

Who are

The Souls
Under
The Alter

Leslie Rendell

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Book Cover by Leslie Rendell

Published by Leslie Rendell at Draught2Digital

First edition 2024

Introduction

There has been much discussion about the identity of the souls under the altar mentioned in Revelation 6:9. This booklet represents my understanding of who these souls are, and why they are under the altar. Some readers may agree with my interpretation, others may partially agree, and undoubtedly, some will disagree entirely. I welcome all perspectives, as my goal is not to convince you to adopt my viewpoint, but to spark curiosity and inspire you to seek the truth in your own Bible.

This is the purpose behind every book I write: to encourage you to study the Scriptures for yourself and determine whether my conclusions are correct. As you read, I ask you to keep one important thought in mind: I do not rely on the teachings of any church, individual, or religious institution. My sole source of information is the Bible. No words or opinions of man can ever carry more authority than the Word of God.

The Souls Under The Alter

The passage of scripture in Revelation 6:9-11 offers a profound glimpse into the heavenly response to the suffering of God's faithful people. As the fifth seal is opened, we witness the cries of martyrs who have given their lives for the Word of God and their testimony. Their plea for justice and their subsequent comfort by God reveals key truths about His sovereignty, the hope of ultimate vindication, and the enduring call for faithfulness amidst persecution. This message will explore the rich symbolism and theological depth of this passage, encouraging believers to trust in God's timing, persevere in trials, and hold fast to the promise of eternal reward.

Rev 6:9 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:

Rev 6:10 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?

Rev 6:11 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

fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

As Christians who desire to follow the leadership of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, what can we expect?, or more accurately what should we expect?

Should we expect a life of ease? Will our lives be just a walk in the park? Can we expect the world at large, the woke, and the terrorists to be a friend to God's grace? Can we expect this evil and adulterous world to help and encourage us to find God?

Can we expect a "health and wealth gospel"? Or a "name it and claim it promise? Will the "power of positive thinking" help us to find the truth? Will a "feel good" religion give you a warm and fuzzy feeling where everyone joins hands and sings "Kum-ba-yam".

What can we expect? A pre-tribulation rapture, sparing us from any form of persecution? A golden-age, sparing you from any form of suffering?

Whatever you are expecting, Revelation 6:9-11 is a most sobering and realistic picture of the life of a true Christian, and exactly what we must expect from this current evil age when we are very close to the time of our Lord's return.

We have studied the book of Revelation and as we go through this amazing book the imagery keeps intensifying.

The images become more horrific; the scenes more terrifying; the issues more pressing. We have come to expect that. We see it here once again. If you thought the opening of the first four seals was disturbing, wait until you see what the fifth seal shows you!

Rev 6:9 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:

The most important word in this verse is the word “slain”. So what exactly does this word mean. A Dictionary definition of the word slain is as follows.

Slain is a past participle of slay. And slay means to kill violently. Therefore anyone who was slain has been killed violently, murdered, beheaded, shot, stabbed, burned at the stake, crucified, or any of many other ways that someone can be killed, not by accident, but by deliberate and violent actions.

A martyr is someone who willingly suffers persecution, and often death, for their faith, beliefs, or principles. In a Christian context, a martyr is typically one who sacrifices their life rather than renounce their allegiance to Christ, their testimony of the gospel, or their adherence to God's Word. Martyrs are revered for their steadfastness, courage, and unwavering commitment to their faith in the face of opposition or hostility.

And according to verse 9, why were these people slain, it was for the word of God, for their testimony about Jesus Christ, for their refusal to recant their beliefs. Because even to the point of death they refused to deny God as their Father and Jesus Christ as their Lord of lords and King of kings.

Who does the bible tell us are martyrs. The answer is in the following verses.

Act 22:20 And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment

of them that slew him.

Rev 2:13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

These two examples are followers of Jesus who were prepared to die rather than deny Jesus.

Who is not a Martyr.

Someone is not regarded as a martyr if their suffering or death does not result from their commitment to their faith, beliefs, or principles. In a Christian context, the following people would typically not qualify as martyrs.

