

## The Revelation Of Jesus Christ Study 32

### PRAYERS FOR VENGEANCE; THE FIFTH SEAL

*Revelation 6:9-11 (NKJV)*

<sup>9</sup> *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.*

<sup>10</sup> *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?"*

<sup>11</sup> *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.*

It has been observed that God created man in His image and man has returned the favor.

People have created gods in whatever form pleases them and accommodates their sinful lifestyles. In the cynical words of British author D. H. Lawrence, "God is only a great imaginative experience" (cited in *the Columbia Dictionary of Quotations*, Copyright 1993, 1995 by Columbia University Press)

God rebukes such foolish people;

*Psalms 50:21 (NKJV)*

<sup>21</sup> *These things you have done, and I kept silent; You thought that I was altogether like you; But I will rebuke you, And set them in order before your eyes.*

God is who He has revealed Himself to be in Scripture and not what people imagine Him to be. While Scripture reveals that God is loving, merciful, and gracious a savior of sinners, one truth about Him that is decidedly unpopular today is that He is a God of vengeance against those who reject Him and salvation in His Son.

The Bible repeatedly affirms that to be the case.

*Deuteronomy 32:35 (NKJV)*

<sup>35</sup> *Vengeance is Mine, and recompense;*

*Deuteronomy 32:41-43 (NKJV)*

<sup>41</sup> *If I whet My glittering sword, And My hand takes hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to My enemies, And repay those who hate Me.*

<sup>42</sup> *I will make My arrows drunk with blood, And My sword shall devour flesh, With the blood of the slain and the captives, From the heads of the leaders of the enemy." '*

<sup>43</sup> *"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, And render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people."*

Speaking of God, Isaiah declared;

*Isaiah 59:17-18 (NKJV)*

<sup>17</sup> *For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, And was clad with zeal as a cloak.*

<sup>18</sup> According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay, Fury to His adversaries, Recompense to His enemies; The coastlands He will fully repay.

One of the things Christ will proclaim is found in Isaiah;

*Isaiah 61:1-2 (NKJV)*

<sup>1</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

<sup>2</sup> To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn,

In Isaiah God speaks of having a day of vengeance in His heart.

*Isaiah 63:4 (NKJV)*

<sup>4</sup> For the day of vengeance is in My heart, And the year of My redeemed has come.

God's vengeance is no to be equated with petty human vindictiveness and bitter desire for revenge.

God's holiness, righteousness, and justice demand that He take vengeance on unrepentant sinners. Vengeance belongs to God alone because all sin is ultimately against Him and an offense to Him. The Psalmist declares;

*Psalms 51:4 (NKJV)*

<sup>4</sup> Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight-- That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge.

The knowledge that God will one day execute vengeance on those who reject Him does not justify any personal vengeance on the part of believers.

Instead we read:

*Proverbs 25:21 (NKJV)*

<sup>21</sup> If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;

And Paul wrote;

*Romans 12:19 (NKJV)*

<sup>19</sup> Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

Now a realization that the Day of the Lord is coming in which God will take vengeance on the wicked is a bittersweet one for believers.

On the one hand we rejoice, because God's glory will be put on display, sin will be done away with, the world will be taken back from the usurper, Satan, and God will be vindicated. But on the other hand, that day will bring about the destruction of the ungodly and their sentencing to eternal punishment.

This bittersweet, almost ambivalent attitude toward God's judgment is pictured in Revelation;

*Revelation 10:8-10 (NKJV)*

<sup>8</sup> Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, "Go, take the little book which

*is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth."*

<sup>9</sup> *So I went to the angel and said to him, "Give me the little book." And he said to me, "Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth."*

<sup>10</sup> *Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter.*

John's initial reaction to the judgments described in the little book was the sweet realization that God will be vindicated and His glory put on display. But the sobering realization of the horrors that would be inflicted on unbelievers nauseated him.

Now the fifth seal marks the midpoint of the Tribulation period in bridging the gap between the beginning of God's wrath in the first half of the Tribulation and its full fury revealed in the second half.

Like the horsemen of the first four seals, it also portrays a force. That force is the prayers of God's saints for Him to exact vengeance on rebellious mankind.

