

Revelation — Lesson 9

Revelation 5:9-10, Continued...

In 4:11, God was worthy of glory, honor, and power because of his creation. Here in 5:9-10, Christ is worthy because of his *new* creation, the church.

In 15:3, we will see the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb. The song of Moses is also found in Exodus 15, where we find another song about deliverance and about the goodness of God.

Why do we need a *new* song? Because a greater deliverance required a new and greater song. Also, this new song depicts a new expression of God's love. Recall, for example, Psalm 98:1 —

O sing to the LORD a **new song**, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory.

And recall Isaiah 42:10 —

Sing to the LORD a **new song**, his praise from the end of the earth! Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the coastlands and their inhabitants.

Who are the ransomed in verse 9? Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 2:6 that Jesus “gave Himself a ransom for all.” And yet not all are ransomed because those outside of Christ remain under a yoke of bondage (Galatians 5:1). The ransomed in verse 9 are the church. We belong to Christ.

- **1 Corinthians 6:20** You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.
- **1 Corinthians 7:23** You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.

- **Mark 10:45** For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
- **1 Peter 1:18-19** You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

And who are the kingdom and priests in verse 10? Once again, we see the church. We are a kingdom and priests to our God.

- **Exodus 19:6** You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.
- **1 Peter 2:9** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.

The kingdom and the priesthood were taken from Israel and given to the church. Recall Matthew 21:43 —

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it.

The RSV in verse 10 says that they *shall reign* on earth. The KJV has the same translation. The ASV says that they *reign* on earth. Neither translation contradicts the fact that we are reigning now (Romans 5:17, Revelation 3:11, Ephesians 2:5-7), although the use of the future “shall” would indicate that the church’s reign would be renewed and strengthened by Jesus’ judgment against Rome. For example, in Revelation 20:6 we read that we “*shall* be priests,” yet in Revelation 1:6 we find that we already are priests. The promise is that these Christians would continue to reign with Christ and would continue to be priests. If they were faithful, that relation would not end regardless of what Rome did.

11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to re-

ceive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" 13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!" 14 And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Jesus is worshipped here by angels and by every living creature. The purpose of this scene is to emphasize Christ's worthiness and Christ's power. He is *worthy* to do what must be done, and he is *able* to do what must be done.

The phrase "myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands" is sometimes translated "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." This phrase simply denotes an indefinitely great number. Compare Hebrews 12:22 — "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an *innumerable* company of angels." We are also reminded of Daniel 7:10 — "A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened." (See also Psalm 68:17.)

Verse 12 tells us that Jesus is worthy to receive power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing. (Notice that the list consists of 7 items.) These are not attributes he is about to receive having not already had, but rather these are attributes he already possesses. These attributes tell us further *why* he is worthy.

Jesus is already powerful! Jesus already reigns! He is reigning now!

- **1 Corinthians 1:24** But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

- **Hebrews 1:3** He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.
- **1 Timothy 6:15** Who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

But what about verse 13? Did literally *every* creature worship the Lamb at this time? No. We know they did not because if they did then this book of judgment would not have been needed. Indeed, the reason for this book is that Rome was *not* worshipping or honoring Christ, and in fact were setting themselves up *against* Christ and his church. The universal language here stresses the worthiness of Christ to receive worship from every creature. All of creation owes its existence to Christ. Verse 13 is the beautiful climax of the scene. Christ receives the adoration of the entire created world.

The entire scene reminds us of Psalm 148 — “Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens.”

The throne of God is also the throne of the Lamb. Note, for example, Revelation 22:1 — “Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.”

Before we move into Chapter 6, let's pause to consider the structure of this book. The vision of Christ in Chapter 1 led to the letters to the seven churches. The throne room vision in Chapters 4 and 5 sets the stage for the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls in Chapters 6–16.

Chapter Six

1 Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say, as with a voice of thunder, “Come!” 2 And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and its rider had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

As Chapter 6 opens and the first seal is removed from the scroll, we see the first part of what is one of the most well known images from this book — the four horsemen of the apocalypse.



We were told earlier that only Christ was worthy to remove the seals from this scroll, and here we see him begin to do just that. Tearing off a seal uncovers and reveals what is to come. The one who opens the scroll will carry out what is written inside, which means that Christ is about to execute the judgments of God found in this scroll.

In some translations, the living creature says, “Come and see,” as if inviting John to come and see what is about to happen. The best Greek manuscripts simply have “Come!” (as in the translation above), which is not an invitation but rather a summons for the four horses and their riders to come out onto the stage.