Accidental Deaths: Those who die in accidents or natural disasters, as their deaths are not tied to their testimony or faith.

Criminal Actions: Individuals who suffer or die, and this includes true Christians, as a consequence of wrongdoing, illegal activities, or personal misconduct are not martyrs because their suffering is not connected to their faithfulness to God or moral principles.

Unintentional Witness: Someone whose faith is not a factor in their suffering or death, such as a believer killed in unrelated circumstances, e.g., in a random act of violence or unrelated conflict, in a car accident, a house fire, an earthquake, or flood.

Personal or Political Causes: Those who suffer or die for political, nationalistic, or personal causes without a connection to their religious faith are not considered martyrs in the Christian sense.

Victims of violent deaths: But their death has nothing to do with their beliefs.

Those who may have been raptured:- Those who prefer to be taken out of harms way so they do not need to meet the requirements of martyrdom. They will not suffer because of their faith .

In summary, a martyr's distinction lies in their intentional suffering or death for their faith and testimony, rather than incidental or unrelated causes.

When the fifth seal is opened and we see the souls of those who have been killed; these are the souls of those who have died a violent death; these are the souls of those who have been stoned, who have been beheaded, who have been hanged, and who have been sawn in two. These are the souls of those who have been burned as lamps to illuminate the arena, those who have been thrown to the lions, those who have been counted as sheep for the slaughter. These are the souls of those who have been slain.

And why were they slain. The answer is in the very next words. "For the word of God".

In Revelation 6:9, the term "slain" (Greek: esphagmenon, from sphazō) carries the meaning of being killed, particularly in a sacrificial or violent manner. The word often conveys the sense of a deliberate act, such as slaughter or execution, rather than an accidental death. Some Synonyms for slain are Killed, Murdered, or Assassinated.

In the context of Revelation 6:9, "slain" refers specifically to those who have been martyred—killed for their unwavering faith in God, their adherence to His Word, and their testimony about Jesus Christ. This sacrificial connotation aligns with the imagery of their souls being

"under the altar," evoking the Old Testament practice of pouring the blood of sacrifices at the base of the altar as we see from Leviticus 4:7.

Lev 4:7 And the priest shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the LORD, which is in the tabernacle of the congregation; and shall pour all the blood of the bullock at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

Here, their death is portrayed as a profound act of devotion and witness, underscoring their ultimate allegiance to God even at the cost of their lives.

These are the martyrs: those who have died for the faith, those who have died for the Word of God, who have died for the testimony which they held, who have died because they refused to recant, who have died because they held to the Word of God though it cost them their life, who held to the testimony and sealed it with their blood.

These are the souls of the martyrs. These are the souls of all those who have died for the faith from the time of Christ's ascension to this very day. One of those souls is the soul of Stephen, the first martyr; his soul is there. The souls of the apostles are also there. History holds that Peter was crucified head down; James was beheaded at Jerusalem; Andrew was crucified on an X shaped cross; Nathanael was beheaded; Matthew was killed with a sword; Thomas was run through with a lance; the other James was thrown from a tower, stoned, and then sawn in pieces; Judas, not Judas Iscariot, was shot to death with arrows; Paul was most likely

beheaded. These are the traditions of history, and though we cannot prove the accounts, they are by all means likely and probable. The souls of the apostles are there under the altar.

Why were these incredible men murdered. It was only because they believed in Jesus Christ and had the faith of Jesus to withstand whatever persecutions and forms of being killed were given to them. Listen again to Revelation 6:9.

Rev 6:9 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 where does John see these souls of the martyrs? He sees them “under the altar.” This is not the altar of incense that stood in the Holy Place just before the curtains of the Holy of Holies. This is the altar of sacrifice that stood in the outer court and upon which the animals were sacrificed, their blood being poured out at the base of the altar. Do you see the imagery? Where you would see the blood of the sacrifice on the Old Testament altar, you now see the souls of the martyrs! Their blood has been poured out, as they have sealed their faith in death.

