

THE SOULS UNDER THE ALTAR

Introduction

1. Chapter 6 began with the opening of the first four seals.
2. John saw imagery of the so-called “four horsemen of the Apocalypse.”
3. The victory of the Gospel was followed by persecution of those who obeyed it.
 - a. They suffered bloodshed from physical and spiritual conflict.
 - b. They suffered from famine, being unable to work due to persecution.
 - c. They suffered death from any means available to the persecutors.
4. Now, John’s attention is turned to the opening of the 5th and 6th seals...

- I. The Opening of the Fifth Seal (6:9-11)
 - A. With the opening of the fifth seal, the scene changed significantly.
 - B. John saw the results of the persecution illustrated by the four horsemen – the souls of Christians who had been killed for their faithfulness to God.
 1. Note the symbolism; John saw souls – that which is invisible.
 2. They had been slain for the word of God (cf. 1:9; 2:13).
 3. Examples (Matthew 24:9; John 16:2; Acts 7:58-59; 12:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:8; 4:6; etc.)
 - C. The souls of these Christians were seen under the altar, like the blood of animals sacrificed under the Old Covenant (Lev. 4:7).
 - D. These martyrs cried out for vengeance! *“How long?”*
 1. This illustrates the idea that the persecution against the church had been going on for some time.
 2. Further, it demonstrates God’s faithfulness to His promises and His justness (cf. Genesis 4:10; Hebrews 12:24; Job 9:32-33; 1 John 2:1-2).
 3. God will avenge the righteous (Luke 18:7-8), but in His own time (Romans 12:19-21).
 - E. God’s answer to them was two-fold.
 1. First, they were given white robes, symbolizing the fact that God had not forgotten them or their faithfulness.
 2. Second, they were told to rest and wait a little longer.
 - a. The persecution would not end immediately.
 - b. In fact, there were still others who would be killed for their faith (17:6).
 - F. Though God’s judgment was not coming immediately, there must be no doubt that it was coming.

- II. The Opening of the Sixth Seal (6:12-17)
 - A. The opening of the sixth seal revealed the judgment of God that would come upon those who persecuted the church.
 - B. The symbolism of this passage is used throughout Scripture to describe God’s judgment upon a nation or the world (cf. Isaiah 13:9-13; 29:6; 50:3; Jeremiah 4:23-28; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:15; Amos 8:9; Haggai 2:6-7; Matthew 24:29-30; Acts 2:19-20).
 1. “The Lord pictures a crashing world, earth-shaking events with no light to guide, and darkness engulfing wicked people” (H. Hailey).

The Book of Revelation

Lesson Fourteen

Revelation 6:9-17

2. Verses 15-16 make it clear that this is not the final judgment and the end of the world.
3. Instead, this is a judgment of God against Rome and the persecutors of the Christians.
- C. The earthquake symbolizes the shaking of that which appears to be unshakeable and immovable.
- D. The darkening of the sun and moon symbolizes the removal of leadership and light by which a nation is guided.
- E. The falling of stars symbolizes the casting down of a nation's rulers (cf. Isaiah 14:12; Daniel 8:10; etc.).
- F. The sky being rolled up like a scroll symbolizes the end of a world power.
 1. When one finishes reading a scroll, it is rolled up and put away.
 2. Likewise, when God brings a nation's time to an end, it is as if He has rolled up their scroll (cf. Isaiah 34:4).
- G. The moving of the mountains and islands symbolizes the crumbling of all that was accounted as a source of strength or a foundation (cf. Ezekiel 26:15-18; 27:34-35).
- H. All classes of men would seek to hide from the judgment of God, but it could not be escaped (cf. Hosea 10:8; Isaiah 2:19; Luke 23:28-30).
- I. When the great day of God's wrath comes, no one will be able to stand – save for those washed by the blood of the Lamb.

Conclusion:

1. As the Lamb opens the seals of this scroll, we are given a view of the suffering inflicted upon God's people by their Roman persecutors.
2. Christians were being conquered, their blood was being shed, and they suffered famine and death.
3. Their souls cried out for vengeance and vindication for their wrongful deaths.
4. God promises that judgment is coming, and the persecutors will suffer for their sins.
5. The day of God's wrath upon the wicked is the day of deliverance for the faithful.