This vision is modeled after the vision found in Zechariah 1:8–17 and Zechariah 6:1–8. Let’s read the latter of those two references, and, as we do, note the similarities with John’s vision:

I saw in the night, and behold, a man riding upon a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen; and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses. Then I said, ‘What are these, my lord?’ The angel who talked with me said to me, ‘I will show you what they are.’ So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, ‘These are they whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth.’

The riders in Zechariah’s vision were brought forth to bring judgment upon Babylon and Egypt. These riders do the same, but for Rome.

The creature in verse 1 speaks “with a voice of thunder.” Once again, the thunder reminds us that we are about to see judgments from God.

As we begin Chapter 6, we are faced at once with a difficult and widely debated question: Who is the rider on the white horse? Opinions range from Christ to the antichrist!

First, let’s consider (and reject) the notion that we are seeing “The Antichrist” here. Hundreds of books and even movies have appeared telling us all about “The Antichrist” in the book of Revelation. And how many times does “The Antichrist” make an appearance in this

book? Precisely zero! The word “Antichrist” never occurs. In fact, the phrase “The Antichrist” with the definite article never occurs anywhere at all in the Bible! John does talk about “antichrist,” but he does so in his letters rather than in Revelation:

- **1 John 2:18** Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that **antichrist** shall come, even now are there **many antichrists**; whereby we know that it is the last time.
- **1 John 2:22** Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is **antichrist**, that denieth the Father and the Son.
- **1 John 4:3** And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of **antichrist**, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.
- **2 John 7** For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an **antichrist**.

An antichrist is anyone who “confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh,” which means there are *many* antichrists in the world today, just as John said there were many in his day. Yes, Domitian was an antichrist, but he had a lot of company then and he has a lot of company now. Anyone who denies the divinity of Christ is an antichrist. Antichrists are not hard to find. Just look at the faculty of almost any university theology department!

The term “antichrist” is never used in the Bible to denote a particular individual. We do have the son of perdition in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 and we have those with the number of the beast in Revelation 13:18, but nowhere are they called “The Antichrist.”

Also, these riders are sent out by God *against* Satan and his minions. As in Zechariah, “these are they whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth.” This rider is *not* the Antichrist.

Others say the rider is Jesus himself, and while this view does have some appeal, it is not without its problems. First, let’s look at the evi-

dence in support of this view: This rider opens the entire affair. This rider is a conqueror. This rider wears a crown. This rider rides a white horse, and Jesus rides a white horse in 19:11.

But this rider is about to unleash a very violent scene. Could that be true of Christ? Yes. Recall Matthew 10:34 — “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword.” This is a book of judgment against the enemies of God. We are about to see the wrath of the Lamb!

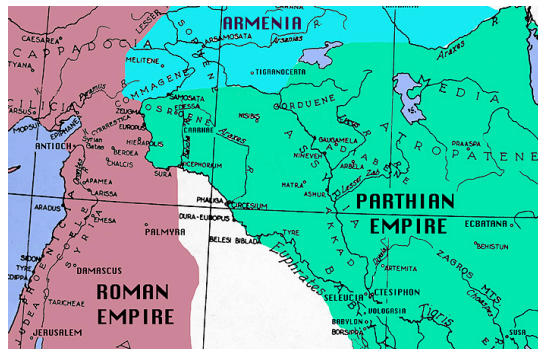
But there are some problems with the view that this rider is Christ. First, Christ appears in verse 1 as the Lamb, which to some suggest he would not also be the rider in the very next verse. Also, there are *four* riders in this part of the vision, and it is unlikely that Christ would be portrayed as co-equal alongside three other riders. Further, although Christ is shown on a white horse in 19:11-12, he does not have three companions, and the crown he is wearing in Chapter 19 is a royal crown (*diadema*), while the crown here in Chapter 6 is a different Greek word that denotes a victor’s crown (*stephanos*).

Who then is this rider? Let’s look at the clues. The rider of this horse has a bow in his hand, which in the Old Testament is a sign of military power. (Jeremiah 51:56; Hosea 1:5; Psalm 46:9) Thus, we have horse and rider that represent military might.

In my opinion, this rider is *not* Jesus. Instead, what we have here is an image that would have struck cold fear into the heart of any Roman citizen of that day — this image most likely depicts a Parthian warrior.



