

I. The Fifth Seal – A Biblical View (Rev. 6:9-11)

A. The fifth seal, in my opinion is not martyrdom, but rather the release of a Holy Spirit prayer movement that partners with Jesus in releasing God's judgment on the unrighteous. The nature of this judgment is an energizing of the furnace of intercession in order to bring the judgments of God to the next level.

1. The fifth seal is often misunderstood for 2 reasons.

a) First - Most see martyrdom as 'the key event' of the seal. However, the main theme of this passage is the intercession of the martyr's that Jesus is waiting to partner with in releasing the sixth seal.

b) Second - Many people have a paradigm of an uninvolved church in the last days. They either believe the church won't be on the earth during this time or that the church is doing all it can just to survive the tribulation period.

B. Prophetic scriptures indicate that the final days leading up to the return of Jesus will be the greatest hour of the church. She will be shining, mature, powerful, unified, and full of zeal fueled by intimacy with her coming bridegroom. This reality is summed up by using the language of the "Victorious Church."

II. The Fifth Seal – Verse by Verse

A. The fifth seal is distinctly set apart from the first four seals as John's attention goes from the events happening on the earth to the events happening in heaven.

1. Souls under the Altar - In the temple Moses built that replicated the heavenly temple there were two altars, the brazen altar for sacrifice and the golden altar of incense. It is unclear which altar is in view here. The altar of sacrifice makes sense because of the sacrificial nature of their suffering. However, it was on the altar of incense that sacrificial blood was poured once a year, on the Day of Atonement. (Ex. 30:1-10; Lev. 4:7; Heb. 9:4)

a) Regardless of which altar is in view, the meaning is the same. The sacrificial offering of the martyrs is displayed front and center of the worship in heaven. The act of laying down one's life for the sake of the gospel is so cherished by God that He wants John to see the martyrs as near to His heart and throne. (Dan. 11:32-35; 1 Pet. 1:3-13)

2. Souls of those who had been slain for the word of God: Here we see such a clear statement of the boldness and power that will be poured out upon the church in the last days. John sees a host of individuals prophetically declaring that the church will overcome the pressure to remain voiceless and ineffective during the time of great pressure that is coming upon the earth. The picture here is an end time church that is grounded in truth, fearless, influential, and is so unrelenting in their testimony about Jesus that the only way to stop them is to kill them.

3. They cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long...": The prayer, "How long..." is the most recorded prayer in the Old Testament and the only prayer of request in the Book of Revelation. The question they ask is when will God bring vindication for the wrongly oppressed. (Zech. 1:12; Ps. 6:3; 13:2; 74:10; 79:5; 80:4; 89:46; 90:13; 94:3; Dan. 8:13; 12:6-13)
 - a) "Those who dwell on the earth", is the primary phrase for unbelievers in Revelation (used 13 times). They were focusing their prayers on individuals who are still alive on the earth at the time they are praying. In other words, these are not the martyrs throughout history but specifically the martyrs slain just before Jesus returns.

 - b) This is not a cry for personal revenge but a prayer that God would bring judgment upon them to disrupt their murderous work. To remove people from their positions of influence. The saints love mercy not vengeance, and God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. We do not rejoice in judgment and pain on the individual but in the fact that God disrupts and shakes everything in order to turn even the hardest heart to Himself.
(Ez. 33:11; Lk. 18:7-8; Act. 7:60)

4. Holy and True: - Holy and true are the two main attributes of Jesus that are emphasized in the book of Revelation in context to His leadership and judgments concerning the earth. He brings judgment according to His nature as God, filled with mercy and kindness. He is faithful to truth and justice and will not allow wickedness to go unchecked. There will be great temptation, as judgment increases to be offended at His leadership in the last days. We must understand that all His ways are filled with mercy, justice, and truth. (Rev. 3:7)

