

We continue our very painstaking study through the Book of Revelation, which is really the framework in which to understand the prophetic Scriptures regarding the end of the age. As we have been progressing through the Book of Revelation, we have come to chapter 6 and the opening of the fifth seal. That is chapter 6, verse 9.

The One who is opening the seals, might I remind you, is the Lamb. No one else in heaven or on earth or under the earth was found worthy to take the scroll and to open the seals (cf. Revelation 5:3). The Lamb was worthy. The Lamb came and took the scroll, and now we have seen the opening of the seals.¹ So it is not an angel opening a seal. Such matters are not delegated to anyone else but the person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Lamb who had been slain from the foundations of the world.

The importance of this is that the events released, both in heaven and on earth, are under the absolute and sovereign control of the Lamb. It is important that you remember this, particularly as a believer in Christ living in these times. It is normal for us to think that with the cascading of events, in the fashion described by Jesus Himself as birth pangs on a pregnant woman, it is tempting to think that these events will just run out of control, and no one will, in fact, be in control: there will be a cascading of events that are not subject to any control; they are random, and the like. No, not so at all. Even though, in this section of the Book of Revelation, we are observing permissions being given to, for example, the four horsemen—and they go out and they wreak certain havoc, as we have talked about under the section of the four horsemen, they wreak great havoc upon the earth—but we are reminded of the fact that the order of their sequencing, and the announcement as to what they can do, and even the recognition that the power by which they were permitted to do these things remained firmly in the sovereign control of the Lamb. They are released when the Lamb opens the seals.

All Scripture quotations are from the NKJV Bible, unless otherwise noted.

¹ See Revelation 5:5b: “Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.”

So the Lamb opens the fifth seal, and here the scene changes. In the first four seals broken and opened, we saw the release on the earth, in the sequence of their release, of the four horsemen. Now the scene switches, and it is about a focus that, in my understanding, covers both the heavens and the earth; it covers people who are in both heaven and earth, but primarily those who are in heaven. So, let me get to it as we begin.

When He [the Lamb] opened the fifth seal, [John said] 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. 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?” [so again, matters that concern people both in heaven and on earth] 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 (Revelation 6:9-11 NKJV, comments added in brackets).

Now that is what happened when the fifth seal was opened. You will note in verse 12, following, “I looked when He opened the sixth seal.” We are not going to the sixth seal yet. We are going to dwell for a while on the fifth seal.

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. 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 6:9-10)

It seems that from the frenzy of activity that had been launched by the departure of the four horsemen and the great tragedies upon the earth that were then unfolding, the scene switches to those under the altar that was in heaven. As you look closely at these words (and I have considered each word in the process), the word “soul” here is the word *psuché*,² and it has multiple meanings. It is not the bodies of people; it is the souls. Now where would the bodies be? The bodies are dead

² See *psuché*, Strong’s Greek 5590 - <https://biblehub.com/greek/5590.htm>

and remain buried, waiting upon the resurrection, which will happen—the first resurrection will happen—at the time of the return of the Lord.

For a moment, let me talk about that, because many people wonder what happens to you when you die. Well, the human being has three components of being, and each one of these components of being has a life that is distinct and different from the other components of being and from the lives within those components of being. What happens to each of these three components is largely determined by the life that is within them and the way that they lived while they were on the earth.

The three components of being are:

1. The *sarx*,³ which is the body (that is one component of being), has a life within it that is defined as *bios*.⁴ That is the life within the body. It is the capability of the body, in terms of its systems, to function in the earth. Death occurs when that life cannot and is not sustained anymore within the body. The body, then, is buried. According to Ecclesiastes 12:7, that body was taken from the dust of the earth, and it returns to the dust from whence it came.⁵
2. The soul has a life in it that is not of this world, but its purpose is to interpret the events and circumstances that are taken in through the body, through the five senses. You have heard me speak about these things before. That soul, when the person dies, goes in one of two directions, depending on how the person lived. If the person lived in reliance on God, was added to the Body of Christ, that soul returns to heaven or goes to heaven when the person dies. If the person lived in opposition to God, then that soul goes to hell, to Hades; not Tartarus, as that is the place where evil spirits are contained until the day of the final judgment when they are destroyed—the great white throne judgement at the end of the millennial period.

