

**VICTORIOUS LIFE CHURCH BIBLE STUDY SERIES:
THE BOOK OF REVELATION
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CHAPTER SIX: The Opening of the Seven Seals
Verses 9-17- The Fifth Seal**

The Lamb opens the fifth seal and we have a change of imagery. The four horsemen have been unleashed to conquer, to make war, to send famine, and to bring death. Our attention is then turned to the souls who have been slain because of the word of God and for their witness.

9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

The fifth seal reveals those martyred for Christ. While the phrase **“and when he opened the fifth seal”** sounds identical to the previous four, there is one modification in the Greek text; namely, the number precedes the word “seal.” This slight modification anticipates the distinction that follows, as John does not hear one of the four living creatures say, **“come”** or **“go,”** nor does he see a horse and its rider. Rather, **I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered on account of the word of God and the witness that they had.** The phrase **“under the altar”** may refer to the blood the martyrs shed for their testimony for Christ. The **“altar”** here is an allusion to the altar of the temple or tabernacle. This was a bronze altar outside the Holy of Holies, the place of sacrifice of animals. This refers to the work of Christ on the cross. These martyrs died for their testimony to His work on the cross. This initial encounter with an altar in Revelation also unleashes a variety of associations, for the altar is a very important article in God’s house, coming to represent his very presence. Here the word ψυχῶν (psychai, “souls”) means more than disembodied spirits, for the word often means “life,” that

may be laid down on behalf of another individual (John 10:11, 15, 17; 13:37-38; 15:13; 1 John 3:16). Such a meaning fits well with its use. The location of these “souls” indicates that they are sacrifices offered to God and indicates their extraordinarily close proximity to him. The location of these dead believers would not be a complete surprise because of their sacrificial suffering because of their faith and their witness. These martyrs died for their **stand** on the Word of God and for their testimony to the person and work of Christ for them.

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

They are crying out for justice. This is an appeal to God’s justice. It is a cry that is similar to the words of the prophet Habakkuk.

“Look at the wickedness that is going on throughout the earth. How long, Lord, until you judge and bring justice?”

This fourth loud voice (1:10; 5:2, 12) comes from the souls crying out in unison. Their words stand in clear continuity with a number of the voices in the Psalms and Habakkuk that ask the same questioning the same terminology.

Psalm 13:1-2

**How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?
2 How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?**

Psalm 74:10

10 O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?

Habakkuk 1:2

2 O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!

“The cry of the slaughtered souls, **“How long . . . will you not judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants upon the earth?”** focuses upon the divine delay in the dispensing of justice and vindication. Because these souls are in close proximity to God and the certainty of God’s judgment in the OT, the delay in its arrival is difficult to understand. Accompanying this cry is another one: to avenge their blood. The term ἐκδικέω (ekdikeō, “avenge”), which comes from the root word for “justice,” and conveys the idea of vindication. Such vindication is not simply a matter of the reputation of God’s people but of God himself. The introduction of the words “our blood” further underscores the identification between the slaughtered Lamb (5:6, 12) and his slaughtered followers — the faithful witness to which they are called, patterned on Jesus’ own faithfulness unto death. Such a visceral prayer reveals something of the depth of the pain and anguish of these souls. The martyrs cry to God with loud voices and ask how long this persecution will last. They call for retaliation upon their persecutors. This is not a day of grace but a day of God’s judgment on the earth. God will call to account those who perpetrate injustice in the world. The prayers of these martyrs’ mirror God’s program for the Tribulation. Today, God calls the Christian to forgive like Stephen, in the end the cry and intention of God is for judgment and retribution.

