Session 4. Fifth and Sixth Seals: Prayer Releasing Judgment (Rev. 6:9-17)

I. FIFTH SEAL: THE PRAYER MOVEMENT STRENGTHENED BY MARTYRS (REV. 6:9-11)

When He** [Jesus] **opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God ... [10] 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?" [11] 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 brethren, who would be killed ... was completed. (Rev. 6:9-11)

A. Jesus will release the fifth seal judgment against the Antichrist in the context of a significant increase of intercession. The prayer movement in heaven and on earth (Lk. 18:8) will increase at the fifth seal. The fifth seal judgment is against the Antichrist, not against the martyred saints.

B. Jesus prophesied about the end-time prayer movement on earth crying out for vengeance against the great injustice of the Antichrist's reign of terror. This occurs at the time of the fifth seal.

Shall God not avenge** [bring justice] **His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? [8] I tell you that He will avenge them speedily** [Tribulation]**. When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith** [agreement] **on the earth? (Lk. 18:7-8)

C. The fifth seal judgment is more severe than the four preceding it. The judgments increase in intensity as the seals unfold. The fourth seal resulted in the death of one fourth of the earth. The first four seals were the wicked acting against each other as God removed His restraining hand.

D. The blood of the martyrs crying out for justice in the fifth seal is powerful. It will release a new order of supernatural judgments seen in the sixth seal, followed by the trumpets and bowls. There is an acceleration of judgment after the fifth seal. It is the turning point in Revelation.

E. The mistreatment of the righteous in the first four seals (Rev. 6:1-8) resulted in increased prayer by the saints (Rev. 6:10). The murder of the saints will stir Jesus' heart of vengeance.

For true and righteous are His judgments, because ... He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her. (Rev. 19:2)

F. Martyrdom sets into motion a domino effect in the spirit realm, which intensifies prayer. Murder backfires on the Antichrist. The shedding of the saints' blood fuels the prayer movement, purifies the Church, and releases the harvest. It will result in fearless dedication to Jesus and zeal in the prayer movement, which releases judgment.

G. The Antichrist will be the greatest oppressor in history. God is raising up a justice movement to confront him. The end-time prayer movement is the ultimate justice movement. Jesus will confront oppressors and completely overpower them.

H. The wicked do not fear the prayer movement because they do not understand that the blood of martyrs fuels the prayer movement. Murder fills up the guilt of a nation.

You are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who <u>murdered</u> the prophets. [32] <u>Fill up</u>, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. (Mt. 23:31-32)

Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land** [Egypt] **... and they will afflict them 400 years. [14] The nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions ...[16] But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the <u>iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete</u>. (Gen. 15:13-16)

I. The Spirit who inspires intercession in heaven in the fifth seal will inspire intercession in the Church on earth as Jesus prophesied in Luke 18:7-8. The prayer ministry in heaven gives us great insight into the prayer ministry on earth. They will mirror each other.

J. Jesus will confront oppression to the degree that prayer ascends. The end-time prayer movement is the greatest justice movement in history. The prayers of the ***<u>saints</u>*** (Lk. 18:7-8; Isa. 42:10-16; Rev. 5:8; 22:17) join with the prayers of the ***<u>martyrs in heaven</u>*** (Rev. 6:10) and with the prayers of the ***<u>remnant of Israel</u>*** (Zech. 12:10; Isa. 64:1-12; 30:18-33; Ps. 94:1-23; 98:1-9; 99:1-9, etc.).

K. Scripture prophesies the end-time prayer movement at the time of the fifth seal in heaven.

Let the <u>high praises</u> of God be in their mouth ... [7] To execute vengeance on the nations ... [9] To <u>execute on them the written judgment</u>—this honor have all His saints. (Ps. 149:6-9)

Sing to the LORD a new song, and His praise <u>from the ends of the earth</u> ... [11] Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voice ... [13] The LORD shall go forth** [Jesus' coming] **like a mighty man; <u>He shall stir up His zeal like a man of war</u> ... He shall prevail. (Isa. 42:10-13)

I will pour on ... the inhabitants of Jerusalem <u>the Spirit of grace and supplication</u>** [prayer]**; then they will <u>look on Me</u> whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him. (Zech. 12:10)

Oh, <u>that You would rend the heavens</u>! that You would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence ... [2] to make Your name known to <u>Your adversaries</u>, that the nations** [Antichrist's armies] **may tremble at Your presence. (Isa. 64:1-2; also see Ps. 110:5)

L. The prayer ministry is the governmental center of the universe. The end-time prayer movement affects the decrees in God's court by releasing favor on the saints and judgment on the wicked.

