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**The Martyr-Witnesses and the Justice of God:  
The Significance of Rev 6:9–11 for the  
Theology of the Apocalypse**

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**Introduction**

Theodicy represents a major theological thrust of the Apocalypse providing the reader with a clear sense of God’s justice.<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> See [www.sebts.edu](http://www.sebts.edu).

<sup>3</sup> Grant R. Osborne, “Theodicy in the Apocalypse,” *TrinJ* 14 (1993): 77.

martyred souls make a request that directly addresses the question of justice when they inquire, in Rev 6:10, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and vindicate our blood?” This request echoes the sentiments of countless generations of God’s servants who suffering unjustly as the wicked appear to remain unpunished. The OT abounds with the same inquiry pondering when God will take judicial action regarding the mistreatment of his people (e.g., Ps 79:5–10; 94:1–3).<sup>4</sup> The concern, in Rev 6:10, is not why does evil exist in the world or why Christians suffer in general, but specifically why are they suffering as a consequence of faithfulness to Christ and obedience to the righteous requirements of his commands. In a sense, the remainder of John’s vision seeks to answer this query by demonstrating that God will render true justice in a world filled with evil and injustice.

The plea for justice and vindication in Rev 6:9–10 constitutes a theological locus for the theme of theodicy as it relates to the overall message of John’s vision to suffering believers. This article will attempt to demonstrate how the request of the martyr-witnesses in Rev 6:9–10 reverberates throughout the entirety of the Apocalypse to demonstrate that God will vindicate his righteous ones through the judgment of the nations. It will also be argued that this theology of God’s justice will be set within the framework of a cosmic lawsuit. The martyr-witnesses function as the plaintiffs in a lawsuit against all those in opposition to Christ and his people. This cosmic lawsuit, however, is ultimately between God and Satan as it is played out in the narrative of the John’s vision. The martyrs’ plea for justice will be fully satisfied when the saints are vindicated at the resurrection and when they are exalted to the throne with Christ.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See also D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord?: Reflections on Suffering and Evil*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); . John N. Day, *Crying for Justice: What the Psalms Teach Us about Mercy and Vengeance in an age of Terrorism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 107; Enrique Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge: A Study of Justice in the Biblical World*, trans. Seán Charles Martin (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004), 123.

<sup>5</sup> N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006), 138–39.

## A. Exegetical Overview of Rev 6:9–11

### 1. Rev 6:9-11 in Context

While the local religious and political climate of each city varied, John, as one who experienced unjust exile, wrote to believers facing similar injustice (Rev 1:9). Believers might succumb to despair over the triumph of a corrupt justice system that condemns the innocent simply because of their faith and convictions. John's vision, however, assuages these fears by depicting the eventual reversal of this miscarriage of justice. This concern for justice and vindication is voiced by the cry of the martyred souls under the altar (Rev 6:9–11; 16:7). The Apocalypse reveals Jesus wielding ultimate judicial authority and as the one who is worthy to unleash God's wrath upon impenitent humanity (Rev 1:12–20; 5:4–2).<sup>6</sup> Revelation 6–16 presents a series of judgments verifying humanity's guilt and the justice of God's verdicts (Rev 9:20–21; 16:9–11). In Revelation 17–18, the prostitute Babylon, because of her crimes against the saints, is declared guilty and summarily executed. Christ will return as conquering King of kings and Lord of lords brandishing the sword of God's justice (Rev 19:11–15). No matter what fate Christians might have endured under unjust judges, they will one day rule and reign with Christ as judges of the nations (Rev 20:4).<sup>7</sup>

The scroll with seven seals introduced in Rev 5:1 rests securely in the hands of the Lamb who proceeds to break open the seals. Since the contents of the scroll cannot be read until all the seals are broken, it is best to understand the seals preliminary judgments.<sup>8</sup> They are preliminary in that they occur prior to the time of the Great Tribulation. The primary reason for viewing them as prior to the Tribulation stems from the fact that before the plagues of the trumpets are allowed to harm the earth, God's servants must first be protected with his seal (Rev 7:1–3). The increased intensity of those judgments along with the need to protect God's servants indicates that trumpets introduce a new and more serious phase of God's judgment. What is

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. John 5:17–29.

<sup>7</sup> David A. DeSilva, "Honor Discourse and the Rhetorical Strategy of the Apocalypse of John," *JSNT* 71 (1998): 98.