That is the scene set before you in the opening of the fifth seal. In view are the souls of all the martyrs who have died for the faith, from the time of Christ’s ascension to the time of His return on the clouds of glory. Their numbers will continue to increase until Jesus Christ returns. During the tribulation many more Christians will be murdered just because they profess Jesus Christ as their Lord. Considering the total number of Martyrs their numbers will be like a great army.

And who will be with Christ when He returns? This is revealed in Revelation 19:14.

Rev 19:14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

Remember what these souls under the alter were given. It was white robes. And what will the armies of Heaven be wearing when they return to the earth with Jesus. White robes. So these are the martyrs. Those who did not regard their lives as more important than proclaiming Jesus as their Lord of lords and King of kings.

Rev 6:11 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 fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

The number of God's martyrs has not reached its final number, there are still more to be added, and many will be added during the tribulation.

Now we come to Revelation 6:10.

Rev 6:10 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?'

What do they mean by "avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" It means repaying those who murdered them and getting the justice they all desire.

This is a cry for vengeance! Notice it is the cry of those who have already been slain. It is the cry of the souls in

heaven. It is not the cry of the Christian on earth! The soul of Stephen in heaven today cries out “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” That was not his cry in martyrdom. Then he cried, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” In his death, he was conformed to his Savior. You remember the cry of Christ on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!”

The cry for vengeance comes only from the souls in heaven, not from those who still dwell upon the earth. Even in suffering, even in persecution, yes, even in death, the cry of the martyr is that of the martyr’s Lord: “Father, forgive!”

Why the cry for vengeance from the souls in heaven? Because they stand in glory, and their cry is based on the character of God. They call Him “Lord”, and rightly so, for He has absolute power and authority. They call Him “holy and true”, and in His holiness and truth, He must judge sinners. This He will do. He has said, “It is Mine to avenge; I will repay.” For this judgment the souls under the altar cry out. They are crying out for the vindication of God.

And you see the Lord’s response, verse 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 their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.”

They are given a white robe and commanded to rest. The white robe is the righteousness of Christ. They have been liberated by Christ; they have been consecrated by Christ; they have been crowned by the Lamb in the righteousness of the Lamb. And they rest. Already now they enjoy the eternal

Sabbath rest. That is their condition.

Yet justice is delayed. Their blood has not yet been avenged. Final judgment has not yet been poured out upon their enemies, which are also the enemies of Christ. Though they stand clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and though they already enjoy Sabbath rest, they anxiously await the final judgment.

When shall that judgment come? John tells us:

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.

Do you find that phrase disturbing? Do you find it unsettling? You should! This tells you what you can expect of the Christian life. There are many yet to be killed as these martyrs were killed. What can you expect, Christian? Persecution, suffering, torture, even death. You are called fellow servants and brothers of these souls under the altar! Do you get the point? Your blood may very well run with theirs!

The Comfort of the Martyrs.

As disturbing and unsettling as this passage is, it also hints, in the most tender of terms, at the comfort that is ours: comfort in the midst of persecution, comfort in the midst of suffering, comfort in the midst of torture, comfort in the midst of death.

Note again the place of these souls: they are under the altar. This is the altar by which you enter the presence of God. This is the altar of sacrifice — the altar of the cross. Christ

laid down His life on the altar of the cross. And the blood of the Lamb that was sacrificed upon that cross pours down and it covers those souls under the altar. Yes, dear child of God, you are covered in the blood of the Lamb. Let the blood of the Lamb — that blood that covers you — let that blood speak to you of how precious you are in the sight of your God!

So precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints, He has ordained that judgment will not come until the number of the martyrs is complete! God knows the number! He knows the number of the elect! He knows the number of His children! He knows every last one of them, and not a hair can fall from their heads apart from His sovereign will! Notice that! God measures the time until the judgement by the blood of the martyrs!