The horn** [Antichrist] **was <u>making war</u> against the saints, and <u>prevailing</u> against them, [22] <u>until</u> the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in <u>favor of the saints</u> ... to possess the kingdom ... [25] He shall <u>persecute the saints</u> ... [26] The <u>court shall be seated</u>, and they shall take away his dominion ... [27] The kingdom ... shall be <u>given to the ... saints</u>. (Dan. 7:21-27)

[9] The Ancient of Days was seated ... [10] ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The <u>court was seated</u> ... [11] I watched till the beast was slain ... [14] to Him** [Jesus] **was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples ... should serve Him. (Dan. 7:9-14)

II. THE DETAILS OF THE FIFTH SEAL

A. ***Jesus opened the fifth seal:*** God will allow the martyrdom prophesied by Daniel to create the context for a great prayer movement. The heavenly court is in session as the saints pray.

B. ***Under the altar:*** the golden altar of incense in heaven (Rev. 8:3-5; 9:13; 14:17-18; 16:7) is where the prayer reaches the heavenly court. In Moses' tabernacle there were two altars, the brazen altar for sacrifice and the golden altar of incense for prayer.

C. ***Until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth*** (Rev. 14:20; 16:7; 19:2, 21). To generalize this passage as referring to all the martyrs of history ignores the detail that their persecutors are still alive on earth at the time that their prayer is offered in heaven. These are martyrs killed in the end times. They pray in heaven for their persecutors, who live on the earth. "Those who dwell on the earth" refers to unbelievers in Revelation (13 times).

D. This is a prayer to vindicate God's reputation, deliver His people, and judge the Antichrist. This is not a cry for personal revenge, but a prayer that God would remove reprobate people from oppressing others. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11). We do not rejoice in judgment on individuals, but in the fact that God stops oppression. We pray for judgment only on the reprobate, who can't repent since they took the mark of the Beast.

E. God answers are seen in Revelation 6:12-17 and then followed by trumpets and bowls.

F. ***They cried, "How long":*** the prayer, "How long," is one of the most recorded prayers in the OT (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). This is the only prayer of request in Revelation. Psalm 79 develops this vindication theme of "how long."

G. ***O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood:*** *Holy* and *true* are emphasized in Revelation 3:7. The saints lean into sovereignty with confidence. God's judgments are holy, or pure. They always express love, justice with wisdom. They are true to God's promise to release His judgments without being too severe, nor too lenient. He judges with accurate information.

H. ***White robes:*** declare the saints' purity (the opposite of the guilty verdict that men gave them) and assure the saints that their prayers will be answered. They also speak of the victory. The elders (Rev. 4:4) and saints wear them (Rev. 6:11; 7:9, 13, 14; 22:14).

I. ***Rest and wait:*** they were not to stop crying for vengeance, but were to rest with assurance. This is in contrast to the persecution they just endured on earth (Rev. 14:8, 13). They were not to stop interceding, but to be at peace, knowing that there was a time decreed for vengeance.

J. ***Until:*** God's sovereign time for the fullness of judgment at the second coming will not come until the full number of martyrs is complete.

III. SIXTH SEAL: COSMIC DISTURBANCES AND FEAR (REV. 6:12-17)

He** [Jesus] **opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. 13 And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. 14 Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. 15 The kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, 16 and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6:12-17)

IV. INTRODUCTION TO THE SIXTH SEAL

A. Jesus opened the sixth seal in answer to the prayers of the saints in the fifth seal. This seal begins a new order of supernatural judgment released by the trumpet and bowl series against the Antichrist's empire. The martyrs cried, "Avenge us" and the wicked will cry, "Hide us."

B. Jesus' prophesied of fearful signs in the sky that point to His coming (Lk. 21:28). When He breaks the sixth seal, He will release cosmic disturbances with signs in the sky.

There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations ... 26 men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. (Lk. 21:25-26)

C. The sixth seal describes the great agitation of the universe. This is the turning point in history.

Thus says the LORD of hosts ... "I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; 7 and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire** [Jesus] **of all nations. (Hag. 2:6-7)

D. The sixth seal is key to understanding Revelation and the outpouring of the Spirit (Joel 2:28-31).

I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy and ... see visions ... 30 I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. 31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. (Joel 2:28-31)

E. Our view of the sixth seal and its timing determines our view of the structure of Revelation. The Day of the Lord is both narrow and broad. The ***narrow*** Day of the Lord is a 24-hour day in which Jesus enters Jerusalem. The ***broad*** Day of the Lord starts at the Tribulation and continues until the end of the millennium as a "day" lasting 1,000 years plus 3½ years (2 Pet. 3:8). For the great day of His wrath ***"has come"***—the issue is whether the Day of the Lord has just began or is it soon to follow. In the Greek, the verb ***has come*** can look backwards, indicating that the Day already arrived, or it can look forward as something to occur soon. The verb tenses in the hymns of Revelation are future tenses (Rev. 11:18; 19:7). Robert Thomas says the verb *elthen* ("has come") is aorist indicative, referring to a previous arrival of God's wrath.[1]

[1] Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1992), 457.