<sup>8</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 151. Contra Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation*, SHBC (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2001), 124–25.

more, the trumpets and bowls exhibit several parallels echoing the Exodus plagues distinguishing them from the seals.<sup>9</sup>

The trials introduced by the seals represent the “birth pains” (Mark 13:8) occurring prior to coming days of tribulation that will precede the return of Christ (Mark 13:19).<sup>10</sup> The similarities of both content and arrangement between the seals and the events predicted in the Olivet discourse suggest an intentional thematic correspondence providing the framework for these preliminary judgments. R. H. Charles posits that “our author finds his chief and controlling authority in the eschatological scheme there set forth.”<sup>11</sup>

The rider of on the white horse (Rev 6:2) representing a parody of the true messiah who comes in order to conquer (Rev 19:11), which corresponds with the claims of the false messiahs promising victory to their followers (Matt 24:5; Mark 13:6; Luke 21:8). The rider on the red horse given a large sword causing wars among people (Rev 6:4) evokes wars, rumors of war, and international discord as nations engage in battle (Matt 24:6–7; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9). With war comes famines, plagues, and death wreaking havoc (cf. Rev 6:5–8; Matt 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11).<sup>12</sup> A striking parallel exists between the souls of martyrs killed for their testimony to Christ (Rev 6:9–11) and the persecution befalling believers that will give testimony before magistrates (Mark 13:9–13; Luke 21:12–19; cf. Matt 24:9). The earthquakes and cosmic phenomena resulting from the sixth seal (Rev 6:12–14) appears to resemble the signs preceding the *Parousia* (Matt 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11). These parallels

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<sup>9</sup> Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, BNTC (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), 104.

<sup>10</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 200. See also Boxall, *The Revelation to Saint John*, 105.

<sup>11</sup> R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, ICC, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 158–59. See also John Sweet, *Revelation*, TPI New Testament Commentaries (London: SCM Press, 1990), 52–54; John M. Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 49–51; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, NCBC (London: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, 1974), 129–30; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, AB 38 (New York: Doubleday, 1975); G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 370–71; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 105–6. For one of the most extensive investigations on this relationship see John Andrew McLean, *The Seventieth Week of Daniel 9:27 As A Literary Key for Understanding the Structure of the Apocalypse of John*, MBPS 38 (Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1996), 169–186.

<sup>12</sup> Keener, *Revelation*, 200 n. 6. He notes the common tri-fold pattern of sword, pestilence, and famine in the OT (cf. Jer 14:12; 21:7–10; 27:8; 29:17–18; 32:24, 36; 34:17; 38:2; 42:17, 22; 44:13; Ezek 5:12; 6:11–12; 7:15; 12:16).

demonstrate the basic framework shared by the seals and the Olivet discourse.

The seals, like the trumpets and bowls, fall into a pattern whereby the first four constitutes one group of judgments and the last three forms a second group.<sup>13</sup> The four horsemen constitute a repetitious pattern of conquest, war, famine, and death discernable throughout this age.<sup>14</sup> The martyred saints and their appeal for justice (Rev 6:9–11) indicates that during this time the church will continue to endure persecution. The seals, however, also represent a progressive intensification leading up to a time of cosmic upheaval as indicated by the breaking of the sixth seal. Greg Beale argues that it portrays how Christ is in control of trials and persecutions endured by the church.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. Rev 6:9

When Jesus breaks open the fifth seal, John sees a group of souls under the altar (ei-don upoka,tw tou/ qusiasthri,ou ta.j yuca). The altar resides in heaven and reappears throughout the Apocalypse in connection with the execution of divine justice through judgment (cf. Rev 6:9; 8:3, 5; 9:13; 14:18; 16:7).<sup>16</sup> It most likely represents the altar of incense due to its location before the throne and its connection with the prayers of the saints (cf. Rev 8:3, 6).<sup>17</sup> Another indication of its heavenly location relates to the fact that these souls (ta.j yuca.) have been slaughtered (wj eʃfagne,non). Aside from the mention of the qusiasth,rion, the imagery of the heavenly temple and a cultic setting is apparent from language closely associated with Leviticus. That the souls are under (upoka,tw) the altar is reminiscent of Lev 4:7 instructing the priest to pour out the blood at the base of the altar.<sup>18</sup> Even more striking are the thematic parallels with Lev 17:11 (LXX) based on the shared lexical occurrences of the occurrences of

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T & T Clark, 1993), 10–15; David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, WBC, vol. 52b (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 389–90; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 146.

<sup>14</sup> Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 371.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

<sup>16</sup> Charles, *Revelation to St. John*, vol. 1, 226–20.

<sup>17</sup> J. P. Heil, “The Fifth Seal (Rev 6,9–11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation,” *Bib* 74 (1993): 224.

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, trans. Wendy Pradel (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 273; George B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, BNTC (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1966/1999), 84; Keener, *Revelation*, 218.

yuch., quasiasth,rion, ai-ma.<sup>19</sup> The term indicating their death, e;sfagme,nwn, was used to describe Jesus as the slain Lamb (e;sfagme,non) in Rev 5:6.<sup>20</sup> It also occurs in Revelation to indicate any form of brutal murder that humans inflict on one another (cf. Rev 6:4; 13:3, 8; 18:24). Here it forms an associative link between the murder of these souls and the crucifixion of Jesus.<sup>21</sup> This stems from the fact that these souls were executed because of (dia,) the word of God (to.n lo,gon tou/ qeou) and because of (dia,) the testimony they had maintained (th.n marturi,an hñ ei=con).<sup>22</sup>

Variations of the phrase, “the word of God and they testimony of Jesus,” occur four times throughout the Apocalypse. Every instance pertains to the persecution of Christians with varying degrees of intensity (Rev 1:2, 9; 6:9; 12:17; 20:4; cf. 14:12). Undoubtedly this group would include Antipas (Rev 2:13), victims of the Neronic persecution, as well as any other Christians killed because of their faith in Christ, but it may also include all of God’s people who died as a result of their faith.<sup>23</sup> These souls, then, represent the star witnesses in the lawsuit against the nations because instead of taking matters into their own hands they present their case to the ultimate judge. They represent the plaintiffs in a wrongful death lawsuit pleading their case in the divine court demanding that justice be served on their behalf through his retributive vengeance (Rev 6:10).