Three features become evident as the fifth seal is unveiled:

### **The persons involved**

**The petition they have**

**The promise they receive**

## **THE PERSONS INVOLVED**

*Revelation 6:9 (NKJV)*

<sup>9</sup> *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.*

As with the first four seals, **when the Lamb** (the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone has authority to take back the universe: 5:4-5) **broke the fifth seal** another sequence in the unfolding of divine judgment was revealed, in which John **saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain.**

These are martyrs, killed during the time of all the judgments. In addition to divine judgment through the false peace, war, famine, and disease dominating the unbelieving world, there will be widespread persecution of believers led by Satan, his demons, and the final Antichrist.

Jesus taught that identical sequence of events in His Olivet Discourse in *Matthew 24*.

*Matthew 24:1-7 (NKJV)*

<sup>1</sup> *Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple.*

<sup>2</sup> *And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."*

<sup>3</sup> *Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"*

<sup>4</sup> *And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you.*

<sup>5</sup> *For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.*

<sup>6</sup> *And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.*

<sup>7</sup> *For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.*

These verses describe the events of the first four seals, just as the fifth seal describes martyrs, so also does Jesus in the next verse

*Matthew 24:9 (NKJV)*

<sup>9</sup> *Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.*

The event that marks the midpoint of the Tribulation, the setting up of the "abomination of desolation," does not occur until *verse 15 of Matt 24*.

Therefore the persecution Jesus spoke of (that associated with the fifth seal) will begin in the first half of the Tribulation and escalate in the second half, after the abomination of desolation.

The abomination of desolation is referred to three times in Daniel's prophecy;

*Daniel 9:27 (NKJV)*

<sup>27</sup> *Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate."*

*Daniel 11:31 (NKJV)*

<sup>31</sup> *And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation.*

*Daniel 12:11 (NKJV)*

<sup>11</sup> *And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days.*

Daniel used the very same words to describe the acts of the Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanes.

The yet future "abomination of desolation" Jesus described in *Matt 24* will be similar to Antiochus's act.

At that time the final Antichrist will set himself up in the temple to be worshiped as God.

*2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 (NKJV)*

<sup>3</sup> *Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,*

<sup>4</sup> *who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*

As we have said, the event that will usher in the second half of the Tribulation with its increased intensity is the "abomination of desolation"

At this point the persecution of the believers will be greatly increased. But note something with all the increase in persecution this situation will by no means prevent the "gospel of the kingdom" from being preached.

The preachers will include:

- **144,000 Jewish evangelists;**

*Revelation 7:1-8 (NKJV)*

<sup>1</sup> *After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree.*

<sup>2</sup> *Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea,*  
<sup>3</sup> *saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."*

<sup>4</sup> *And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed:*

<sup>5</sup> *of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed;*

<sup>6</sup> *of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand were sealed;*

<sup>7</sup> *of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand were sealed;*

<sup>8</sup> *of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed.*

- **Two powerful preachers known as the two witnesses**

*Revelation 11:3 (NKJV)*

<sup>3</sup> *And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."*

- **An angel flying through the sky**

*Revelation 14:6 (NKJV)*

<sup>6</sup> *Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth--to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people--*

So effective will their preaching be that those who will respond to it and are saved are described in Revelation 7:9 as "a great multitude which no one could count."

John described the martyrs he **saw underneath the altar** as **souls** because their bodily resurrection had not yet take place (20:4)

They are the first-fruits of those who will be saved out of the Great Tribulation.

The altar of which John saw is most likely emblematic of the altar of incense in the Old Testament because of its association of incense with prayer

*Revelation 5:8 (NKJV)*

<sup>8</sup> *Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.*

*Revelation 8:3-4 (NKJV)*

<sup>3</sup> *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.*

<sup>4</sup> *And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.*

*Psalms 141:2 (NKJV)*

<sup>2</sup> *Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.*

*Luke 1:10 (NKJV)*

<sup>10</sup> *And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.*

John gives two reasons why the martyrs will be slain:

**1<sup>st</sup> Because of the Word of God,**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Because of the testimony which they had maintained.**

### **Because of the Word of God**

They will correctly interpret what they see going on around them in the world in the light of Scripture.

They will proclaim from the Bible God's judgment and call on people to repent and believe the gospel.

Antichrist and his followers, however, will not tolerate their bold preaching and will persecute and kill them.

### **Because of the testimony which they had maintained**

This refers to their loyalty to Jesus Christ which was demonstrated by their proclamation of the Word of God in the face of life-threatening hatred and hostility.

In this world, merciless men will murder those who faithfully and courageously proclaim the message of judgment and salvation. And they are the one's seen under the altar.