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“Who is Able to Stand?” Revelation 6:12-17

Throughout the years, there have been many people in the world who have been interested in or even fascinated with doomsday scenarios.

Many people have an expectation that life, as we know it will come to an end; possibly during their lifetimes.

People turn to various human sources for information. One of those sources is **Nostradamus**, a famous physician, astronomer, and astrologer from the mid 16th century.

Later in his life he turned to writing prophecy in the form of quatrains, which are four line French poems.

Every year, tabloids, newspapers, and news magazines interpret his so-called prophecies for the year. One year that has already been receiving a great deal of attention is 2012.

The 2012 Nostradamus predictions paint a bleak picture of massive destruction and havoc brought about by a comet. It is unclear from this prophecy, whether this supposed comet will strike the earth or just pass close by.

The main reason that his 2012 predictions have caused a stir is because the Mayan calendar comes to an end on December 21, 2012. Many people have hypothesized that the world will also come to an end on this date.

This anticipation of the end of the world has increased to the point that even underground shelters are being built in preparation for future doomsday scenarios.

The Vivos Group located in Del Mar, California is one such group preparing **underground shelters** like this one shown here.

These shelters are built to provide safety for 1,000 people for 1 year.

They are built to endure most catastrophes including a pole shift, super volcano eruptions, solar flares, earthquakes, tsunamis, and asteroids, as well as manmade devastations such as nuclear bombs, bio terrorism, and chemical warfare.

I am not trying to advertise or sell spots. I do not own shares in the company. I am simply highlighting the extremes that people have taken in light of prophecies regarding 2012.

However, the problem with many of these prophecies is that they are vague and often times not entirely accurate.

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But there is one place we can go to get the truth about the end of times. The Book of Revelation in the Bible provides us with the truth about the end.

So turn with me to Revelation 6:12-17 and we will look at a true doomsday scenario. While you are turning there, let me briefly review what we have already covered in Revelation 6.

Remember in Revelation chapter 6, the focus is on God's judgment poured out upon the earth. In particular these end times events that we are studying about is a period of God's judgment known as the Tribulation Period.

We saw in Revelation 6:1-8, that John was given a vivid description of literal events that will take place on the earth during the first half of the tribulation period.

With the opening of the first seal, we saw that there will be a rise of false messiahs culminating in the rise of the antichrist and his pseudo peace through a covenant with Israel.

With the opening of the second seal, we saw that there will be world-wide warfare and bloodshed breaking out as supposed peace and prosperity will turn to conflict.

With the opening of the third seal, we saw that there will be a devastating world-wide famine, where a full days salary will barely buy food for one person for one day.

With the opening of the fourth seal, we saw that $\frac{1}{4}$ of the earth's population will perish as a result of war, famine, disease, and wild beasts.

We saw in Revelation 6:9-11 and the breaking of the fifth seal, that John was given a vision of slain tribulation saints under the altar awaiting the culmination of God's judgment upon the unbelieving world.

Now we come to the end of Revelation 6, verses 12-17 where we see the results of the breaking of the sixth seal judgment. It is probably necessary to mention the timing of this particular judgment.

Since Matthew 24:15 marks the mid-point of the tribulation and the description in Matthew 24:16-29 utilizes similar terminology as Revelation 6:12-17, it is generally accepted that this sixth seal judgment occurs shortly after the mid-point of the tribulation period.

Let's read Revelation 6:12-17.

There are 2 features of this sixth seal judgment that are necessary for us to understand, and then we need to consider what our response should be.

First, we must understand the Record of Devastation (6:12-14).

The opening of the sixth seal marks another great catastrophe upon the earth.

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It is important to point out that this is one judgment with 6 different devastating results. So what are those results?

1-There will be a damaging earthquake.

John writes in Revelation 6:12, *“I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake.”*

There have been many earthquakes in recorded history and according to Matthew 24:7 there will be many that take place during the first half of the tribulation period.

But the cataclysmic event that John saw in this seal seems far more powerful and devastating than any previous earthquake.

The Greek [MEGAS SEISMOS] literally means a great shaking and can actually apply to the air, sea, or land.

For instance, this phrase is used in other contexts such as a storm on the Sea of Galilee as in Matthew 8:24. However, here in Revelation 6:12 it is God’s judgment directed toward the people of the earth and is thus speaking of a great shaking of the earth.

God has often made His presence felt in human history by shaking the earth. He did so when He gave the Law to Israel at Mount Sinai as recorded in Exodus 19:18.

Also, in Isaiah 29:6 and Ezekiel 38:19 earthquakes are associated with God’s judgment. Here in Revelation 6:12 God’s judgment in the breaking of the sixth seal results in a great shaking of the earth that appears to be world-wide in scope.

Henry Morris explains this to some extent in his commentary on Revelation. He says:

“The great earthquake described here... for the first time in history is worldwide in scope. Seismologists and geophysicists in recent years have learned a great deal about the structure of the earth and about the cause and nature of earthquakes.

The earth's solid crust is traversed with a complex network of faults, with all resting upon a ... mantle whose structure is still largely unknown.