### 3. Rev 6:10

These martyrs cry out in a loud voice (e;kraxan fwnh/ mega,lh) inquiring as to how long (e;wj po,te) until he renders a verdict in their behalf and thereby avenge them (kri,nej kai. ekdikeij). Some ambiguity exists as to whether o` despo,thj addresses God or Christ. The attributive titles o` agioj kai. a;thqino,j specifically apply to Christ in Rev 3:7 (cf. 3:14;

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<sup>19</sup> Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure, and Exegesis*, SNTS 128 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 77.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Rev 5:6, 9, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 273.

<sup>22</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 285. Contra Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (London: Macmillan, 1919; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 526; Charles, *Revelation to St. John*, vol.1, 174; Mounce, *Revelation*, 147; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 406.

<sup>23</sup> Heinz Giessen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, RNT (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1997), 183.

19:11), but variations of those titles frequently refer to God in OT (LXX).<sup>24</sup> What is more, God is the one praised for the justice of his judgments (Rev 15:3; 16:7; 19:2). Perhaps, the ambiguity is intentional in that John presents both God and the Lamb equally in the role of judge (Rev 5:13; 6:16; 7:9-10; 19:11; 20:11; 22:1, 30).

Although others may see their plea as a vindictive cry for vengeance<sup>25</sup> or theodicy,<sup>26</sup> contextually it best to take it as an appeal for justice through judgment.<sup>27</sup> The imagery of Christians demanding vengeance has caused some scholars to reject these passages as antithetical to the Christian ethic of love and forgiveness.<sup>28</sup> These souls, however, demand justice because their blood was unjustly shed.<sup>29</sup>

The verb *kri,nw* occurs in various forms in Rev 6:10; 11:18; 16:5; 18:8, 20; 19:2, 11; 20:12, 13. The first occurrence, in Rev 6:10, plays a crucial role in the subsequent uses.<sup>30</sup> Osborne avers, “This verb functions as a prelude to the rest of the book as God pours out his judgment on ‘those who dwell on the earth.’”<sup>31</sup> The additional occurrences of *kri,nw* in Rev 16:5–7; 18:20;

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<sup>24</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 407.

<sup>25</sup> Charles, *Revelation*, vol. 1, 175; <sup>25</sup> Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, MNTC (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), 119; Ford, *Revelation*, 4; ; William Klassen, “Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John, *CBQ* 28 (1966):300–11; A. Y. Collins, “Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation,” in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World*, ed. David Hellholm (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1983), 729–50.

<sup>26</sup> Mounce, *Revelation*, 158; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 64 Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John E. Alsup (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 90.

<sup>27</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 407–10; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 392; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 275; Osborne, *Revelation*, 287; Caird, *The Revelation of St. John*, 84–85; Keener, *Revelation*, 218; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 48–56; Pattemore, *People of God in the Apocalypse*, 84.

<sup>28</sup> Charles, *Revelation*, vol. 1, 175; Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, 119; Ford, *Revelation*, 4; Klassen, “Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John,” 300–11; Collins, “Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation,” 729–50.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. LXX Ps 78:2; Zech 1:12. So Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 392–3; Pattemore, *People of God in the Apocalypse*, 84.

<sup>30</sup> Heil, “The Fifth Seal,” 220–22. His article utilizes “verbal repetitions and conceptual correlations to demonstrate the interrelationship between Rev 6, 9–11 and the rest of the book. The extensive connections will illustrate how the opening of the fifth seal functions as a key part within a unified whole.” Cf. André Feuillet, “Les martyrs de l’humanité et l’Agneau égorgé. Une interprétation nouvelle de la prière des égorgés en Ap 6,9-11,” *NRT* 99 (1977): 189–207; Pattemore, *People of God in the Apocalypse*, 68–116.