V. THE SEVENFOLD DESCRIPTION OF THE SIXTH SEAL

A. ***Earthquake:*** is mentioned seven times in Revelation (Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13 [2x], 19; 16:18 [2x]). Four times they are prophesied with the qualifying word "great" (Rev. 6:12; 11:13; 16:18 [2x]).

B. ***Sun:*** the darkening of the sun cannot be for a long period, or the earth would freeze. What causes this darkening? This will be Jesus' supernatural work. Yet, it could also include natural events such as volcanic eruptions that leave particles in the air as ash, dust, and debris; a nuclear fallout; or a full eclipse, which occurs when something gets in between earth and the light of the sun.

C. The sun will be black as sackcloth. Sackcloth is the clothing of mourning and judgment (Isa. 33:9). The prophets wore black and sackcloth when calling for repentance (Mt. 11:21; Lk 10:13; Rev. 11:3). The sun will one day wear the garments of death and mourning.

D. ***Moon:*** this will be Jesus' supernatural work. Yet it could also include natural events as gases or a lunar eclipse that change the color of the moon's light to look red. A lunar eclipse occurs during a full moon when the earth is in the way of the light of the sun. Blood red speaks of death.

E. ***Stars:*** asteroids and meteor showers hitting the earth. The Greek word for stars used here is *aster* from which we get the word "asteroid." An aster refers to any shining mass in the sky, including stars, comets, meteors, asteroids, or any flaming debris.

F. The diameter of the earth is nearly 8,000 miles. Our sun is a small star that is over 800,000 miles in diameter (100 times larger than the earth). One star hitting the earth would destroy it; thus, the kings would not need to flee to the mountains. Stars will still be in the sky in the fourth trumpet (Rev. 8:12). Isaiah prophesied of stars losing their light rather than falling (Isa. 13:10).

G. As God guided David's stone to hit Goliath, so He will guide these stones (asteroids) to destroy the Antichrist's infrastructure to stop oppressors from killing the saints and others. Meteorites will bombard the earth, as compared to a fig tree losing its figs when strong winds blow on it.

H. ***Sky:*** the sky will recede (split, divide, move back) as a scroll. God will cause the sky to roll back, thus opening a window to see into heaven so that worldwide leaders may witness it.

Then the <u>sky receded</u> as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. (Rev. 6:14)

I. ***Mountains moved:*** every mountain and island will be moved out of its place, which does not imply that they are all destroyed. No one would be able to hide in the mountains if they were all destroyed. There are five specific earthquakes prophesied in Revelation: at the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12), at the release of the trumpets (Rev. 8:5), at the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15, 19), when the two witnesses ascend to heaven (Rev. 11:13), and at the seventh bowl (Rev. 16:17-21), which is referred to as the most severe earthquake in history (Zech. 14:4-5; Isa. 2:19; 29:6; Hag. 2:6, 7).

VI. THE RESPONSE OF UNBELIEVERS —SEVEN CLASSES

The kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, [16] and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the Throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! [17] For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6:15-17)

A. John describes those affected from seven categories of society. He emphasizes how leaders will respond: ***kings*** (presidents); ***great men*** (world leaders); ***rich men*** (financial leaders); ***military commanders***; ***mighty men*** (civil leaders); and ***slaves and free men*** (common class majority).

B. Powerful world leaders are pictured as running for their lives in panic without regard for their dignity as they run to the mountains, claiming to hide from a God they said did not exist. Later in the seventh bowl, they decide to fight against Jesus (Rev. 19:17-21).

C. Some asteroids can be detected years ahead of time so that nations will know they are coming.

D. Unbelievers will perceive God's wrath in these signs as they cry to the mountains, "Fall on us and hide us from the wrath of the Lamb!" They run in panic, understanding the cosmic disturbances as God's judgment.

E. We are not told how they conclude this is God's wrath. The forerunners have been proclaiming it since the opening of the first seal. This is not the second coming, because at that time, the world leaders will fight Jesus instead of running to hide from Him in the mountains (Rev. 19:17-21).

F. The unbelievers will understand and even announce the coming of the Day of the Lord.

G. Jesus, Peter, and Paul taught that the Day of the Lord would come as a thief, surprising many (Mt. 24:37-44; 1 Thes. 5:2-4; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15).

H. Isaiah prophesied about people hiding in the caves (Isa. 2:10, 21, 19; Hos. 10:8; Lk. 23:30).

Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty ... [11] The haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day ... [19] They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of the Lord ... when He arises to shake the earth mightily. (Isa. 2:10-19)

I. The saints will see and understand in this hour in which Nahum's prophecy is fulfilled.

The mountains quake before Him, the hills melt, and the earth heaves at His presence, Yes, the world and all who dwell in it. [6] Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him. [7] The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him. (Nah. 1:5-7)