Babylon (Zechariah 2:7). And in the context, the Spirit would bring not only many Israelites, but also many people from the Gentile nations to the living God (Zechariah 2:11; 8:20-23).

Note the contrast with the vision in Zechariah chapter 1: there the report was that the whole world was still at rest and in peace (Zechariah 1:11), while after the Spirit was let down in Babylon, this rest and peace would come to an end due to the Spirit of God which brings the nations of the world into turmoil and into seeking the living God. Thus in Zechariah chapter 6, God sent out his Spirit to prepare for the Messianic period of salvation and judgement (the whole New Testament period). This triumph of God's cause in Zechariah is caused by God's Spirit (Zechariah 6:5,8), but also by means of a shaking of the nations (Haggai 2:6). Zechariah chapter 6 speaks *first of the struggle* and *then of the victory gained*. Revelation chapter 6 speaks *first of the victory* (6:1-2) and *then of the struggle* (6:3-11) by which that victory is finally gained.

c. Eschatological end-time events

Old Testament prophecy also speaks of the eschatological (end-time) events. It uses the same kind of language as Revelation 6:12-17 (Isaiah 13:9-11; 34:4; Ezekiel 38:19-20; Amos 8:8-9; Joel 2:10-11,31-32a; cf. Matthew 24:29; Luke 21:25-26; 2 Peter 3:10-12; Revelation chapters 16, 18 and 20:11-15).

a. Earthquakes.

There shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground (Ezekiel 38:19).

The day of the Lord is great and dreadful: the earth shakes and the sky trembles (Joel 2:10-11).

In the day of judgement the land will tremble for its unrighteousness. The whole land will rise like the Nile, it will be stirred up and then sink like the river of Egypt (Amos 8:8).

And Jesus said that there would be earthquakes in various places (Matthew 24:8).

b. Darkening of the sun, moon and stars.

The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light (Isaiah 13:10).

All the stars of the heaven will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll. The entire starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shrivelled figs from the fig tree (Isaiah 34:4).

The day of the Lord is great and dreadful: the sun and moon are darkened and the stars no longer shine (Joel 2:10-11). The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord (Joel 2:31).

In the day of judgement the Lord will make the sun go down at noon and darken the sky in broad daylight (Amos 8:9). And Jesus said that the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken (Matthew 24:29).