<sup>31</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 287. See also Pattemore, *People of God in the Apocalypse*, 85. He argues that *kri,nw* is frequently used of action of God or Christ (Cf. Rev 11:18; 16:15; 18:8, 20; 19:2; 20:12, 13; 19:11).

and 19:2 all directly link back to the plea of the souls in Rev 6:9–10 to indicate God’s answer to their prayers for justice and vindication.<sup>32</sup>

John’s use of *ekdike*,w stems from the concept of justice prevalent throughout the OT.<sup>33</sup> Several OT passages provide background examples of God avenging the blood his people (Ps 79:10; Hos 1:4; 4:1, Isa 26:21; Deut 32:43). Numerous OT passages exists providing conceptual backgrounds for Rev 6:10: (1) oppressed saints often ask God how long will it be until he acts in their behalf (Ps 6:3; 13:1–2; 35:17; 74:10; 94:3; 119:84; Hab 1:2–3); (2) the idea of blood crying out for justice (Gen 4:10; Job 16:18; Ps 9:12; cf. Matt 23:35; Luke 11:51); (3) prayers for divine vengeance (2 Sam 3:28–39; 2 Kgs 1:10, 12; 2 Chron 22:22; Neh 4:4–5; Jer 11:20; 15:15; 17:18; 18:21–23; 20:12; Amos 7:17); and (4) the general tenor of imprecatory prayers whereby an innocent one appeals to God for retribution against their enemies (Psalms 7, 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 83, 109, 138, 139). In Rev 6:10, however, John specifically alludes to Psalm 79[78]:10 and Deut 32:43, but Ps 79:10 stems from Deut 32:43.<sup>34</sup>

In Deut 32:43, the Song of Moses promises that God will exact vengeance on those who have harmed his people. The lexical parallels between *ouvkri,neij kai. ekdikeij to. ai-ma himwh* (Rev 6:10) and *oti to. ai-ma twh uiwh autou/ekdikatai kai. ekdikh,sei* (Deut 32:43 [LXX]) suggests an intentional allusion. In addition, both passages pertain to God vindicating his people who were wrongfully persecuted. The mention of the martyrs’ blood (*to. ai-ma himwh*) makes their request for justice in accordance with the divine law of *lex talionis* (Deut 19:21). This is also echoed in Jewish apocalyptic writings which frequently depict similar scenes of appeals to God for justice.<sup>35</sup>

The Song of Moses promises that God will vindicate his saints and exact wrathful vengeance against the wicked in due time. John N. Day contends that Deuteronomy 32 constitutes the theological foundation for the theme of divine justice through vengeance, which had direct implications for the Book of Revelation:

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Caird, *Revelation of St. John*, 228–30; Keener, *Revelation*, 431–34.

<sup>33</sup> Used to translate the Hebrew terms *qtl dqP*, and *j pv*. See Joel Nobel Musvosvi, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse*, AUSDDS 17 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1993), 37–148.

<sup>34</sup> Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 393; Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 84 n. 78.

<sup>35</sup> *1 En.* 8:4–11:2; 47:4; 90:1–11; 104:3–4; *4 Ezra* 4:35–37; 15:9–11. Cf. *T. Mos.* 9:6–7; *Sib. Or.* 3.307–13. See also Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 176; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 408–9; Keener, *Revelation*, 218.

Moreover, the Song of Moses has an ongoing prophetic function. It is a witness to the ongoing covenant of God with his people—the application of which carries through the end of the canon. Through the canon, the cry for divine vengeance for the blood of saints is raised until [*sic*] Revelation 6:9–10, and in 19:1–2, those gathered around the throne rejoice in its accomplishment. This prophetic nature illustrates both the primary and secondary purpose of the Song. It is primarily a witness against Israel for their rebellions. . . . Secondly it is a testimony to the faithfulness of God in the face of his people’s faithlessness, including his faithfulness in taking vengeance against oppressors (cf. Deut. 32:4, 31–43).<sup>36</sup>

The language of vengeance in Deut 32:43 is the backbone of the imprecatory prayers.<sup>37</sup> These prayers represent the way in which suffering saints expressed their trust in the justice of God who will avenge them. The Book of Revelation continues this theme of divine justice through retributive vengeance in accordance to the *lex talionis* because God will render judgments based on what people deserve (cf. Rev 18:6; 20:12).

Joel N. Musvosvi’s dissertation on the concept of vengeance in the Apocalypse, indicated by Rev 6:9–11 and 19:2, aims to present a thematic study of the vengeance motif in Revelation in light of the OT and ANE literature.<sup>38</sup> The problem he attempts to address relates to how the attitude of vengeance corresponds to the NT ethic of love and mercy towards one’s enemies. His analysis of the Hebrew and Greek words for vengeance offers a covenantal view for interpreting the concept of vengeance. The term ~qn and its cognates occur in at least seventy-eight passages in the OT.<sup>39</sup> Musvosvi examines each instance and demonstrates its connection to the covenant and covenantal lawsuit.<sup>40</sup> His survey reveals that the dominant use of vengeance describes God as the avenger against those who attack Israel or covenantal violators.<sup>41</sup> Vengeance in the Apocalypse, according to Musvosvi, directly relates to the suffering and persecution of God’s covenant people. He argues that in the OT God exercised vengeance on Israel’s oppressors as a means of protecting his covenant people.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Day, *Crying for Justice*, 56.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>38</sup> Musvosvi, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse*, 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–131.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 130–31.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 149. On page 153, he highlights the common pattern associated with persecution and vengeance: (1) Covenant broken by Israel; (2) God exacts vengeance on the covenant violators, usually [*Footnote continued on next page ...* ]

The martyrs request the vengeance to be directed at the *tw̄h katoikou,ntwn epi. thj ghj* (“the inhabitants of the earth”).<sup>43</sup> The phrase *oī katoikouh̄tej epi. thj ghj* denotes the objects of wrath in the Apocalypse (cf. Rev 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 14; 17:2, 8). This group is consistently set in juxtaposition to the saints. The inhabitants of the earth are the ones responsible for the execution of the saints (Rev 6:10) and they will subsequently be recipients of God’s wrath. With the breaking of the sixth seal, they seek to hide due to their dread and terror of the coming wrath of God and the Lamb (Rev 6:13–17). Nothing in that fear indicates repentance from their wickedness, but rather it implies they recognize that their guilt deserves punishment.

