

**Study 14: Revelation 6:9-17**

**9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.**

Those who were in danger of losing their lives at the time Revelation was written could only be encouraged by this verse. They were not alone in what they were facing. There had been others who lost their lives because of God's word and their testimony and they were in the presence of God. They did not die in vain but their souls were in a special place in the presence of God.

God never overlooks any sacrifice that we make for Him, especially when we give our lives unto death for His cause. **"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).**

I have been on several somewhat dangerous missions assignments, but I refuse not to go because my life may be in danger. I surrendered my life to God on May 18, 1973. How He chooses to claim me into His presence is God's business, not mine.

On my first international missions trip, I made a last will and testament and met with my family to give them final instructions in case something happened.

Paul always fled when his life was in danger. That is wisdom. If there is any way you can escape the danger you face, you should. But if you cannot, then you should take courage in the above verse and the others I now list:

**"Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my master will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the LORD your God. But the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling"(1 Samuel 25:29).**

What a beautiful analogy! We are bound securely in the bundle of the living. If we are taken out of that bundle, it is with God's permission and assistance!

**"The wicked lie in wait for the righteous, seeking their very lives; but the LORD will not leave them in their power or let them be condemned when brought to trial" (Psalm 37:32-33)**

**"He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight" (Psalm 72:14).**

**10 They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"**

God uses the death of His followers to give added testimony to those who do not believe. We know that Saul was a witness at the stoning of Stephen. My theory is that Stephen's death played a role in Saul's conversion.

The martyrs also help to seal the eternal doom of their killers. The Pharisees were fond of saying that if they had been alive, they would not have killed the prophets as their forefathers did. Jesus addressed this issue when He said:

**And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers! "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar (Matthew 23:30-35).**

**11 Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.**

This seems to imply that there is a certain number of saints assigned to martyrdom. Or perhaps it simply implies that the number of those to be killed will end when the current age expires. But martyrdom is a fact of Christian life.

God takes special notice of those who give their lives as a testimony to His work in their lives. He gives them "white robes," symbolic of their holiness and purity before Him. I used to wonder what would happen if I was given an ultimatum, "Renounce the Lord or die!" I no longer worry about that issue. If the Lord puts me in that situation, He will give me the grace to endure.

Those yet to be martyred are referred to as "fellow servants and brother." As God's servant, I am a fellow servant and brother of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and all the other great servants of God. They are my cousins and uncles in the faith. I wonder if that is what the writer of Hebrews was thinking when he stated that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses (see Hebrews 12:1)?

**12 I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red,**

There are times when we can only "watch" what God is doing. We have no role to play; we are simply spectators of God's fearful and awesome cosmic play.

The earthquake and blood-red moon are not to be taken literally, but represent "apocalyptic" language that describes cataclysmic but not actual events.

When the Lord moves in your life and shakes things up, it can seem like an earthquake and that your sky is falling. Consider this passage:

**At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." The words "once**

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**more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken-- that is, created things-- so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:26-29).**

Is God shaking your life to show you something about the permanence and importance of His kingdom, His rule, in your life?

I heard someone say that we all meet God as a consuming fire. Some in this life as we submit to God burning away those things that are not of Him; others in the next life, where there is a fire that cannot be extinguished. I want my fire now so I can enjoy God forever!

Then consider an Old Testament passage:

**God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah (Psalm 46:1-11)**

Did the churches in Revelation feel like their world was crumbling around them? God gave John this revelation so that they would see God's hand in the fearful events taking place. God doesn't stop the cataclysmic events, but He does make Himself a refuge in such times. Are you going through massive upheaval? Don't try to get out of it, take refuge in God!

What does that mean to take refuge in God? You've probably had people tell you to give something to God. What were they trying to say?

How can we be still in times of change? How can we rest in God when all around us seems to be in turmoil? It must be possible or God wouldn't tell us to do it?

**13 and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind.**

**14 The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.**

Revelation was not written to scare people, in spite of how people use it today to do just that. Revelation was written to encourage those who were going through traumatic times, to let them know that God is in control; to let them know that the Lamb is opening the seals of history that has been ordained by God the Father.

When anyone tries to scare you and uses Revelation as their tool, you can reject their fear tactics. Revelation is a source of encouragement. Anyone who claims that Revelation is a book of specific future history, they don't understand what they are talking about!

Revelation is not a history book. It is the last chapter in a great story of God creating and redeeming mankind. Someone once said, "I read the last book and we win!" The sky and stars may fall, but God is in control! Is that the story of your life?

**15 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains.**

No one can stand before God and what He is doing! The churches of Revelation were being told that Caesar was king, that the emperor was divine and all mighty. This presents a totally different picture.

Man started out hiding in Genesis (Adam and Eve hid from the Lord when He walked through the garden) and is still hiding in Revelation. What a ludicrous thought: trying to hide from the presence of God. That isn't possible. All men, all politicians, the rich, the famous and powerful will try to hide when God reveals His purpose and plan.

**16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!"**

That doesn't seem quite appropriate: the wrath of the Lamb! But this is no ordinary Lamb. This is also the Lion of Judah!

The rocks will fall on these who are hiding, but it won't be to conceal them; it will be to crush them! **"He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed" (Matthew 21:44).** I would rather fall on the stone by choice and be broken than have the stone fall on me and be crushed to powder!

When you are broken to pieces, there still may be something to reassemble. But powder just scatters in the wind! The choice is given to every person.

**17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"**

The day of wrath may delay, but it will come. I have put my faith in God that this wrath will pass by me. The wicked may prevail for a day, but God will have His way and remove them as dust. I trust you, Lord! I trust that what comes is from you and that you will preserve and protect me in the day of trouble. Amen.