

BETTER WAY APOSTOLIC CHURCH- BIBLE CLASS

SUBJECT: JUDGING THE DISOBEDIENCE: REVELATION 6:9-17

Comfortable people may not like the language of this passage, but oppressed and suffering people who trust God can resonate with the promise of vindication, as in the *Old Testament and often throughout history.

6:9. The blood of sacrifices was poured out at the base of the altar (Leviticus 4:7,18,25,34; 5:9; 8:15; 9:9); the martyrs are thus viewed as sacrifices, like the Passover lamb of Revelation 5:6. (Paschal lambs had come to be viewed as sacrificial in some sense. Martyrs were also viewed as sacrifices in, e.g., *4 Maccabees and Philippians 2:7.) Souls were "visible" to recipients of *apocalypses, due to the seers' visionary state.

6:10. The very fact of their shed blood (6:9) cries out for the vindication of retribution (Genesis 4:10; see comment on Matt 23:35); as in the Old Testament, a prayer for vengeance for corporate sin was ultimately a prayer for the vindication of the righteous and of God's name. Justice could ultimately be done, and the oppressed delivered, only when God arose to judge the earth. "How long?" was common in Old Testament prayers of entreaty (e.g., Psalms 6:3; 13:1; 80:4), including prayers for vindication (e.g., Psalms 79:5,10; Zechariah 1:12); it also could address the duration of a judgment (Isaiah 6:11; Jeremiah 47:6).

6:11. Other Jewish texts also include prayers for vengeance and protests over delays (6:10); the souls of the righteous in *4 Ezra (probably from the same decade as Revelation) ask how long until the end and are told that they must wait until the full number of righteous dead is completed. Jesus and Paul had also earlier stressed that the good news must be preached to all nations — with the attendant suffering for witnesses involved in such proclamation — before the end. On white robes see comment on 4:4.

6:12-17- The Sixth Seal

Although cosmic, cataclysmic language is sometimes used for God's judgments in history (e.g., an already-fulfilled judgment in *Sibylline Oracles; cosmic exaggerations of Sinai phenomena in *Pseudo-Philo; cf. Psalms 18; Jeremiah 4:20-28), the language of this passage lends itself most naturally to the view that it, like the sixth and seventh trumpets and vials, represents the end of the age (as cosmic destruction generally does in the *Old Testament prophets and Jewish literature).

6:12-13. An Old Testament prophecy associated the end of the age with a powerful earthquake (Zechariah 14:4-5; cf. Ezekiel 38:20; Amos 8:8); because severe earthquakes had wrought devastation in first-century Asia Minor, this announcement would have special impact on the readers. Darkness was also an Old Testament judgment (Exodus 10:21-23; Isaiah 50:3), especially the judgment of the end (Isaiah 13:9-10; 24:23; Ezekiel 32:7-8; Amos 5:18; 8:9; cf. *4 Ezra). The stars may symbolize angelic hosts (12:4; Isaiah 24:21; Daniel 8:10; 10:13), but in this context they probably depict simply the cosmic scope of the judgment (Isaiah 34:4). The graphic language is not meant as literal astronomy: disappearing or shaken stars were used as poetic language for great devastations such as wars (Sibylline Oracles, *Petronius; cf. Isaiah 13:10,17).

6:14. A reader would unroll a scroll with the right hand to read, rolling up again the part just read with the left; the language here reflects Isaiah 34:4, which is also echoed in other Jewish judgment oracles (Sibylline Oracles). This sort of language was normally reserved for the end of the age.

6:15-16. The *Old Testament and *apocalypses also speak of judgment across social classes; the readers could be encouraged that God would ultimately vindicate them against the emperor and his governors who now judged them. Hiding in the rocks and crying for the mountains to conceal them from God's wrath reflects Hosea 10:8; cf. Isaiah 2:10 and 19-20.

6:17. This verse reflects especially Joel 2:11; cf. Malachi 3:2, referring to the day of judgment.

John recorded two responses to the opening of the seals, one in heaven and the other on earth.

The martyrs (vv. 9-11). When the Old Testament priest presented an animal sacrifice, the victim's blood was poured out at the base of the brazen altar (Leviticus 4:7,18,25,30). In Old Testament imagery, blood represents life (Leviticus 17:11). So, here in Revelation, the souls of the martyrs "under the altar" indicates that their lives were given sacrificially to the glory of God. The Apostle Paul had the same idea in mind when he wrote Philippians 2:17 and 2 Timothy 4:6.

The Greek word *Martus*, which gives us our English word martyr, simply means "a witness" (see Revelation 2:13; 17:6). These saints were slain by the enemy because of their witness to the truth of God and the message of Jesus Christ. The forces of Antichrist do not accept the truth, because Satan wants them to be deceived and accept his lies (see Revelation 19:20; 20:10; also 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

Since their murderers are still alive on earth, these martyrs are apparently from the early part of the Tribulation. But they represent all who have laid down their lives for Jesus Christ and the cause of God's truth, and they are an encouragement to all today who may be called to follow them. They assure us that the souls of the martyrs are in heaven, awaiting the resurrection (Revelation 20:4), and that they are at rest, robed in heavenly glory.