#### 4. Rev 6:11

This plea for justice through vindication receives an initial answer assuring them that judgment is coming, but not until the predetermined number of martyr’s reaches completion (Rev 6:11). That they were given (*edo,qh*) white robes (*stolh. leukh.*) affirms their innocence and anticipates their full vindication. The imagery of white or clean robes recurs throughout the Apocalypse to depict the purity of the saints guaranteeing their eschatological reward (3:4–5, 18; 7:9, 13–14; 19:14; 22:14).<sup>44</sup>

The notion of a set number to reach fulfillment, especially in response to the “how long” question, represents a fairly common theme in Apocalyptic writings (cf. *1 En.* 47:1–4; *4 Ezra* 4:35–37; *2 Bar.* 23:4–5a).<sup>45</sup> In this context, the souls must rest and wait until the remaining number of their brothers in Christ join them (*e[wj plhrwqwsin kai. oī su,ndoul oi autw̄h kai. oī adel foi*). Rather than seeing *oī su,ndoul oi* and *oī adel foi* as two separate groups of people it is best to take the *kai.* epexegetically equating *oī su,ndoul oi* with *oī adel foi* (i.e., “their fellow servants, that is, their brothers”).<sup>46</sup> By stating that additional believers will surrender their lives in faithful testimony to Christ, John’s audience should realize that they very well

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by sending foreign armies; (3) the call for and performing of repentance on Israel’s part; and (4) God brings vengeance upon those who shed Israel’s blood.

<sup>43</sup> For the most detailed analysis of *oī katoikouh̄tej epi. thj ghj* and the synonymous constructions denoting a universal scope see the insightful work of Ronald Herms, *An Apocalypse for the Church and for the World: The Narrative Function of Universal Language in the Book of Revelation*, BZNW 143 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 185–201.

<sup>44</sup> See also Roloff, *Revelation*, 90.

<sup>45</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 48–56. See also Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 185.

<sup>46</sup> Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1, 160; Mounce, *Revelation*, 160; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 411; Osborne, *Revelation*, 290.

could be included in that number (Rev 12:11; 13:7-10).<sup>47</sup> This corresponds with the theme that the way to victory for believers is the way of the Lamb via martyrdom.<sup>48</sup> This theme of justice and vindication directly related to the martyred souls resurfaces as a central component in the execution of divine judgment against the nations—especially as it relates to the trumpet and bowl judgment (Rev 8:3-5; 16:7).

## **B. Rev 6:9–11 in the Theological Framework of the Apocalypse**

### **1. Rev 8:1–5**

An interlude interrupts the sequence between the sixth and seventh seal. The purpose of this interruption is to assure the believers that prior to the plagues of the tribulation God will provide them with a protective sealing ensuring their final salvation. John, however, returns to the seals in Rev 8:1 with the opening of the seventh seal. Revelation 8:1–5 establishes a relationship between the seven seals and the seven trumpets by means of interlocking.<sup>49</sup> John uses the device of interlocking to transition from the seals to the trumpets, but it also intimately connects the succeeding trumpet judgments with the preceding seals. The breaking of the seventh seal immediately results in silence for about half an hour (sigh) followed by the introduction of the seven angels (tou.j epta. agge.lou) and the trumpets given to them (ewlo,qhsan). This scene demonstrates that the ensuing judgments are directly related to the martyrs' plea for vindication in Rev 6:9–11.

The interconnectedness between the martyrs' plea and the trumpet judgments is made explicit with the emphasis on the altar and the offering up of the saints' prayers. The scene depicted in Rev 8:1–5 represents the initiation of the sequence of judgments that will ultimately accomplish the full outpouring of God's retribution for the blood of his saints. The most obvious connection to the martyrs of Rev 6:9–11 is that the altar (qusiasth,rion) once again takes center stage. Due to the lack of any other altar mentioned in the heavenly courtroom, this seems to be the same one containing the souls of the slain saints.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 89.

<sup>48</sup> Caird, *The Revelation to Saint John*, 87.

<sup>49</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 17.

<sup>50</sup> Charles, *Revelation to St. John*, vol 1, 227.

