

**Revelation #20****December 4, 2022****Series Title: The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Behold I Am Coming Soon****Today's Message: The Seven Seals: The Fifth Seal; Revelation 6:9-11**

We come to the fifth seal, the midpoint of the Tribulation. Unlike the opening of the first four seals, in the following seals we do not hear a voice of one of the four creatures. The fifth seal marks a change in events. Tony Garland observes, "We now leave behind the "beginning of sorrows" spoken of by Jesus and enter the time of tribulation characterized by martyrdom:

"Jesus answered: Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and deceive many. You will hear of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pangs. Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of Me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other." (Matthew 24:4-10)

So, we take it that the "beginning of sorrows/birth pangs" of Matthew 24:4-8 correspond with the first four seals of Revelation 6, and the Fifth Seal marks the midpoint of the 7 years of Tribulation and corresponds with the martyrdom described in Matthew 24:8-28.

Perhaps most useful for us is that the martyrs of the Fifth Seal are in God's tender care: He sees them, He hears their prayers, and He provides His divine comfort! Let's take a look.

**(Revelation 6:9-11) The Fifth Seal: The Martyred Saints Are Comforted By God.****I. (6:9) God Sees His Martyred Saints**

A. When the fifth seal was opened by the Lamb, John immediately saw an altar, he saw "under the altar", and he saw the souls of martyrs who were under the altar.

**1. The altar**

a) In the Greek Septuagint (The Greek Translation of the OT) the same word for "altar", that we see here in Revelation 6:9, is used for the "Altar of Burnt Offerings"

- (1) Aaron and his sons would, after putting the blood of the bull on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, pour the remaining blood beside the base of the altar (Exodus 29:12; Leviticus 8:15)
- (2) The same pattern was followed for the sin offering of Leviticus 4:7. The blood would be poured out at the base of the altar.

- (a) Think of the thousands of animal sacrifices offered every day all year long. The value of the blood did not go unnoticed by God!

2. "Under the altar"

- a) This imagery is intended to connect the martyrdom of the saints with the blood of the OT sacrifices, **reminding us** that the blood of the martyrs does not go unnoticed! **God sees!**
- b) Just as the blood of the animal of sacrifice represented the life of the animal (Leviticus 17:11-14), so the souls "under the altar" remind God of the life of the martyr sacrificed for God
  - (1) The blood of the saints, then, are **in God's sight**, an offering to the Lord.
    - (a) Not of *atonement*, but of *devotion*!
      - (i) Perhaps their sacrifice of devotion has become a pleasing aroma to God!
      - (ii) God loves unwavering devotion to Him!

3. Souls:

- a) These souls are living!
  - (1) Upon the believer's death in the body, the soul lives!
    - (a) We do not believe in "soul sleep".
    - (b) These souls are immediately in God's presence upon death!
      - (i) 2 Corinthians 5:8: "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."
    - (c) These souls have a voice (6:10).
  - (2) These souls are the souls of the Tribulation saints, martyred for Christ!
  - (3) Not of the blood of the martyrs from "church age."
    - (a) The saints of the church age have been raptured already.
  - (4) These souls are the souls of Jews and Gentiles who come to faith during the Tribulation.
  - (5) These souls under the altar had not yet received their resurrection body.
    - (a) We believe that we will receive our resurrection body at some point in Christ's millennial kingdom!

- (i) Philippians 3:21, where He “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.”
  - (ii) Revelation 20:6a: “Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection.”
  - (iii) 1 Corinthians 15:50: “I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”
- b) These saints were slain/ martyred because...
  - (1) ...of the Word of God
    - (a) Probably these saints were martyred during the first four seals.
    - (b) Their ministry of the Word of God was deemed dangerous because it was at odds with the false religion being foisted upon the “inhabitants of the earth” by the **impersonal forces at work during the first four seals.**
  - (2) ...and because of the testimony they had maintained!
    - (a) Examples of saints dying for their testimony:
      - (i) Stephen in Acts 7:59
      - (ii) Antipas from Pergamum, Rev. 2:13
    - (b) Revelation extols the faithfulness of saints who die because of their testimony in Revelation 14:13 by saying, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...because their deeds follow them.”