Who were the Parthians? At this time, the one enemy that mighty Rome feared most was Parthia, which was located on the far eastern edge of the empire. In A.D. 62, shortly before this book was written, something unprecedented had happened — a Roman army had actually surrendered to the king of the Parthians. This event occurred during a war between the two powers that lasted from A.D. 54 to 63. The Romans were unnerved by all of this and feared an invasion from the east. And as for the vision, the Parthians rode white horses and were the most famous bowmen in the world. (See statue above.)



The message to Rome in a nutshell? Be afraid! Be *very* afraid! You think the Parthians are scary? They are just the very first thing out of the scroll I have prepared for you! There is much, much more to come!

3 When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” 4 And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another; and he was given a great sword.

The second seal is removed in verse 3, and its removal unleashes a red horse that depicts war. As with any war, this horse was going to cause great suffering. And as with any war, that suffering would not discriminate between the guilty and the innocent.

We should pause here to note that God’s people were suffering when this book was written, and they would continue to suffer during these

judgments. But, and this is the key point, their suffering was *not* a punishment. We may see all suffering alike, but God does not see things the way that we see them!

This rider would take peace from the world. Rome had created a time of peace, and as we discussed in our introductory lessons, the church had used that peace for its own advantage. Paul, for example, had used the Roman peace to travel all over the Roman empire preaching the gospel. God is telling Rome that the peace will end, and the end of Roman peace would be a hardship to both the godly and the godless.

History tells us that the Roman peace was already beginning to show signs of stress. The forced suicide of emperor Nero, in AD 68, was followed by a brief period of civil war, the first Roman civil war since Mark Antony's death in 30 BC. Between June of AD 68 and December of AD 69, Rome witnessed the successive rise and fall of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius until the final accession of Vespasian, the first ruler of the Flavian Dynasty. The military and political anarchy created by this civil war had serious repercussions, such as the outbreak of the Batavian rebellion — an uprising against Roman rule by the Batavi and other tribes in the province and in Gaul. They managed to destroy two legions and inflict humiliating defeats on the Roman army, but was eventually defeated by a massive Roman army. This conflict with Gaul was a taste of things to come for Rome.

In the Old Testament, God often depicted his judgment as a loss of peace.

- **Zechariah 14:3** Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle.
- **Isaiah 19:2** And I will stir up Egyptians against Egyptians, and they will fight, every man against his brother and every man against his neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom.

In Matthew 24, Jesus said that at the time of his judgment against Jerusalem, there would be wars and rumors of wars. While the judgments in Matthew 24 and Revelation are not the same, the time frame

is close to the same, with the events in Revelation unfolding shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Thus, the wars and rumors of wars in Matthew 24 could also apply to the warfare shown here.

5 When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And I saw, and behold, a black horse, and its rider had a balance in his hand; 6 and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; but do not harm oil and wine!"

When the third seal is removed, a black horse is released. This horse represents famine and economic hardship.

The balance in the rider's hand was for weighing food. It's presence here reminds us of Ezekiel 4:16, which prophesied famine by saying the people would eat bread by weight and with fearfulness.

Moreover he said to me, "Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem; they shall eat bread by weight and with fearfulness; and they shall drink water by measure and in dismay.

And in Leviticus 26:26, God told the people that if they were disobedient, then "they shall deliver your bread again by weight."

A denarius was a day's wages. (Recall Matthew 20:2.) Normally it would buy ten times as much as it buys in these verses.

And yet the command not to harm the oil and wine in verse 6 indicates that this famine was not too extreme. Food was still available to be weighed.

It was not abnormal for there to be wine and oil but no grain. The olive tree and the grape vine are more deeply rooted than grain and would endure a drought that would wipe out the other. Remember that when Jacob sent his sons to Egypt for corn, he was still able to

send with them “the choice fruits of the land.” (Genesis 43:11) What we see here is a situation in which luxuries are plentiful and necessities are scarce.

Once again we can find a historical comparison with Rome. During the time of Nero there had been a famine that left the luxuries untouched. During that famine when a ship arrived from Alexandria, the starving populace rioted when they discovered it contained not corn as they expected but sand to cover the ground for the gladiatorial games. Later, during the reign of Domitian, there was such a shortage of grain and an overabundance of wine that Domitian ordered half the vineyards to be cut down. The violent reaction that followed caused the order to be rescinded.

Why is this rider told not to do too much? These judgments are still at an early stage. We are only in Chapter 6! Things will get much worse later when the bowls are poured out.