A angel standing at the altar (εἷστα, qh epi.) holding a golden censer is given (e;cwn libanwto.n crusouh) a large amount of incense (qumia, mata polla) for the purpose of offering up the prayers of all the saints (iħa dw, sei taij proseucaij twħ aģi, wn pa, ntwħ). The large quantity of incense essentially corresponds to the large quantity of prayers. Although these prayers generally include all the prayers offered by every saint throughout history (i.e., twħ aģi, wn pa, ntwħ), it specifically pertains to the antecedent petition of the slaughtered souls. This association is strengthened by the observation that the request of the souls constitutes the only explicit example of prayer in the Apocalypse.<sup>51</sup> These prayers, then, primarily involve the desperate cries for justice from believers suffering unjustly at the hands of ungodly oppressors. That the smoke of the incense coalesced with the prayers ascending before God indicates that the petition of Rev 6:10 “is now being formally presented before God with angelic favor and authority.”<sup>52</sup>

Once the prayers are offered and accepted the answer to the plea for vindication is symbolically portrayed in Rev 8:5. Now that the censer has been emptied the angel uses it to scoop up the fiery coals from the altar and hurls it toward the earth. What once contained the prayers of the saints suddenly becomes a vehicle for administering divine judgment. The use of e;bal en conveys the sense of a forceful action and evokes a sense of anger and wrath. This act triggers the theophanic phenomenon associated with judicial decrees issuing from the throne of God (brontai. kai. fwnai. kai. astrapai. kai. seismo,). The verdict from the preliminary investigative judgments is in and now the angels are permitted to sound their trumpets after an anticipated delay (cf. Rev 7:1–3; 8:1).

Although each successive trumpet blast has dire consequences on the earth’s inhabitants, they still refuse to repent (Rev 9:20–21). The last trumpet comprises the consummation of God’s wrath in that it contains the seven bowl judgments that destroy life on earth (Rev 16:1–21). By developing the theme of the prayer for vindication from 6:9–11, Rev 8:1–5 explicitly connects the Tribulation judgments with the prayers for vindication from the star witnesses in the lawsuit against the nations.

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Heil, “The Fifth Seal as a Key to the Book of Revelation,” 224.

<sup>52</sup> Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 455.

## 2. Revelation 11–13

A third interlude appears between the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev 11:15–19) and the introduction of the seven bowls containing the final judgments (Rev 15:5–8). This interlude tells the story of the war between Satan and God via his war against the saints. As the story unfolds, the ahistorical and cosmic nature of this struggle becomes apparent. The dragon, who is Satan the arch-nemesis (Rev 12:9), attempts to destroy a beautiful sky woman and her unborn child (Rev 12:3–4). This pregnant woman represents Israel through whom the messiah would come.<sup>53</sup> The language used to describe the rule of her son indicates that he is Jesus—the Davidic Messiah (cf. Rev 19:15; Ps 2:9). After the child ascends to heaven and the woman flees to the desert for 1,260 days, a war in heaven ensues between Michael and Satan. Michael expels Satan and his rebellious angels out of heaven by casting him down to the earth (Rev 12:7–9). Caird has perceptively captured the legal nature of this struggle when he remarked, “The real victory of Michael may be a forensic one, the victory of an advocate whose case is wholly dependent on the record of his client; but it takes open war to clinch it.”<sup>54</sup>

The conflict between Satan and God’s people in Rev 12:10–17 is a continuation of this legal battle. Immediately upon Satan’s defeat and prior to his war against the Christians, a loud voice in heaven announces the forensic victory of God and his people in litigation with Satan the accuser (Rev 12:10–12). The point is that victory in war results from victory in God’s courtroom.<sup>55</sup> The dragon is identified as Satan (o` Satanaʾ) in Rev 12:9, but in 12:10 his role is described as the accuser (o` kath.gwr) who brings charges against God’s people. The term o` Satanaʾ comes from the Hebrew form of ךָּֿפּ, <sup>56</sup> which basically carries of the sense of a legal “adversary.”

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<sup>53</sup> On the interpretation of the woman as Israel and/or the messianic community see Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 314–15; Lupieri, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 189; Osborne, *Revelation*, 457–8; Keener, *Revelation*, 314; Michaels, *Revelation*, 148; Mounce, *Revelation*, 236; Collins, *Combat Myth*, 106–7. Prigent argues that she represents the Church that has “taken root in the history of Israel” (Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 378). Beale, however, more correctly identifies her as representative of the faithful community of God’s people both before and after the coming of Christ (Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 625). For a survey of additional interpretations of the identity of the woman see Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 679–82. On the relationship between this woman and the New Jerusalem in contrast to the harlot see Duff, *Who Rides the Beast*, 83–96.

<sup>54</sup> Caird, *Revelation of Saint John*, 157.

<sup>55</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 475.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Num 22:22, 32; 1 Sam 29:4; 2 Sam 19:23; 1 Kgs 5:18; 11:14, 23, 25; 1 Chr 21:1; Job 1:6–9, 12; 2:1–4, 6–7; Ps 38:21; 71:13; 109:4, 6, 20, 29; Zech 3:1, 2. The devil is only called Satan in 1 Chronicles, Job, and Zechariah.