As each martyr dies, the cry of the souls under the altar increases. When Stephen died, as the first martyr, it was a lonely cry. But the cry of the apostles soon joined his cry. And the souls of the early Christians soon joined the cry of the apostles. And the cry of the Reformers soon joined the cry of the early Christians. And the cries of those who died in the last century has joined the cry of the Reformers. Think of it! All the martyrs who have died for the Word of God and for the testimony that they held — from the time of the Ascension of Christ to this very day, and to this very moment — are crying out in heaven: “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

Do you think that cry falls on deaf ears? Do you think that cry goes unheeded? This is the cry of souls for whom Christ died! This is the cry of souls for whom the Lamb gave His life! This is the cry of those who have been purchased by

the blood of the Lamb! This is the cry of those who have been loved by the Lamb with an everlasting love! Do you think their cry falls on deaf ears?!

How foolish the wicked! How foolish those who would persecute Christians! How foolish those who would put to death the followers of Christ! They stoned Stephen and thought that Jesus Christ, the Cornerstone, would remain silent! They threw the Christians to the lions and thought that the Lion of the Tribe of Judah would remain silent! They burned Christians at the stake and thought that He whose eyes are like flames of fire would remain silent! They thrust Christians through with the sword, and thought that He who will strike the nations with the sword of His mouth would remain silent! How foolish the wicked!

Do you think the cry of the souls under the altar falls on deaf ears? Then look at the opening of the sixth seal. There you have the answer. There, in verses 12-17, you have the answer to the cry of the martyrs. The Day of Judgment is the answer to the cry of the souls under the altar. And don't be fooled, it is only a "little time" until that day.

Rev 6:12 And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

Rev 6:13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

Rev 6:14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

Rev 6:15 And the kings of the earth, and the

great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

Rev 6:16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

Rev 6:17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

This, then, is what we can expect. This is the life of the church. This is the life of the Christian. We can expect persecution. We can expect suffering. We can expect torture. We can expect death. It is a most sobering and realistic picture. If this is not what we expect, then we had better study church history. Then we had better read our Bibles. We had better read the Word of God.

And we had better hold to the Word of God. There is a distinction here, a distinction between those who hold to the Word of God and the testimony and those who dwell upon the earth. There is a separation between the sheep and the goats. There is a separation between the wheat and the tares. There are those who claim to be Christian and yet do not hold to the Word of God. There are those who claim to be Christian and yet do not hold to the testimony of Jesus Christ. There are those who claim to be Christian and yet have no regard for the blood of Christ. There are those who claim to be Christian and yet have no regard for the righteousness of Christ. There are those who claim to have faith, but it is not a saving faith.

What is true faith? True faith clings to Christ. It clings to Christ in persecution, in suffering, and even in death. And

in clinging to Christ it is conformed to Christ. As Christ was accounted as a sheep before the slaughter, and as He was killed, so also the Christian. Paul says in Romans 8:36.

Rom 8:36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

Remember how Jesus was led as a lamb to the slaughter as described for us in Act 8:32.

Act 8:32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:

Just as Jesus was led like a lamb to the slaughter, we can expect the same punishment just because we are followers of Jesus.

What then is the comfort for Christians as we face persecution, suffering, even death? Our comfort is what we read in Romans 8:37-39.

Rom 8:37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

Rom 8:38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

Rom 8:39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Your enemies may bring you tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, or peril. They may bring you the sword and kill you all the day long, but this they cannot

do: they cannot separate you from the love of God that is yours in Christ Jesus your Lord!

So how can we identify these souls that are under the alter. These are the martyrs of Jesus who were murdered for their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Only those who were killed violently for that very reason. Anyone who died in any other way is not regarded as a martyr, and are not among the number of souls under the alter.

The Martyrs Return With Christ

It will only be the martyrs of Jesus Christ who will return with Jesus when He comes back for the second, and the last time. Then all those who belong to Jesus, those who were not martyred will be either be resurrected or changed in the twinkling of an eye from mortal to immortal. And we know when the dead will be resurrected. Nothing can be more clear on this point. The answer is found in Revelation 20:1-5.