Even here, we are seeing the patience and longsuffering of God. John 3:16 tells us that God loved the world, and that includes even the Roman persecutors. And yes, it even includes Nero and Domitian. But, as Rome will soon learn, the love of God and the wrath of the Lamb are inextricably linked. God is patient and longsuffering, but God is not mocked. Judgment is coming. But for now, there is still time to repent. Later there will be no time for repentance.

7 When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” 8 And I saw, and behold, a pale horse, and its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed him; and they were given power over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.

With the removal of the fourth seal, the pale horse takes the stage. Its rider is named Death, and Hades follows along behind. If this judgment is not yet too extreme, I shudder to think of what is coming!

The Greek word translated “pale” is *chloros*, which means yellow-green or livid. Perhaps most frightening of all is this final pale horse of pestilence. Even today we are not immune to the fear of a pandemic. The following excerpt from a recent book on the pandemic of 1918 captures the fear that such an event can cause:

They called the plague of 1918 influenza, but it was like no influenza ever seen before. It was more like a biblical prophecy come true, something from Revelation that predicted that first the world was to be struck by war, then famine, and then, with the breaking of the fourth seal of the scroll foretelling the future, the appearance of a horse, “deathly pale, and its rider was called Plague, and Hades followed at its heels.”

The plague took off in September of that year, and when it was over, half a million Americans would lie dead. ... Children were orphaned, families destroyed. Some who lived through it said it was so horrible that they would not even talk about it. Others tried to put it behind them as another wartime nightmare, somehow conflating it with the horrors of trench warfare and mustard gas. It came when the world was weary of war. It swept the globe in months, ending when the war did. It went away as mysteriously as it appeared. And when it was over, humanity had been struck by a disease that killed more people in a few months' time than any other illness in the history of the world.

“And I saw, and behold, a pale horse, and its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him.” That fearful image has not been dulled at all by the passage of time.

Notice in these verses that death and Hades are being sent forth and commanded by God. Revelation regards both death and Hades as defeated enemies who must do what the Lamb bids.

Why do only a quarter perish? Once again, we see that this judgment is neither final nor complete. The survivors will live to experience much worse. This is just the warm up act!

These first four seals remind us of Ezekiel 14:12–23, which in describing a judgment against Jerusalem refers to sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts as God's four deadly acts of judgment. They also remind us of Leviticus 26:21–26 where God tells his people the penalties for their disobedience — wild beasts, sword, pestilence, and famine. John is seeing traditional images describing what happens when God focuses his wrath upon a disobedient people.

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; 10 they cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?" 11 Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

With the fifth seal, the focus moves from the enemies of God back to the people of God. We see an altar, and under the altar we see the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. God is keeping them safe from the judgments unleashed below.

What is the identity of the altar in verse 9? The theme of sacrifice suggests it may be the altar of burnt offering. But the prayers that rise like incense suggest it might depict the altar of incense. Most likely it is intended to be a blending of those two altars. This altar in heaven reminds us of Hebrews 8–9, where we learn that the earthly tabernacle of the Old Testament was constructed according to a heavenly pat-

tern. It should be a reminder to us that we still live and worship according to a heavenly pattern.

The witness or testimony for which these souls had been martyred was the testimony of Jesus. This same testimony was mentioned in 1:2, and we will see it again in 12:17, 14:12, and 19:10. Jesus had told his disciples what to expect in John 16:2 — “whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.” And in Matthew 24:9, he told them that they would be “hated of all nations for my name’s sake.”

Notice that these martyrs are beneath the altar. We are reminded at once of Leviticus 4:7 — “And the priest ... shall pour all the blood of the bullock at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering.” The life blood of these Christians has been poured out as a sacrifice to God. We see the same image from the pen of Paul:

- **Philippians 2:17** Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.
- **2 Timothy 4:6** For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

Barclay: “There is a great and uplifting truth here. When a good man dies for the sake of goodness, it may look like tragedy, like the waste of a fine life; like the work of evil men; and, indeed, it may be all these things. But every life laid down for right and truth and God is ultimately more than any of these things—it is an offering made to God.”

The question in verse 10 is one of the central passages in the book. It could be considered the theme of this book. It is the eternal cry of the suffering righteous — how long? “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?” The book of Revelation is an answer to that plea for divine retribution. And what is the answer?

- **Revelation 1:1** The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what **must soon take place**; and he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.

- **Revelation 1:3** Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein; **for the time is near.**
- **Revelation 22:6** And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants **what must soon take place.**
- **Revelation 22:10** And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, **for the time is near.**
- **Revelation 10:5-6** And the angel whom I saw standing on sea and land lifted up his right hand to heaven and swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that **there should be no more delay.**

What support is there for stating that nothing in the book has been fulfilled yet? Is that what an initial reader would have thought? Is that the answer they would have expected to the question in verse 10? No, and it is not the answer they got! They were told over and over again that the time was near!

