

THE SOULS UNDER THE ALTAR!

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NOTE: - All Bible texts are taken from the King James Version; and the compiler has supplied all emphasis throughout this Study Document.

☞ The following passage found in the Book of Revelation, is used as “proof” that the *supposedly* immortal souls of the righteous, go directly to heaven at the time of their death. This popular view asserts that these souls are in a disembodied and conscious state, and that they are literally crying unto God for vengeance to be executed upon their murderers.

Revelation 6:9 - 11: - “And when he had opened the fifth seal, **I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?** And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they [were], should be fulfilled.”

THE BIBLICAL ANSWER: -

We notice, that this passage is **ONLY** referring to a specific group of the righteous dead – those who have been martyred for Jesus Christ, and **NOT** to all the righteous dead. Hence this passage gives **NO** support to the teaching that all the souls of the righteous go directly to heaven at death.

If we take this passage as teaching a literal truth, there is a problem for the popular interpretation of this passage, and that is: -

All the souls of the millions and millions of martyrs for Jesus Christ, throughout the history of this world, are positioned as being under the altar, **until** all the remaining martyrs for Jesus are to be slain. They are told to continue to be at rest, and therefore they cannot be singing praises to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven, which contradicts the popular teaching of what the *supposedly* “departed souls” of the saints are doing in heaven since they died.

It is often asked that if these souls are not conscious in heaven, how could they cry unto God for vengeance? By the use of the simple literary device of personification, that is frequently used throughout the Bible, in which the Bible writers endow inanimate objects with the qualities of being living, intelligent beings.

A few examples will establish this point as being a frequently used tool by the inspired prophets and apostles: -

- Abel’s shed blood is represented as having a voice and crying to God from out of the ground.
Genesis 4:8 - 11: - “And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the LORD said unto Cain, Where [is] Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: [Am] I my brother’s keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? **the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.** And now [art] thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand.”
- In the Book of Judges the various trees are portrayed as speaking to one another discussing the prospect of anointing a king to rule over them.
Judges 9:8 - 15: - “**The trees went forth [on a time] to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou,**

[and] reign over us. **But the fig tree said unto them**, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? **Then said the trees unto the vine**, Come thou, [and] reign over us. **And the vine said unto them**, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? **Then said all the trees unto the bramble**, Come thou, [and] reign over us. **And the bramble said unto the trees**, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, [then] come [and] put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.”

- In the Book of Isaiah the heavens are commanded to sing; the lower parts of the earth are to shout; the mountains, forest and every tree within the forest are to break into signing. In another passage from the pen of the prophet Isaiah, the mountains and hills are listed as going to break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Isaiah 44:23: - **“Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done [it]: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.”**

Isaiah 55:12: - **“For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap [their] hands.”**

- In the Book of Habakkuk the stone out of the wall is portrayed as crying out, and the beam out of the timber is pictured as going to answer it.
Habakkuk 2:11: - **“For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.”**
- The wages of the labourers that the rich men have kept back by fraud are represented as crying to the Lord.
James 5:4: - **“Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.”**

☞ More Bible passages could indeed be produced to establish this point that the Bible writers have frequently used the literary device of personification throughout the Scriptures, portraying inanimate objects as being living, intelligent beings. In none of the above passages, would any intelligent person claim that they actually believe that the blood of Abel, or the trees, or the hills and mountains, or the heavens and forest, or the stone or the beam, or the wages of the labourers are living, animate intelligent beings who can speak and sing etc. **NO ONE!** Yet it is confidently asserted that the souls under the Altar in Revelation 6:9 - 11 must be alive and conscious in death, to be able to cry out to God for vengeance on their persecutors. Such as we have seen is not necessarily the case at all.

☞ A few thoughtful questions will show that the popular belief concerning this passage does not stand up to a thorough Biblical examination: -

- These *supposedly* immortal souls cried out for their blood to be avenged. But do *supposedly* immortal souls have blood? **NO!** The apostle Paul makes it plain that flesh and blood **cannot** inherit the Kingdom of God, where these souls are supposed to be dwelling according to the popular interpretation concerning this passage.
1 Corinthians 15:50: - **“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.”**
- And who were those upon whom the saints called upon God for vengeance? Their persecutors and murderers. If their persecutors were already dead, then according to the popular theology of our day that claims that the souls of all mankind are immortal and go to their eternal reward at death, then their dead wicked persecutors would already be in the fires of an eternally burning Hell, suffering for their sins. Was this not vengeance enough for the saints that their dead persecutors were already being tormented in the flames of Hell? And if some of their persecutors were not yet dead, in the natural course of things they would soon be in Hell, being tormented

eternally for their sins, as fiercely as any one could wish. How amiable does this make these righteous souls appear? It makes them appear absolutely hard and sadistic. Such is the absurdity that is attached to the popular view of this passage.

- We do find an interesting statements concerning God's vengeance being poured out upon the murderers of his saints, further on in the Book of Revelation. Concerning God's vengeance that will be poured out upon Babylon the Great, during the Seven Last Plagues, at the end of the 7th Plague, we find that God has avenged his martyrs in pouring out his wrath upon their murderers.

Revelation 18:20 & 24: - "Rejoice over her, [thou] heaven, and [ye] holy apostles and prophets; **for God hath avenged you on her. ... And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.**"

Revelation 19:1 & 2: - "And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous [are] his judgments: **for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.**"