³ See *sarx*, Strong's Greek 4561 - <https://biblehub.com/str/greek/4561.htm>

⁴ See *bios*, Strong's Greek 979 - <https://biblehub.com/str/greek/979.htm>

⁵ See Ecclesiastes 12:7: “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.”

3. But then the third component of being is called *pneuma*.⁶ The life within the *pneuma* is called *zoë*.⁷ Now *zoë* is a life that is not connected to nor maintained by any force or power on the earth. It is literally the life that is within the person of God Himself and fuels the functioning of the human spirit.

When a person is saved, the soul and the spirit return to God, and come back at the point of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is because the soul has been brought back under the rule of the spirit, and the person lives in the *bios* as one representational of eternal life, and as one whose life, then, has a purpose intricately tied up with the representation of the living God—how He chooses to rule in creation through such a being. That is actually the definition of salvation. I know salvation has been typically defined by evangelical or even, generally speaking, Christian religion, as going to heaven when you die; and salvation is decided to be, being saved out of going to hell. Well, there is a lot more to salvation than that. Those are certainly elements of it, but salvation is to be saved out of the rule of one kingdom and placed into and under the rule of another King and into another Kingdom. And, salvation is to retrieve the soul from the control of the enemy and putting the soul back under the rule of the Spirit of God, by way of bringing it back under the rule of the human spirit, which is in turn ruled by the Spirit of God.

So, what is resurrected at the end of the age when Jesus returns is the only thing that died. The spirit does not die, nor does the soul die; but a body dies. The only thing that needs to be resurrected is the thing that expired. At the end of the age, then, the body will be resurrected. But it was sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:44). Much like, when Jesus was killed as Jesus of Nazareth, He was raised up as the Christ, the Son of the living God. God raised Him up, according to Peter in the Book of Acts, the second chapter (his first message upon the ascension of Christ), he said, “And you, with wicked hands, crucified and slew the Son of God, and God raised Him from the dead and made Him to be both Lord and Christ, or the *Mashiach*, the Messiah.” Now my point is not to speak about these things, although I wanted to take this opportunity to tell you what happens when you die. The body is put into the ground. The spirit and

⁶ See *pneuma*, Strong’s Greek 4151 - <https://biblehub.com/greek/4151.htm>

⁷ See *zoë*, Strong’s Greek 2222 - <https://biblehub.com/str/greek/2222.htm>

the soul of the righteous go back to God who gave it. The spirit of the unrighteous returns to God because it was never activated; the soul, however, goes to hell and awaits a time of judgment before the great white throne, which is the time at the conclusion of the millennium.

But going back to what we see under the fifth seal. He said,

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. 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 6:9b-10)

Now the altar in heaven, that is quite interesting, because there are actually two words for the term “altar.” One is the term *bómos*,⁸ which, generally speaking, refers to a mound, a berm, a construction found in the temple of pagan gods, and it was used for and in the process of worshiping idols. However, this reference, this word “altar” is the word *thusiastérion*,⁹ and it typically denotes an altar for the sacrifice of victims; it is also used as an altar of incense, for the burning of incense. When, for example, the father of John the Baptist, Zechariah, was offering the evening sacrifice of incense on the altar of incense, an angel appeared to him. The purpose of the altar in heaven is to recognize the sacrifice of those whose lives were given for the purpose of Christ. But it has the dual meaning, because later on, in Chapter 8, it will refer to the altar in heaven and much incense being given to a certain angel. This larger quantity of incense was described as the prayers of the saints.¹⁰

Everything in heaven has a shadow in the earth. Things that are in heaven are the reality; things on the earth are the type and shadow. In the tabernacle, inside of the tent itself, there was an altar of incense. It symbolized—not necessarily to the Jews, because the revelation of the saints had not

⁸ See *bómos*, Strong’s Greek 1041 - <https://biblehub.com/greek/1041.htm>

⁹ See *thusiastérion*, Strong’s Greek 2379 - <https://biblehub.com/greek/2379.htm>