5. Given white robes and told to rest: White robes signify victory and the glory of a unique heavenly reward. White robes also speaks of the purity of their faith tested by fire. Their intercession for God to break in will be answered in His perfect timing and they are told that they can be assured He will move on their behalf (rest). (Rev. 3:4-5 alludes to 6:11, Rev. 19:8)
 - a) God tells these saints to “rest” the original greek word used here means to “bring a calm and encourage patient expectation”. God’s perfect timing was waiting until the full number of martyrs was complete. God in His perfect wisdom set a number to be martyrs, necessary accomplish His purposes in allowing them to suffer. (Mat. 23:31-32; Col. 1:24)

III. The Sixth Seal (Rev. 6:12-17)

- A. Jesus opened the sixth seal to begin His answer to the cry of the persecution of the saints in seal five. In other words, the intercession led by the martyrs in heaven is the catalytic event in which God partners with to get personally involved at levels the earth has never seen. This seal begins a new order of supernatural judgment released in the trumpet and bowl series. Strange signs in the sun, moon and stars cause multitudes to know without doubt that God’s day of wrath upon sin has come. (Joel 2, Mat. 23)
 1. There was a great earthquake: Worldwide geophysical upheaval takes place. Earthquakes will be prominent in each of the 3 prophetic time frames spoken of concerning the final days. The beginning of birth-pangs, worldwide peace and safety, and the Great Tribulation. This earthquake is unique as it signals the beginning of the supernatural judgments of God that will result in the ultimate exodus of His people and the renewing of the earth. (Is. 2:12-19, Mt. 24:7; Lk 21:11)
 2. Sun Darkened and Moon to Blood: Biblically, these signs are to be seen as divine signs so I would encourage us to take these signs at face value. Many try to understand these events through a logical or earthly grid. It is common to explain these events by describing how eclipses, and “blood moons” naturally occur. These types of explanations contrary to the biblical emphasis that these events are divine signs and wonders. It is my conviction that this event and the others to follow are supernatural interruptions that can only be explained as divine phenomena. (Joel 2:31; Rev. 6:16)

3. The stars of heaven fell: The Greek word for “stars” here is “aster.” We get the word asteroid from this word. It can be used to refer to any shining mass in the sky or transient celestial bodies such as stars, planets, comets, meteors, asteroids, or flaming debris, etc. I believe this will be similar to a meteor shower crashing on the earth with the number of meteors compared to a fig tree losing its figs. Our sun is over 100 times larger than our planet and therefore it’s my opinion that it’s wrong to think John is talking of a star like our sun striking the earth.
4. The sky receded as a scroll: God will cause the sky to roll back opening a window of sorts into the 2nd or 3rd heaven. This lasts long enough for all the worldwide leaders to witness it. (Is. 34:4)
5. Every mountain and island was moved out of its place: John is unclear about how this happens. Jesus spoke much of literal earthquakes being very prominent during the final days. The mountains and islands are not destroyed however but simply shaken or moved out of place. (Mat. 24:7; Mk 13:8; Lk 21:11)
6. The people affected – 7 different classes of society. John especially tells us how world leaders will respond. Powerful kings and military generals run for their lives to the mountains and fortified places in the earth. The sixth seal describes the end of atheism and the worldwide confession that Jesus is responsible for the physical shaking of heaven and earth. Here unbelievers declare that God is real and is manifesting His judgments. (Isa. 2:10, 21, 19; Hos. 10:8; Luke 23:30)
 - a) Kings (prime ministers or presidents); great men (senior leaders in presidential, and governmental cabinets); rich men (leading business people in the nations); military commanders (generals and strategists); mighty men (strong leaders who establish direction for cities and people groups); every slave and free man (lower class majority).
 - b) These leaders are not repenting and turning to Jesus, they are simply admitting He is real and behind these judgements. It’s a common misconception that if God would break in with clear manifestations of Himself to the unsaved that they would all turn to Him. The narrative of God’s dealings with man in the scriptures proves that simply seeing the power or even manifestations of God rarely hold enough weight to truly convert the soul. (Exodus and Wilderness Narrative; Miracles of Jesus)