“Satan” refers to his identity, but “accuser” refers to his role and how it pertains to his war against God’s people in the heavenly court.

Although Satan brings accusations against the saints, in Rev 12:11 they are assured of certain victory because they overcame him (eni,khsan auto.n). The means of their victory is not in military might but through faithful testimony to Christ. John states that they overcame Satan on three grounds (dia,). First, because the blood of the Lamb (to. ai-ma tou/ arni,ou) has redeemed them from their sin (cf. Rev 1:5–6). Second, because they maintained faithful testimony to Jesus (to.n lo,gon thj marturi,aj autwh) even while suffering (cf. Rev 6:9; 11:7). The third phrase, “they did not love their lives to the point of death” (ouk hga,phsan th.n yuch.n autwh a;cri qana,tou), indicates that their faithfulness to Christ surpassed even their desire for self-preservation. That their testimony and death are conceptually linked is evident by the fact that the dia, preceding “the word of their testimony” also governs “they did not love their lives to the point of death.” By connecting their testimony with their death, John associates them with the slain souls under the altar making an appeal for true justice (Rev 6:9–10).<sup>57</sup> The point of the proclamation in Rev 12:10–12, then, reminds John’s audience that the way of victory is the way of the slain Lamb.<sup>58</sup>

Once the dragon plummets to the earth he continues with his vehement assault on the people of God (Rev 12:13–17). In his rage, the dragon declares war (aphl qen poihsai po,l emon) against the rest of the woman’s offspring (twh loipwh tou/ spe,rmatoj authj). He identifies these offspring with two phrases that clearly designates them as Christians. Her offspring are those who observe God’s commands (twh throu,ntwn taj entol a,j tou/ qeou)<sup>59</sup> and have the testimony of Jesus (eco,ntwn th.n marturi,an Ihsou). The dragon enlists the aid of two beasts in order to execute his war against the saints (Rev 13:1–18).<sup>60</sup> The beast from the sea (Rev 13:1–8) may represent

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<sup>57</sup> Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 665–66.

<sup>58</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 476.

<sup>59</sup> This phrase is equivalent to the oft cited to.n lo,gon tou/ qeou/ (cf. Rev 1:2, 9; 6:9; 20:4). It also emphasizes that they obey God’s righteous requirements. See David E. Aune, “Following the Lamb: The Apocalypse,” in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 279–83.

<sup>60</sup> Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 270.

the brute force of the political and military power of Rome, but he is commonly recognized as the Antichrist.<sup>61</sup>

The Antichrist was granted the authority to speak blasphemously and to reign for forty-two months. The use of *edlo,qh* emphasizes God's sovereignty over the Antichrist and his actions.<sup>62</sup> In Rev 13:7, the Antichrist is given authority to wage a war against the saints and conquer them (*edlo,qh autw/ poihsai po,lemon meta. twh agi,wn kai. nikh'sai autou,j*).<sup>63</sup> Although Rev 12:11 explicitly states that the saints ultimately conquered Satan (*eni,khsan auto.n*), during this time of war they will face physical death (*nikh'sai autou,j*). This miscarriage of justice continues as the all the inhabitants of the earth worship the beast (Rev 13:8) and the false prophet (i.e., the land beast) mandates forced idolatry with the legal authority to execute offenders as well as instituting economic restrictions designed to oppress the saints (Rev 13:11–17). As Satan proceeds to execute his war against the saints on earth, the subsequent slaughter of the righteous would make things seem to appear that Satan has indeed triumphed through this injustice.

John, however, inserts a brief prophetic warning for the saints in Rev 13:9–10. The unjust and merciless onslaught against believers may tempt them to either retaliate or conform, but John encourages them to remain faithful as they patiently endure captivity and execution (cf. Jer 15:2). By responding to this oppression with patient endurance, they place the judgment of their enemies in the hands of God and the Lamb (cf. Rev 6:10).<sup>64</sup> Although many may die during this time of exile, Rev 14:1–5 returns to the 144,000 as a means to assure the believers that God will faithfully save all his sealed servants.<sup>65</sup> This group of redeemed saints appears again in Rev 15:3–4 as those who overcame (*tou,j nikwhta*) the beast, his image, and his number. The redeemed saints, then, worship the rightful Lord and king of the nations because all his ways are “just and true.”

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<sup>61</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 343. See also Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 682–85; Roloff, *Revelation*, 155–57.

<sup>62</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 498.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Dan 7:25; Rev 11:7.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>65</sup> Aune, “Following the Lamb,” 278–79.

### 3. Rev 16:4–7

Revelation 16 describes how the seven bowls, containing the wine of God’s wrath, are poured out on the inhabitants of the earth. The objects of this wrath are specifically identified as everyone with the mark of the beast that worshipped his image (Rev 16:2). According to Rev 13:8, this would include all the inhabitants of the earth in juxtaposition to the people of God. The bowls represent the answer to the prayer of Rev 6:9–11 as explicitly affirmed in the judgment doxology of Rev 16:5–7.<sup>66</sup>

The pouring out of the third bowl, in Rev 16:4, transforms all fresh water into putrid blood (e;ge,neto ai-ma). Although it echoes the first Exodus plague (Exod 7:17–21), it represents a far more serious plague due to its global impact. This plague deprives all life on earth from water and forces them to drink blood out of thirsty desperation. At this point, the pattern of pouring out the bowls is interrupted with brief but profound doxological statements affirming the justice of God inherent in this harsh judgment.