Whether the crust consists of great moving plates is a current matter of controversy among geophysicists, so the ultimate cause of earthquakes is still not [entirely] known.

In all likelihood, the entire complex of crustal instabilities is a remnant of the phenomena of the great Flood, especially the breakup of the fountains of the great deep.

In any case, the vast worldwide network of unstable earthquake belts around the world suddenly will begin to slip and fracture on a global basis, and a gigantic earthquake will ensue.”

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In this future time, just when the Antichrist will be worshipped as God and his false prophet will be proclaiming that utopia is at hand, in an instant, the world's false hopes will be shattered by the violent shaking of the earth under their feet.

Not only will there be a great shaking of the earth, but...

2-There will be a darkening of the sun.

John goes on to say in Revelation 6:12, *“and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair.”*

In ancient times, sackcloth was a rough cloth worn by mourners, and was usually made from the hair of black goats. In other words, the sun will be darkened to the extent that it will be pitch black during the daytime.

The sun will more than likely be darkened from all of the debris in the air. The damaging earthquake is evidently accompanied by tremendous volcanic eruptions, spewing vast quantities of dust and steam and gases into the upper atmosphere.”

The darkening of the sun is closely associated with the third result.

3-There will be a discoloring of the moon.

John goes on to state at the end of verse 12, *“and the whole moon became like blood.”*

John is not saying that the moon became blood, but that it had a blood red appearance.

John MacArthur says, “There will be vast clouds of ash and smoke spewed out by the volcanic activity associated with the great worldwide earthquake. That ash and smoke will eclipse the moon, coloring it blood red as it attempts to pierce the smoke-darkened sky.”

The prophet Joel spoke of these same phenomena in connection with the Day of the Lord. In Joel 2:31, he says, *“The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.”*

Isaiah also speaks of this time period in Isaiah 13:9-10, when he says, *“Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it. 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.”*

These phenomena will likely affect every aspect of life on earth as the normal cycle of daylight and darkness is disrupted. This darkening of the sun and discoloring of the moon will add more reason for the world to be in a panic.

In addition to a damaging earthquake, the darkening of the sun and the discoloring of the moon...

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4-There will be a dropping of the stars to the earth.

John records in Revelation 6:13, *“and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.”*

It is best to understand that these are not literal stars, as we know them today. Stars would be much too large and would incinerate the earth long before impact.

The Greek [ASTERES] refers to any luminous body in the sky other than the sun or moon. Since the stars are still in place at the time of the fourth trumpet judgment in Revelation 8:12, then these must be some other heavenly bodies.

The most likely identification of these falling stars is that of a great swarm of asteroids that pummel the earth. Such an encounter is a real possibility, and would cause great devastation upon the earth.

John provides an illustration of how dramatic this event will be. He says that they will fall to the earth as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by the wind.

This isn't just one asteroid or meteor that strikes the earth, rather the illustration pictures a vast number of asteroids that will pummel the earth.

Modern experts believe that the impacts of asteroids, comets or meteors striking the earth would be devastating and cause unprecedented destruction.

It might even be the trigger that will set off the global earthquake as well as the darkening of the sun and discoloring of the moon. But the devastation does not end here; John goes on to inform us that...

5-There will be a dividing of the sky.

John says in Revelation 6:14, *“The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up...”*

This vivid picture finds a parallel in Isaiah 34:4, which says, *“And all the host of heaven will wear away, And the sky will be rolled up like a scroll; All their hosts will also wither away As a leaf withers from the vine, Or as one withers from the fig tree.”*

This is a description of some sort of unusual atmospheric condition. It is likely that the preceding results of this judgment in some way have affected the earth's atmosphere to give this unusual appearance.

Some have suggested that the clouds of dust and ash will gradually spread across the sky, making it appear as if the sky is rolled up like a scroll. While others, suggest that the movement of the earth's crust creates this appearance.

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Whatever the case, it is an unusual condition and it is necessary to keep in mind that John is utilizing terminology from his day to describe the unusual condition, which he sees. Lastly John goes on to mention that...

6-There will be a displacing of the mountains and islands.

This incredible disaster is not over yet, because John says in verse 14, *“and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.”*

Japan’s coastline moved about 8 feet from the earthquake on Friday. But the result of the sixth seal judgment is that every mountain and island are moved out of place.

The earth’s crust will be so disturbed by the impacting asteroids, the volcanic explosions and the worldwide earthquakes that great segments of it will begin to slip and slide displacing the mountains and islands.

The devastating natural disasters accompanying this sixth seal judgment will be the most terrifying events to affect the earth up to this point.

Their cumulative impact will be far more destructive than any of the current doomsday scenarios conjured up by mankind.

Certainly, John outlines a record of devastation from the breaking of the sixth seal, but how do people react?

Second, we must understand the Reaction of Dread (6:15-17).

In verses 15-17, John describes the reaction of the people to the devastating judgment of the sixth seal. There are 3 facets to this reaction that we must take note of.

1-Notice the people who are filled with dread.