The question in verse 10 reminds us of Psalm 79:5-10 — “How long, LORD? wilt thou be angry for ever? shall thy jealousy burn like fire? Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name. ... 10 Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? let him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed.”

And yet, in verse 11 they are told to rest a little longer. God had a plan and they needed to wait until the time was right for their vindication, but that time would be soon! They would have to wait only a little longer. God’s judgment was at the doorstep.

Meanwhile, though, Rome was to have a position of power over God’s people for a short time. But during that time, Rome was only digging its own grave. Recall Isaiah 33:1 where God told Assyria, “When you

have finished destroying, I will destroy you.” God has that same message for Rome.

Daniel had told us the same thing 600 years earlier. In Daniel 11:36, 45 Daniel wrote that the king of the North (which was Rome) would prosper then be destroyed.

Who are those that dwell upon the earth in verse 10? This is the standard description in Revelation for those who are hostile to God. Those on God’s side are, by contrast, often pictured as already dwelling in heaven even though they are still on earth. And there is a great lesson here. We are pilgrims! This world is not our home! We are just passing through! Isn’t that what Paul told us?

- **Colossians 3:2-4** Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. **For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.** When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.
- **Philippians 3:18-20** For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. **But our commonwealth is in heaven,** and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is the “complete number” in verse 11? First, this is not the complete number of the Gentiles that Paul writes about in Romans 11:25. The context is completely different. (See our website for an explanation of Romans 9-11.)

What then is it? Rome was filling out its own death warrant with each Christian it killed. When the warrant was completed, the judgment would follow. God controls the time schedule here, not Rome.

This passage brings to mind the *restraint* on the man of perdition that Paul spoke of in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-6 —

Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed,

the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? And you know **what is restraining him now** so that he may be revealed in his time.

In my opinion, that man of lawlessness is none other than Domitian, who shortly will be a key character in this book. God had a time schedule for these events, and Domitian would play out his role in due time.

Notice that the cry for vindication from these martyrs rises from their own blood. Compare Genesis 4:10 — “Your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground.” The blood of the martyrs could not go unanswered. There was a moral necessity for judgment and for retribution — and judgment and retribution were coming soon.

Some suggest that such a cry should never be voiced by a Christian. How can we love our enemies while asking God to judge them? First, we see such a cry in verse 10, and we see God’s response in this book. He answers that cry and judges the enemies of his people. Second, we see God’s longsuffering patience even in those judgments, and so we too can pray that God will judge our enemies, and yet while doing so give them a final opportunity to repent. Third, the Bible is filled with pleas from his people for divine vindication:

- **Psalm 79:10** Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?” Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of thy servants be known among the nations before our eyes!
- **Psalm 94:3** O LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult?
- **Habakkuk 1:2** O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and thou wilt not hear? Or cry to thee “Violence!” and thou wilt not save?

It is not wrong for a Christian to pray for vindication from evil men. God’s response in this book, if nothing else, should convince us of

that! And perhaps, sadly, this lesson is one we all may soon need to heed. “John’s words are a reminder that throughout history there has been a persistent hostility towards deeply committed Christians on the part of those wielding power.” And those wielding power include more than just politicians. The media swings a tremendous club, and that club is often aimed at Christians.

When President Clinton, as his first official action, moved to lift the ban against homosexuals in the military, the White House received a flood of calls from concerned Christians. In reporting on the calls, the *Washington Post* characterized the callers as largely poor, uneducated, and easy to command.

Cal Thomas had the following to say about that article:

The caricature of evangelical Christians as inherently stupid because they believe in an authority higher than journalism, the government or the culture (the unholy trinity of rampant secularism) would be repugnant to all if it had been applied to blacks or women or homosexuals. But it seems Christian-bashing is always in season.

And that bashing does not come only from journalists. Hollywood consistently portrays Christians as dangerous, bigoted, hypocritical fools. School textbooks omit most or all traces of religion from American history and social studies. Christians are at war with earthly powers! It was true in John’s day, and it is true today. And yet, today as then, our weapons are *not* carnal. Recall 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 —

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

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Can we pray for the judgment of God's enemies today? Can we pray for the pulling down of earthly strongholds and every high thing that sets itself against the knowledge of God? Absolutely! Not only *can* we pray for such things, we *must* pray for such things!