## II. (6:10) God Hears His Martyred Saints

- A. First, remember that the martyrdom of the tribulation saints is not a judgment on them.
  - 1. The fifth seal is that “bridge” in the middle of the tribulation
- B. He hears the **prayers** of the martyrs!
  - 1. These prayers are a powerful force urging God to act with vengeance on those who have murdered them!
  - 2. Their prayers are fitting, for judgment has come! They are praying accordingly: God has initiated judgment on the nations, which rage against Him.
    - a) Imprecatory prayers!
      - (1) These kind of prayers are not self-seeking, but are consistent with His purposes.

- (2) But these prayers demonstrate their hatred toward all the acts of sinful men that malign and dishonor God!

C. The prayer

1. In a loud voice
  - a) Loud and in unison
2. "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true..."
  - a) Their acknowledgment of God as "Sovereign Lord" should inspire us.
    - (1) Despite the fact that they died a martyrs death (in most instances a gruesome, torturous death, they yield to His Lordship.
      - (a) We would do well to receive from the Lord even suffering and death at the hand of evil if He wills it to be so!
  - b) Their acknowledgment of God as Sovereign Lord is also an acknowledgment of His ownership over them.
    - (1) Do you think like that in your difficulties and hard circumstances?
3. "...until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"
  - a) **This request gives us the answer as to "how is the fifth seal a seal of judgment?"**
    - (1) Vengeance
      - (a) Their prayer of judgment and vengeance is answered as the "seal judgments" are carried out!
      - (b) Isaiah 63:3-4: "I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come."
  - b) This prayer demonstrates their faith in the Lord to exact His righteous vengeance upon the "inhabitants of the earth" who have rebelled against **the word of God and the testimony of the saints!**
    - (1) Could it be a calling upon the Lord as their *Goel*, or Avenger of blood?"

(a) The “Avenger of Blood” in Numbers 35:19-21<sup>1</sup>, etc, had the legal and moral obligation to exact vengeance upon the murderer of a family member!

(i) The Lamb will act with wrath and fury against those wicked men who have killed His own!

(a) Hebrews 10:31

4. The prayer is against “the inhabitants of the earth”

a) In Revelation that includes everyone who refuses salvation, persecutes the saints, and continues to blaspheme God even in the heat of judgment.

(1) They are the kind who rejoice at the deaths of the two witnesses.

(2) They are the kind who pray to rocks and mountains

(6:15-16,etc.)

(3) They are the kind who continue to reject the Gospel of salvation.

### III. (6:11) God Comforts His Martyred Saints

A. God’s response to these faithful, devoted souls who died for Christ.

1. A symbolic gift (MacArthur):

a) A white robe was given to each one. Not a real robe.

(1) Remember the white robes promised to the “overcomers” in Revelation 3:5 and 3:18?

(2) These robes are gifts of God’s grace symbolizing God’s gift of eternal righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ!

(3) It could also be a reminder of the eternal glory and associated joys of heaven, which are waiting for the saints upon the conclusion of the judgments on earth!

2. A Spoken word from God

a) “Wait a little while longer”

(1) To Comfort and calm them

(2) They can cease from crying out for vengeance and instead rest in God until He finishes His judgment.

(a) God is on the throne and at work. And while their prayers for vengeance have been heard, they need to wait patiently and rest in the Lord of promise and glory!

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers 35:19-21: “The Avenger of blood shall himself put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death. And if he pushed him out of hatred or hurled something at him, lying in wait, so that he died, or in enmity struck him down with his hand, so that he died, then he who struck the blow shall be put to death. He is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.”

(b) How can you apply this principle of praying, waiting and resting?

B. He answers their prayer of, "How long...?"

1. "...until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed."

a) God has a divine and all-wise purpose for allowing the persecution and martyrdom of the saints. Known only unto Him is the exact number.

(1) He knows "who" and "when".

**(a) Will you trust Him in your difficulties...?"**