John says in Revelation 6:15, *“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...”*

Such a mighty display of cosmic power will finally gain the attention of the entire ungodly world. These categories of people listed here in verse 15 include all classes of society.

- *The kings of the earth* likely refer to the heads of state throughout the world.
- *The great men* are probably the high-ranking officials in government.
- *The commanders* are the military leaders.
- *The rich* are those who control commerce and business.
- *The strong* may refer to the influential people of the world.

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Together these people comprise the elite elements of human society. Neither, political power, military authority, riches, nor influence will exempt anyone from God's judgment.

The common people, or the lower classes will not escape either. John says that every slave and free man will be as terrified as the influential and wealthy.

The people of the earth are so fearful and full of dread that they hide themselves.

2-Notice the place where they fled.

John goes on to say in verse 15 that they *“hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains.”*

The people are in a panic and they run for the hills. They hide themselves in caves and in the rocks of the mountains.

It is interesting that the people flee to the very places that are being shaken and moved out of place. They are clearly seeking refuge from the swarms of asteroids bombarding the earth.

But, in light of the massive earthquake, widespread volcanic eruptions and the other disturbances of the earth's crust, it becomes quite clear that such hiding places will offer no safety.

It is impossible to hide from God or evade His judgment! Not only do they try to hide themselves, but...

3-Notice their plea; they wished that they were dead.

John records in verses 16-17, *“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?’”*

Now, they finally realize that all of the disasters that have come upon them are the result of God's wrath. More specifically they fear the wrath of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ as the agent of judgment.

Their hearts are so hardened against God that they are unwilling to repent. Instead, they call on the rocks and mountains to fall on them and crush them. The people will be so terrified that they would rather die than face the wrath of a holy God.

However, they foolishly ignore the fact that death will provide absolutely no way of escape from divine judgment, for they will ultimately be cast into the eternal lake of fire according to Revelation 20:11-15.

It is important to point out that the phrase, *“the great day of their wrath”* is another term for the Day of the Lord.

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Apparently the people of the world at that time will understand that the final wrath and judgment of God is at hand. Remember we still have the seventh seal, the seven trumpets and the seven bowl judgments still to come.

The scene closes with the asking of a rhetorical question, “*Who is able to stand?*” The answer of course is? No one!

In Nahum 1:6, Nahum wrote, “*Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger?*” The implied answer is? No one!

In 1 Thessalonians 5:3, Paul declares that “*destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.*”

The ungodly will not be able to evade divine judgment. Who is able to stand? No one! This picture, horrifying and frightening as it is, is not altogether hopeless. Why?

As we will see in Revelation 7:9, a great multitude of people will be saved in the midst of the terrors of divine judgment. Many will repent and come to embrace Jesus as Lord.

Also, the church will be delivered from that time of judgment according to Revelation 3:10 which says, “*Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*”

So, what should be our response as believers in light of these future events?

A knowledge of these future events should remind us of God’s sovereignty!

In a world that often seems to be in chaos or in the grip of wickedness; we need to remember that God is in control of it all.

The Bible proclaims the power and sovereignty of God and reminds us that His purposes for the future will come to pass.

No one can thwart His mighty plans and purposes. We should be comforted in knowing that He is in control

In **Isaiah 40:12-26** the prophet Isaiah declared that God our Creator is not impressed with the assumed power of men and nations, which is anemic in comparison to His sovereign power.

In fact, he asserted that God regards them as dust on the scales, as a drop from a bucket, and as nothing and meaningless.

According to **Psalm 2:1-12**, God is the king of the universe and in absolute power now and in the future.

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A knowledge of these future events should also revive us with comfort and hope.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is the key rapture passage and is written by Paul so that we as believers would offer comfort and hope to others in light of our future removal from this earth to be with the LORD.

In fact **Titus 2:13** emphasizes that the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus is our blessed hope.

These future events should motivate us to long for Our Lord's return.

Lastly, A knowledge of these future events should return us to godly living.

Several passages emphasize a need to strive for personal holiness and godliness in light of future events.

- According to **1 Corinthians 15:51-58**, knowing that the Lord will return should motivate us to abound in the work of the Lord.
- The judgment seat of Christ in **2 Corinthians 5:10** should motivate us toward good works.
- **Titus 2:11-14** indicates that a focus on our blessed hope will move us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and drive us to live sensibly, righteously and godly.
- **2 Peter 3:14** is a command that we be diligent to be found in peace, spotless and blameless in light of future events.
- According to **1 John 3:2-3** in light of the coming of Christ we should be striving for purity just as Christ is pure.

While the world looks forward to various doomsday scenarios, the future of the believer in Christ is different. We have a blessed hope!

We will not face these doomsday scenarios. We will not face the wrath of God being poured out upon the earth in the tribulation.

Rather we have something better; something greater; something more exciting.

For the true Christian, there will be a day with no more tears, no more pain, no more fears, no more burdens for we will see Jesus face to face!

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My hope is that we are living in light of these future events, and that we embrace Christ as our Lord and Savior so that we may stand in His presence rather than face the devastating consequences of God's judgment.