But is it "Christian" for these martyred saints to pray for vengeance on their murderers? After all, both Jesus and Stephen prayed that God would forgive those who killed them. I have no doubt that when they were slain on earth, these martyrs also prayed for their slayers; and this is the right thing to do (Matthew 5:10-12,43-48).

The great question, however, was not whether their enemies would be judged, but when. "How long, O Lord?" has been the cry of God's suffering people throughout the ages (see Psalms 74:9-10; 79:5; 94:3-4; also Habakkuk 1:2). The saints in heaven know that God will eventually judge sin and establish righteousness in the earth, but they do not know God's exact schedule. It is not personal revenge that they seek, but vindication of God's holiness and the establishment of God's justice. Every believer today who sincerely prays, "Thy kingdom come!" is echoing their petition.

God made clear to these martyrs that their sacrifice was an appointment, not an accident; and that others would join them. Even in the death of His people, God is in control (Psalms 116:15); so there is nothing to fear.

Many others would be slain for their faith before the Lord would return and establish His kingdom (see Revelation 11:7; 12:11; 14:13; and 20:4-5). Then as today, it appears that the enemy is winning, but God

will have the last word. Even in our "enlightened" twentieth century, multiplied thousands of true believers have laid down their lives for Christ; certainly they will receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10). Revelation 6:1-2

The earth-dwellers (vv. 12-17). The martyrs cried, "Avenge us!" but the unbelievers on earth will cry, "Hide us!" The opening of the sixth seal will produce worldwide convulsions and catastrophes, including the first of three great earthquakes (Revelation 6:12; 11:13; 16:18-19). All of nature will be affected: the sun, moon, and stars, as well as the heavens, the mountains, and the islands. Compare this scene with Joel 2:30-31 and 3:15 as well as with Isaiah 13:9-10 and 34:2-4.

Even though John wrote using symbolic language, these verses describe a scene that would frighten even the most courageous person. People will try to hide from the face of God and from the face of the Lamb! Imagine wanting to hide from a lamb! I once heard Dr. Vance Havner say that the day would come when the most expensive piece of real estate would be a hole in the ground, and he was right.

We will see more of "the wrath of God" as we progress through Revelation (Revelation 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15). We will also encounter the wrath of Satan (Revelation 12:17) and the wrath of the nations as they oppose God (Revelation 11:18). If men and women will not yield to the love of God, and be changed by the grace of God, then there is no way for them to escape the wrath of God.

Rank and wealth will not deliver anyone in that terrible day. John's list included kings, captains, and slaves, the rich and the poor. "Who shall be able to stand?"

The phrase "wrath of the Lamb" seems a paradox, "Wrath of the lion" would be more consistent. We are so accustomed to emphasizing the meekness and gentleness of Christ (Matthew 11:28-30) that we forget His holiness and justice. The same Christ who welcomed the children also drove the merchants from the temple. God's wrath is not like a child's temper tantrum or punishment meted out by an impatient parent. God's wrath is the evidence of His holy love for all that is right and His holy hatred for all that is evil. Only a soft and sentimental person would want to worship a God who did not deal justly with evil in the world.

Furthermore, the people mentioned here are impenitent. They refuse to submit to God's will. They would rather hide from God in fear (remember Adam and Eve?) than run to Him in faith. They are proof that judgment by itself does not change the human heart. Not only will men seek to hide from God, but they will blaspheme Him as well! (Revelation 16:9,11,21)

But is there any hope for believers during this terrible time of judgment? And what about God's special people, the Jews, who made a covenant with the Antichrist? Certainly people will trust the Lord even after the church is taken to heaven, but how will they manage? We turn to Revelation 7 for some of the answers.

But before considering John's third theme in this section - redemption - we must note the parallels that exist between Christ's prophetic words recorded in Matthew 24 and what John wrote in Revelation 6. The following summary outline makes this clear.

Revelation 6:1-2

Matthew 24 Revelation 6

False Christs (vv. 4-5)	White horse rider (vv. 1-2)
Wars (v. 6)	Red horse - war (vv. 3-4)
Famines (v. 7 a)	Black horse - famine (vv. 5-6)
Death (vv. 7 b-8)	Pale horse - (vv. 7-8)
Martyrs (v. 9)	Martyrs under the altar (vv. 9-11)
Worldwide chaos (vv. 10-13)	Worldwide chaos (vv. 12-17)

Matthew 24:14 introduces the preaching of the Gospel of the kingdom throughout the whole world, and this may well be where Revelation 7 fits in. God may use the sealed 144,000 Jews to share His Word with the world, resulting in the salvation of multitudes.

