



THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

“Altar-ed State”

6:9-11

Revelation 6:9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

Revelation 6:10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

Revelation 6:11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were*, was completed.

The Bible is sixty-six books written by over forty inspired authors spanning many centuries. Yet it tells one continuous story and is always consistent with itself.

Case in point: When Jesus gave His disciples what is called the Olivet Discourse on prophecy (Matthew 24 & 25) what He outlined exactly matches what you read in the Revelation. *It's even in the same order!*

Jesus told His disciples there would be false Christ's followed by wars, famines, death, martyrdom, and global chaos. That is exactly the events in order you read as the seals are broken in Revelation six.

Last week we saw that in the first part of the Tribulation people have a one in four chance of being slain by **sword, hunger, death, and... the beasts of the earth**. Even more people are killed as the Tribulation continues - fully one half of the people on earth are slain.

We believe the Bible teaches a pretribulation Rapture of the church. Allow me to quickly list a few reasons why we believe the Rapture to precede the Tribulation:

1. None of the key New Testament passages that deal with the Tribulation mention the presence of the church on the earth.
2. There are several promises that the church is exempt from the coming wrath of the Tribulation.
3. The twenty-four elders, mentioned twelve times in the Revelation, represent the church safe in Heaven before the Tribulation begins. Their number, their clothing, their crowns, and their song all indicate they are the church.
4. The Rapture is always presented as an imminent, any-moment event. Only a pretribulation Rapture allows for it to be imminent.

When Jesus raptures the church before the Tribulation only nonbelievers are left on the earth. We'll see in subsequent chapters that evangelists are raised up to preach the Gospel all over the planet. Some nonbelievers will repent and be saved; most will resist and be lost.

A great many, maybe even the majority, of those who repent and are saved will be martyred. We see them in chapter six already in Heaven.

Revelation 6:9 When He opened the fifth seal...

One-by-one Jesus is opening the seven [seals](#) of the scroll He took from His Father. Each one takes us further in to the Tribulation. The first six seals cover the first three-and-one-half years.

The first four seals unleashed the famous four horsemen of the Apocalypse.

[Revelation 6:9](#) When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar...

In the time in which we live if a believer dies we know that his or her spirit and soul goes immediately to Heaven to await the future resurrection of their body at the time of the rapture. Nonbelievers who die seem to still go to the torment of Hades to await their future resurrection.

During the Tribulation believers who die will go to a specific part of Heaven – [under the altar](#). In the Old Testament the blood of the sacrifices was poured-out under the altar (Exodus 29:12 & Leviticus 4:7). While the nonbelieving Jews are sacrificing animals again in the rebuilt Temple at Jerusalem God recognizes the living sacrifices of those who give everything to confess Jesus as their Savior.

[Revelation 6:9](#) When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

Millions of believers have been martyred through the centuries. Believers are being persecuted and martyred in our own time as well.

According to a 2006 estimate by the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary 171,000 Christians are martyred per year. I found but could not verify a slightly higher number for 2007 – 175,000. That's about 480 Christians daily.

It will be most difficult to openly declare your faith during the Tribulation. I'd say that the majority of those who openly declare Jesus as Savior, or who are found out, will be killed.

Their 'crime' on earth will be two-fold: [the word of God and... the testimony which they held](#). The apostle John, the one receiving the

Revelation, was himself described as being persecuted for the word of God and for his testimony. It points to that moment of crisis when, no matter the human cost, you must stand for Christ.

You can picture them being asked to renounce Jesus but instead they hold fast to their **testimony** and proclaim **the word of God**.

Revelation 6:10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

Ever heard of soul-sleep? It is a doctrine held by Seventh Day Adventists and by Jehovah's Witnesses. Soul sleep is a belief that the soul sleeps unconsciously between the death of the body and its resurrection on Judgment Day.