Rev 20:1 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

Rev 20:2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

Rev 20:3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

These first three verses clearly occur when Jesus Christ returns. We know Satan is very active during the tribulation, and especially active during the last three and a half years. Therefore, as yet, he has not been bound for a thousand years. That is a very future time. Now listen to verse 4.

Rev 20:4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Did you see what John saw in this verse. Those who were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God. These were slain because of their refusal to deny God. These were the souls under the alter who have been waiting for God's revenge for them. They had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, and had not received his mark in the hands or their foreheads. They refused to worship anyone other than Almighty God. Next we have verse 5 telling us this is when the first resurrection takes place. It happens after Jesus has returned and taken His rightful place as the ruler of the whole world.

Rev 20:5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

Verse five tells us there will be two resurrections of the dead. One immediately after Jesus returns in all power and glory as described for us in Revelation 19:11-16.

Rev 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

Rev 19:12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and

on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

Rev 19:13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

Rev 19:14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

Rev 19:15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

Rev 19:16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Once again we see the armies which were in Heaven follow Him and they are dressed in fine linen, white and clean. They come with Jesus when He returns and as we have seen they are those who were slain, murdered, killed violently, assassinated, and all because they help fast to the testimony of Jesus Christ.

After these martyrs have returned with Jesus, and the other Christians have experienced either the resurrection to life, or if they were still alive at Christ's return, they will be changed in the twinkling of an eye. These will all be with Jesus for one thousand years, after which Satan is released for the pit, and the rest of the dead are resurrected to judgement.

These will be the only two resurrections of the dead, and they are both described in Revelation 20:5.

Conclusion

We have seen who the souls under the alter are. They are only the martyrs of Jesus Christ. Those who were slain violently because of their faith and trust in Jesus. No other soul is there, only the martyrs of Jesus.

Therefore, none of these souls belong to anyone who is hoping to be a part of a pre-tribulation rapture, because they have very obviously not been slain. They are hoping for a pre-tribulation rapture to avoid being martyred. Therefore, they simply do not qualify. And since they will not be there, what does this tell us about the possibility of a pre-tribulation rapture?

Those who are waiting for the pre-tribulation rapture are keen to avoid the possibility of becoming a martyr. Remember the armour our God provides for Us. It only covers the front portion of our bodies, not our backs. Yet those who wait for the pre-tribulation rapture want to turn their backs on the enemy and run for cover. Listen to Luke 17:33 and see if this is a good idea or not.

Luk 17:33 Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.

This verse is very clear, if we are to seek to save our lives, as in a pre-tribulation rapture, we will lose it. And whoever loses his life, for the sake of the gospel, will

preserve it. Now listen to what Paul has to say in 2 Timothy 4:17-18.

2Ti 4:17 Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

2Ti 4:18 And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

The Lord will preserve him unto the heavenly kingdom. This is because he continues to proclaim the gospel.

If we wish to return to the earth with Jesus from Heaven, then there is only one way we can accomplish this. And that is to die the death of a martyr, because these will be the only souls in Heaven. The rest of the Christians will either be resurrected, or changed in the twinkling of an eye at The time Christ and His martyrs return.

About The Author

Leslie Rendell has always believed in the existence of Almighty God. But it is only in the last 34 years that he has become more dedicated to researching the Holy Bible to find answers to his own questions.

We all have our own personal question to ask as we wonder why things are a certain way in our lives, and in the lives of other people as well. Leslie has always relied only on the Bible for his answers to religious questions because this is the only place one can expect to find the truth. The thoughts and teachings of any man, church, or religion, means nothing to him.

If there is a conflict between what man claims to be right, and what God has had recorded in his holy scriptures, then the word of God will always be regarded as correct. The traditions of man, no matter who he is, will never be seen as more important, or more authoritative than the words in the Bible.

This is the way Leslie has always written, and will continue to write, as he seeks to find answers to his own questions that will hopefully also help to answer questions other Christians, and Non-Christians, may have.

The Souls Under The Alter

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TO GOD BE THE GLORY