¹⁰ See Revelation 8:3: “Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.”

so fully come to them—but it did symbolize the ascension of the prayers of the saints, as opposed to the place where the saints were sacrificed. On the earth, the altar of sacrifices was outside of the tabernacle. It was where the priests offered the sacrifices. But in heaven, their sacrifice is done, and it is celebrated before God. So, in that sense, they are viewed as those who were under the altar. Because, now look, they are calling to God. They are saying, “How long, O Lord...”—and you will note that their prayers are immediately answered— “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?” So they are speaking in heaven, but the judgment will come on the earth.

Before I go on, let me make certain other observations. These souls were under—they were under—the altar. There, the reference to “under” is the adverb *hupokató*—pronounced (hoop-ok-at'-o),¹¹ and it is used, under. It is speaking of being underneath. That may well refer to, not so much a position, but those who benefit from having their prayers heard. In that sense, we, on the earth now, who are the sons of God, are under this altar as well because our prayers ascend from the altar to God, and He hears us, just as He hears those who are in heaven. The idea is not so much a crowd of people under an altar, but rather those who, in the way that they lived and died, left no doubt as to their devotion to God. And because they lived that way and they died that way, their prayers continue or whatever they say to God continues to be of great significance to God.

They were asking, “How long will it be until You judge the earth for the blood that they shed?” In that sense, although they were not laid upon an altar and killed, like Jesus, whose altar actually was the cross, they offered daily sacrifices. When people revile you, persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely on account of the name of the Lord, those are daily sacrifices. These sacrifices are spoken collectively in the following terms: “They overcame Satan (they overcame the schemes of the devil) by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony, and that they did not choose to preserve their lives even unto death” (cf. Revelation 12:11). Exactly the same thing is said here about those who are under the altar. It says the following: “I saw the souls under the altar who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony they held” (cf. Revelation 6:9b). They overcame by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and that

¹¹ See *hupokató*, Strong’s Greek 5270 - <https://biblehub.com/greek/5270.htm>

they would not recant to save their lives. So, the testimony which they held and the word of God accessed the blood of Christ. In a sense, they died with Christ, and they were raised with Christ.

Under the altar, then, or covered by the provision of grace that operates even now for us who believe on the earth, who live a life that honors the Lord in all the particulars of how we live, who choose to prefer the ways of God over our own ways or the ways of the world, this is the concept of martyrdom. It is not necessarily that they were killed by being beheaded, for example, because there is no greater benefit to someone who is suddenly killed for the word of God and one who lived a protracted life of daily faithfulness. That is as much of a sacrifice, and it is characterized by its reference to the altar of sacrifice, as avenging our blood. But that is true whether or not we are literally speaking of the shedding of blood or that we did not pursue the life that we otherwise might have because we chose instead to honor the Lord every day in our substance. God hears us because our prayers, the prayers of the righteous, come up before God, as even Cornelius was told in Acts 10. When the angel visited him, he said, “Cornelius, your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.”¹² So in this sense, those covered by that arrangement, with access to and permission to speak to God in this way, when they spoke, God heard them and answered them, and answered them immediately.

Now notice that they were told that they would have to wait for the reply, but the reply came immediately—the delivering of the results for which they prayed, “How long until You avenge?” The word “avenge” there is not this word filled with hubris. It is more the term, “How long before You vindicate us before all the earth?” They were told that their vindication would come when the full complement of those who were to be brought in, of both their fellow servants and their brethren (and I will deconstruct those terms later on) had been brought in. Next, I want to talk about the fact that a white robe was given to each of them, and they were told that they must rest for a little while longer.

In summary, then, they were under the altar, meaning they were covered. When the fifth seal was opened, they were covered by the provision of being the sons of God, and their prayers ascended

¹² See Acts 10:4b: “So he said to him, ‘Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.’”

to God. They were heard on high. They were heard before the living God Himself. This represents a change going forward. I will continue this discussion after we talk about the robes that were given to them.

God bless you.