11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

The answer given is rather interesting and somewhat depressing. The slain people of God are pictured as being given a white robe. The white robe is a picture of purity and faithfulness. The greater image is that these souls are victorious. The white robe represents they are victorious

because of their purity and faithfulness. At a Roman triumph the conquering general would wear a white robe. These saints are conquerors because they have been faithful. “White” indicates that they possess **imputed** righteousness. This is not a righteousness of their own but the righteousness that God gives them. Such white garments are already worn by the twenty-four elders seated around the throne (4:4), indicating that the promises made to those who overcome are being fulfilled before their very eyes or ears. These elders come to represent all those who have been faithful even unto death, not having soiled their garments. They are faithful witnesses like their Lord. However, the second part of the answer continues that these martyred souls were to rest for a little longer. Judgment was not going to happen immediately. They must rest a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. There are more who are going to be slain for Christ before these judgments unfold. The answer seems to be that God is not stopping the death of his people right now. More are going to die for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus before judgment is unleashed on the earth. They would have to wait [rest] until other martyrs face their fate. God has a **perfect** time for everything. Vengeance is God’s; He will repay in His own good timing. We can leave God’s justice in God’s hands. God has a time for everything so we can relax and leave it in His care. There is no point in getting upset and bitter. No hatred or vindictiveness, or fear will help us. We need to rest in the sovereignty of God. There is a right time for God’s vengeance.

12 And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; 13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is

shaken of a mighty wind. 14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

This seal, and the catastrophes that go with it is the beginning of the last days through great cosmic disturbances. For example, the earthquake (v. 12) was a regular feature of divine visitation (Exodus 19:18; Isa. 2:19; Hag. 2:6). These are to be seen as “signs in the heavens” that are both symbolic and literal. One scholar identifies six catastrophic events calculated “to strike terror into the hearts of men living on the earth

1. A Great Earthquake- the shaking of earths foundations
2. The Sun will be Darkened and sackcloth- symbols of mourning.
3. The Moon will be turned to Blood
4. Star of Heaven will fall
5. Fig Tree casting off her Figs by wind- violence storms
6. Heaven Departs as a Scroll- splits open

These acts of judgment represent a disruption of everything that this world considers to be secure. Many people have even considered these elements to be godlike or divine as in

Astrology. While the seals that unleashed the horses would involve the acts of men such as the antichrist, war generals and people in economic systems. These judgements will show humankind that the things they depended upon are not in their control put are in control of the Lord God of heaven. The false gods and powerful men of security are being shaken, attacked and controlled by the true and living God- the Lord God Almighty. At this point men will know assuredly that the tribulation has begun, for they recognize it as **“the great day of his wrath.”**

15 And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; 16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

Due to these preceding events, great fear came upon the leaders of the earth. John indicates that there were seven walks of life affected by these cosmic disturbances. This probably refers to people of all stations in society taken in terror by these events. The number 7 indicates that humanity in its entirety is here represented, while the groups span the range of humankind from kings to slaves and free persons. No politician will be sheltered from these events. The result of the catastrophic events will be complete and total panic of all levels of humanity. The human reaction to these cosmic events is united and complete, for seven distinct classes of human society respond in unison.

1. The Kings of the earth, 2. The Great Men, 3. The Rich Men 4. The Chief Captains 5. The mighty men 6. Every bondman 7. Every free man.

These seven classes of humanity join together hiding themselves “in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains,” a last day activity anticipated in

Isaiah 2:10

10 Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty.

Isaiah 2:19

19 And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.

Isaiah 2:21

21 To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.

They also call upon the mountains and the rocks in which they are hiding, saying: Fall upon us and hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, because the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand? The events that

accompany the opening of the seals are no doubt viewed as the reason that they hide themselves and call out to the rocks and mountains to hide them. Ultimately, however, they consider God and the Lamb to be responsible for these calamities and consequently desire to be hidden from them. The leaders of the earth call for **death**. They would rather die by natural disturbances than yield to the Lamb.

17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

God is not only a God of love, but He is a God of **judgment** — “the great day of His wrath has come.”and who is able to stand? Those who avail themselves of the Lamb slain for our sins can stand. All others will not stand. All those who refuse the offer of God’s grace will have **nothing** on which to stand in the presence of God.

Principle: Pride keeps people from God, even in the face of great evidence.

Application: It is strange that people who see the direct hand of God upon earth still refuse to believe. They think death is better than belief. They believe they can escape God by death by entering oblivion. God says, “**It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this, the judgment**” (Hebrews 9:17). Pride will keep them from humbly submitting themselves to God. They must stay in charge of their life. They cannot yield themselves to God. To yield self to the death of Christ as the only payment for our sin is a hard pill to swallow for arrogant humans. We can only come to God by grace. If grace does not humble us, God’s judgment will in eternity.