When the Bible says a person is "sleeping" in relation to death (Luke 8:52; First Corinthians 15:6) it does not mean literal sleep. Sleeping is just a way to describe death because a dead body appears to be sleeping. And because the body will one day be raised.

There are lots of reasons why it is unbiblical and therefore false. One of them is the presence of these very conscious souls under the altar in Heaven during the Tribulation. They are most definitely not sleeping!

The Tribulation martyrs are not seeking revenge. They are longing for God's righteous rule on the earth that will put an end to evil once and for all. It is their way of saying, *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.*

It's OK for us to wonder **How long?** At the same time we must keep any sense of vengeance in check. We want to be more like the first martyr of the church age, Stephen, who prayed for his persecutors that God would forgive them even as the stones they were throwing were pelting his body.

The cry of the martyrs is a sweet sound in Heaven. It's like a musical prelude that anticipates the Lord coming forth.

Revelation 6:11 Then a white robe was given to each of them...

White robes are one of my favorite symbols to describe salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. The sinner is depicted as standing before God in filthy garments that are unsuitable for entrance into Heaven. But because Jesus died on the Cross in place of the sinner He can clothe them with a **white robe** that makes them righteous. It is an exchange of your sin for Christ's righteousness and it must be done for you and received by you as a gift.

These Tribulation martyrs are described as conscious **souls**. They will not have glorified physical bodies until they are resurrected at the end of the Tribulation in Revelation 20:4. Since they are given **robes** it is clear they have some substance. Whether it is a temporary body or whether your soul has substance I don't know.

Revelation 6:11 ... and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were*, was completed.

Persecution and martyrdom against Christians will characterize the whole Tribulation from start to finish. Together this group of martyrs is described as **brethren** and **fellow servants**.

Brethren has to do with relationship while **fellow servants** describes responsibilities.

Christians are in the relationship of being spiritual brothers and sisters because we are all born into God's family. We all have very different earthly family backgrounds. It's a shame that so many families are dysfunctional. I think it can contribute to the ease with which we quit striving with one another, forgiving one another, bearing with one another. Too often a Christian has a problem with a brother or sister and solves it by leaving a church to join another 'family' of believers.

As **fellow servants** we each have our individual responsibilities. It should be a positive pressure to perform my responsibilities as unto the Lord for the sake of others in the church and those who come to the church.

There will be a **completed** number of Tribulation martyrs. Again we see this is a specific group of believers unique to the Tribulation. **We might call it an exclusive club!**

God is unchanging. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It is called the doctrine of immutability.

Though immutable (unchanging) God deals differently with different groups at different times. Israel is not the church. The church is not Tribulation martyrs. Our immutable God relates to each differently.

I mention this a lot because you will go off the rails prophetically unless you understand God is dealing differently with Israel than with the church than with the saints of the Tribulation.

Completed also tells us that this group completes their mission and purpose. It's a 'mission accomplished' statement. **Well done** is what they get out of this.

I want to complete **my** mission and hear the words, "*Well done!*" So do you.

There is a lot we could say about the mission of the church and about our mission as individual believers:

1. We could go to Ephesians chapter four and see our mission to exalt Jesus by edifying and equipping believers.
2. We could go to Matthew twenty-eight and see the Great Commission to go into all the world making disciples.
3. We could look at Acts chapter one where Jesus promises the church power to take the Gospel to the world.

Mission statements have become almost essential even out in the secular world. To borrow a cliché, they help you *keep the main thing the main thing*.

I like the mission statement of our church: Being changed to bring change. It encapsulates the understanding that the Lord is changing me from glory-to-glory and that, as He does, I am affecting others – both believers and nonbelievers - to change by His grace.

Then we added a guiding principle, seeking to excel. It's from First Corinthians 14:12 which (in the KJV) reads,

1 Corinthians 14:12 Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

If I am sincere about being changed to bring change I will seek to excel in all that I do. I will do everything “as unto the Lord.”

It is a simple but powerful principle and mission.

