

The Fifth Seal: I Saw Under the Altar Those Who Had Been Slain 6: 9-11

DIG: What is revealed by the opening of the fifth seal? What is the significance of the souls of the martyrs being under the altar? What is their cry? How is the phrase the inhabitants of the earth used in Revelation (see 11:10, 13:8 and 12, 17:2 and 8, 3:10, 8:13)? What is the significance of the white robe? How is this related to the suffering of the messianic community in Yochanan's day? In our day?

REFLECT: What's the worst thing that has happened to you because of your faithfulness to the Word of God? Have you ever had to wait a long time for justice to be handed out? How would you have felt if someone told you that you had to wait a little longer? Can you understand their desire to be avenged? Is that wrong, or merely just? Why? Who is to hand out the vengeance (Romans 12:19)? Why is that important?

Following the Rapture, millions will accept **Jesus Christ** as their **Lord** and **Savior**. World leaders will say that these believers will be a threat to world peace, world government, world religion and the environment. Just as the Jews were a scapegoat during the Third Reich, messianic believers will become a scapegoat during the Great Tribulation. Today followers of the New Age movement teach that the earth must undergo a cleansing before society can progress. Part of the cleansing process will be the death of all believers.

As with the first four seals, when the Lamb opened the fifth seal, John saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained (6:9). These souls were not believers at the beginning of the Great Tribulation, but were won to **Messiah** by the preaching of the 144,000 Jews (7:1-8), the two witnesses (11:3), from others won to **Yeshua the Lamb** before being martyred, or even through Bibles or messianic literature left behind by raptured believers. They had been beheaded for not taking the mark of the beast (see **Fe - I Saw Those Beheaded For Not Taking His Mark On Their Foreheads**).

John saw the souls under the golden altar of incense in heaven (Hebrews 9:4). The earthly Tabernacle was merely a replica of the heavenly one (see my commentary on **Exodus Fp - The Altar of Incense: Christ, Our Advocate with the Father**). Earlier, when the **Lamb** was found worthy to open the title deed to the earth, **the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders each held golden bowls full of incense, or the prayers of the saints (see Psalm 141:2).** Later during the Trumpet Judgments, **John would see an angel who had a golden censer. The angel was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar of incense before the throne in heaven (8:2-3).**

They had been slain because of the Word of God and their testimony before an unbelieving world. Some of the **souls** will be from believing families who were caught up in the Rapture. Others will be Jews who finally realize that **Jesus is the Messiah.** While others will have heard the message of the Gospel for the first time. Over time **they** will finally come to grips with **their** sin and turn to **Yeshua** who said: **I tell you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him (Lk 12:4-5).**²¹² **The Word of God** teaches the resurrection and the lordship of **Christ.** No believer could confess the lordship of **Christ** and at the same time bow to the lordship of the antichrist. In the story of the martyrdom of Polycarp, father of the faith, he was promised freedom if he would only reject **Messiah** and swear that Caesar was Lord. However, he would not and was burned at the stake, **the souls under the altar** in heaven will not swear loyalty to the antichrist and will be **slain** as a result.

They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Ruler, holy and true, until You judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood" (6:10)? This plea to **YHVH** for justice and vengeance finds its roots in the TaNaKh, prayers calling for **God** to take a stand against the enemies of righteousness (**Psalm 94:1-5**). Here, these **martyrs** make an appeal on that basis (**Romans 12:19**) because **the LORD** is **holy** and cannot tolerate sin. **They** are asking, **"How long, ADONAI until You judge this sin?"** The phrase, **the inhabitants of the earth** points to men and women who are in rebellion and hostile to **God** during the Great Tribulation (**3:10, 11:10, 13:8 and 14, 14:6, 17:8**). It is a cold hard fact that if people don't want to accept **Christ** right now when no persecution is involved, when the Great Tribulation comes (although they can still be saved) people will **only** be saved **as one escaping through the flames (First Corinthians 3:15).**

Does not **God Himself** affirm that **the blood** of the righteous cries out for judgment? The rebels of the earth will one day take on the **holy God** of the universe. They will challenge **ELOHIM's** attributes of purity and righteousness. So to be who **He** says **He** is, **Ha'Shem** must **avenge the blood of the souls under the altar**. When Cain killed his brother Abel, **God** asked: **What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground (Genesis 4:10).**²¹³ In the same way, **the blood of the Tribulation martyrs** will cry out to **ADONAI** from **under the altar**.

Then each of them will be **given a white robe**. The literal interpretation of Scripture should always be followed if possible. But here, physical **robes** would need to be placed on physical bodies. Since these **martyrs** will not be resurrected and receive their resurrection bodies until the end of the seventy-five day interval between the Second Coming and the start of the messianic Kingdom (**20:4-6**), **their robes** are symbolic of **their** righteousness, or their justification in **Jesus Christ**. By means of **the red blood of Messiah**, they will be made **white**, or pure.²¹⁴ If you are a believer today, you were **justified** at the moment you accepted **Yeshua**. Justification is a once-for-all-time act of **God** whereby, negatively, **He** forgives your sins and positively, **He** declares you righteous by transferring all the obedience and righteousness of **Christ** to you through faith. **Having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having hope of eternal life (Titus 3:7).**

The martyrs were given assurance that **their** prayers would be answered, but **the day of God's wrath (Romans 2:5)**, had not arrived yet. **And they were told to wait a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants, brothers and sisters, all who were to be killed as they had been was completed (6:11).** **God** knows the exact number. It has been fixed from all eternity past. But until that **number** is realized, the final **Day of Judgment** cannot come (**19:11-18**).

Then **God** tells **the martyrs** under **the altar** in heaven that **they** must **wait a little while longer, until the number of innocent deaths is completed**. They will have to **wait** until the start of the second half of the Great Tribulation, when the Bowl Judgments will pour out **God's** wrath upon an unrepentant world. At that time the number of **martyrs** will be **complete** and it will be time to settle accounts. Those **under the altar** will shout out to **ADONAI** with joy: **True and just are Your judgments (16:7b)!**

YHVH is not being cruel. In fact, **His** response is a cause for **hope** because the very fact that a limit is placed on **the number of martyrs** means that the suffering will not go on forever. There will be a point at which it is over, when **God's** justice will finally be seen by the whole world and when there will be **no more tears (7:17c).**

We all need a little bit of **hope**. It can be awfully discouraging to look at the state of the world. We may wonder why **Ha'Shem** doesn't just intervene right now and set everything right. So many of our brothers and sisters are being persecuted and killed for their faith in **the Lord**. So many die because they just happened to be born in the "wrong" place at the "wrong" time - during a famine, plague or war. We ourselves may suffer exclusion or economic setbacks because of our faith. But **Yeshua** wants to tell you that this will not last forever. We can **hope** in **Him** and be patient **a little while longer**.

*Heavenly **Father**, **You** hold this world in **Your** hands. **Your** time and purposes are beyond our understanding. Nevertheless, I trust in **You**, my loving **Father**, to work all these things out for the good and for the salvation of the world. I trust in **You**, **ADONAI**.²¹⁵*