

REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

STUDY THREE

More Seals Broken . . . More Lives Shaken and Taken

Revelation 6:9–17

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God if you are without Christ. So who is able to stand? Those who know the Lord Jesus. It doesn't mean they won't die, but it does mean they will receive their eternal rewards in glory.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN the centuries following the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, many who chose to follow Him endured some of the worst persecution the world has ever known. They were whipped and beaten, enslaved and imprisoned, fed to lions and sawed in half. Their opponents thought they could stomp out the movement while it remained small.

Yet these efforts proved futile. The fires of persecution only refined the faith of believers and emboldened them to rely on the Holy Spirit as they proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ. In the first few centuries AD, the kingdom of God exploded in growth throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe.

This reality led the early church father and theologian Tertullian to make this observation: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Remarkably, the more Christ’s enemies tried to stamp out His church, the more it flourished. It’s amazing to see God work in such upside-down ways! After all, the life-through-death principle is the heart of the gospel.

Even though the cruel deaths of martyrs serve the greater purpose of the kingdom of God, they are still unjust. In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we will listen to a chorus of martyrs begging for justice. God’s response will reveal His righteousness and offer hope to believers—especially those who suffer because of their faith.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

You may not live in a context where Christians face overt, violent persecution, but it's vital to remember that, even today, countless believers suffer for their faith. We must continuously intercede for them and engage in the same mission of boldly declaring and demonstrating our faith in Jesus Christ. Take time to consider this truth and pray as you prepare to study God's vindication of those who suffer for Him.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

John wept when he saw the sealed scroll of God's plan of redemption. Like us, he longed for the day when pain, death, and injustice would cease. Yet an angel comforted John and showed Him the slaughtered Lamb—the One who endured the most unjust death ever. He stepped forward to receive the scroll, to open it, and to carry out God's plans for justice.

In *Revelation 6:9–17*, the Lamb opened the fifth and sixth seals to vindicate those who died serving Him.



Observation: The Fifth and Sixth Seals

As you read *Revelation 6:9–17*, place yourself in the sandals of one of these martyrs. Think of the stories you've heard about those who've suffered for Christ, or simply recall your own seasons of persecution. Then, as you observe the verses, pay special attention to the emotion in the voices of these martyrs.¹

The Fifth Seal—Revelation 6:9–11

According to *Revelation 6:9*, whom did John see under the heavenly altar after the Lamb opened the fifth seal? According to *6:10*, what did this group say?

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What did each member of this group receive in *Revelation 6:11a*? _____

What message did this group receive in *6:11b*?

The Sixth Seal—Revelation 6:12–17

The martyrs learned that more persecution awaited their brothers and sisters, yet this season of suffering would soon come to an end with the breaking of the sixth seal. According to *Revelation 6:12–14*, what happened in nature when the Lamb broke the sixth seal?

What groups of people did John notice in *6:15*? According to *6:16*, what did they say in response to the series of seal judgments?

“For the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to survive?” (*Revelation 6:17*). The unstated answer? *No one!* No human being—no matter his or her rung on the social ladder—can endure God’s wrath against sin . . . unless he or she repents and turns to Jesus Christ in faith. For those who trust Him, there is no wrath—only hope and deliverance.

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Interpretation: The Blood of the Martyrs

The Greek term we translate as “martyr” has an interesting history that provides some insight into the meaning of *Revelation 6:9–17*. Look up the term *martyrs* in the free lexicon available at billmounce.org. What is the original technical definition of this term? How does this definition compare to the way we use the term “martyr” today? What does this development of meaning reveal about the lives of the ancient believers who suffered for their faith in Jesus Christ?

Martyrdom seems like one of the most devastating realities a Christian can face. Yet this passage suggests otherwise. How does the opening of the fifth and sixth seals offer hope to Christians who endure persecution because of their commitment to Jesus? Feel free to consult your Bible-study tools like Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Revelation*.² For a free resource, check out *Constable’s Notes* at netbible.org.

What does *6:15–17* reveal about the extent of God’s judgment against those who reject Jesus Christ as Lord over creation?

We need to pause out of honor for those who have been martyred—for those who paid the ultimate price. Grave markers across lands like Scotland, Germany, Switzerland, and the Far East remind us of those who followed the name of Christ and paid the price. The nations will give an answer for martyring these great men and women. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Correlation: The Day of the Lord

The sixth seal may seem similar to the first four seals—just another depiction of disaster that awaits those who have turned their backs on God. Yet the images of *Revelation 6:15–17* closely match Old Testament prophecies about “The Day of the Lord” (see *Joel 2:1*)—the time when God will judge the wicked and vindicate the righteous.

Though *Joel 2* depicts intense forms of judgment, the middle of this chapter contains a message that offers a way for the wicked to avoid this frightening fate. Summarize the message of *Joel 2:12–14* in your own words.

Read the conclusion of this prophecy in *Joel 2:28–32* and, in the space below, note the parallels between these verses and *Revelation 6:15–17*.

Though these images might worry readers, the purpose of these prophecies is to encourage the righteous and repentant. How does *Joel 2:28–32* offer hope to those who remain faithful to God?

The persecuted are always eager for God’s vengeance. Don’t you do your own avenging. “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.” This is not popular preaching. God is the God of mercy and goodness and grace and love and forgiveness. But He also is holy and just. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Application: A Divine Balance and a Human Reality

Revelation 6:9–17 deals with some heavy topics. Yet it teaches us important lessons about a *divine balance* and a *human reality*.

First, there is a *divine balance* in God's character. He acts with both mercy and justice. He extends both grace and wrath. He shows both love and vengeance. These traits might feel like opposites, but they work in perfect harmony in God.

Do you tend to see Jesus more as a loving friend—who extends grace and mercy—or as a just king—who brings wrath and justice? What might your walk with Him lack if you neglect one of these equally true aspects of His character? What steps can you take to understand and embrace God in His fullness?

Second, there is a *human reality* that people will suffer at the hands of fellow humans. How does your cultural context encourage you to respond when another person causes you to suffer? How does the truth of this passage differ from the message you receive from the world?

Even if you haven't endured physical persecution for following Jesus, you likely have faced some kind of opposition for your faith. How does the message of this passage allow you to understand this opposition from God's perspective? How has this study equipped you to endure future persecution faithfully?

Persecution and martyrdom represent frightening realities for Christians. Yet Jesus taught that we would suffer for following Him . . .

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So when—not *if*—you face opposition for your faith, remember this: you face persecution *because* you live as a faithful witness to the good news of the life-giving death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He sees you suffering, and He will reward you for your faithful service when He welcomes you into His presence.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for giving me assurance through Your Word—confidence that I will, in fact, be able to withstand that great day of wrath when You will judge evil. I rejoice because I will not only simply endure. Rather, I will join You in Your eternal presence. Remind me of the presence of Your Holy Spirit to help me endure as I seek to be a faithful witness. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Brad Smith, writer and content strategist, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2003, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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