This judgment doxology contains two witnesses affirming the justness of God’s judgment. John uses the phrase kai. h;kousa to introduce the first witness in Rev 16:5a and the second in Rev 16:7a. The angel of the waters declares God as just/righteous (di,kaioj ei=).<sup>67</sup> Two o[ti clauses provide the basis or cause for this declaration.<sup>68</sup> God is just *because* “he judged them” (tauta e;krina). This means that the angel in charge of the waters acknowledges the righteousness of God’s judgment on the waters by turning them to blood. The second o[ti clause further explains the reason why this judgment is appropriate by evoking the law of retribution (*lex talionis*). This judgment is just because they (i.e., the earth’s inhabitants collectively) have poured out (e;xe,cean) the blood (ai-ma) of the saints and prophets. God has avenged the ai-ma of his witnesses (Rev 6:10) by forcing the inhabitants of the earth to drink blood (cf. Deut 32:43; 2 Kgs 19:10; Ps 79:10).<sup>69</sup> The ironic use of a;xioi, (cf. Rev 3:4) indicates that the punishment fits the crime and they got what they deserved.

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<sup>66</sup> So Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 99. He creatively calls this a “progress report” on God’s activity regarding his answer to this prayer.

<sup>67</sup> The justness and righteousness of a holy God is an important theme in the Song of Moses (cf. Deut 32:2, 4).

<sup>68</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 674. So Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 856; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 818; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 403.

<sup>69</sup> Paul B. Decock, “The Symbol of Blood in the Apocalypse of John,” *Neotestamentica* 38 (2004): 171–78.

The second witness to testify to the justness of this judgment is a voice that comes from the altar (tou/ quasiasthri,ou) containing the souls of the martyrs (Rev 16:7).<sup>70</sup> The connection of this judgment with the martyrs' plea for vindication is now made explicit when they<sup>71</sup> can no longer contain their exuberance and gladly affirm the angel's declaration. The phrase, "true and just" (a<sup>h</sup>hqinai. kai. di,kaiiai) constitutes an allusion to the Song of Moses and the Lamb sung by the victorious saints in Rev 15:3. In that context it specifically describes the ways of God (ai` odoi, sou). It occurs again in Rev 19:2 (a<sup>h</sup>hqinai. kai. di,kaiiai ai` kri,seij autou) affirming God's judgments as in 16:7. Significantly, these declarations come from the mouths of the redeemed saints who now praise God for the acts of retribution accomplished in their behalf.

#### 4. Rev17:1–6 & 18:1–8

In Rev 17:1–6, John evokes a sense of disgust regarding the lewd and immoral character of Babylon by describing her as a prostitute.<sup>72</sup> She entices the earth's inhabitants to forsake truth, righteousness, and justice in order to indulge in her flagrant adulteries consisting of idolatry, greed, and murder. The legal context for the third vision has been anticipated in the verdict that Babylon has fallen as proleptically announced in Rev 14:8 and 16:19.<sup>73</sup>

The golden cup in her hand, in Rev 17:4, represents the most incriminating evidence against her.<sup>74</sup> As with all her other lavish accrements she brandishes a golden cup (pOTH,rion crusou<sup>h</sup>) wielding it as the only weapon needed to bring her victims into subjugation. Her cup symbolically represents her ability to maintain control and corrupt the world with the wine of her immorality through religious idolatry (Rev 14:8; cf. 16:19). With the wine in this cup, according to Rev 17:2, she has made all the nations drunk (emequ,sqhsan oi` katoikou<sup>h</sup>tej th.n gh<sup>h</sup> ek tou/ oi;nou th<sup>h</sup> pornei,aj aut<sup>h</sup>).

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<sup>70</sup> The genitive tou/ quasiasthri,ou is most likely a partative genitive meaning that someone from the altar spoke instead of the altar itself speaking. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 404.

<sup>71</sup> By stating that he heard a voice from the altar (h;kousa tou/ quasiasthri,ou), John may be using tou/ quasiasthri,ou in the singular to refer to the entire group of souls under the altar collectively.

<sup>72</sup> Keener, *Revelation*, 404.

<sup>73</sup> Barbara R. Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse*, HTS 48 (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1999), 62.

<sup>74</sup> John draws his imagery of Babylon and the cup from Jer 51:7. Babylon is the cup making the nations drunk. The *Targ.* Jer 51:7 compares the cup with Babylon's sin. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 855; Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities*, 64–65. For more on possible OT backgrounds see Keener, *Revelation*, 405.

The cup is filled with “abominations” (bdel ugma,twn) that is the “filth of her fornication” (ta. aka,qarta thj pornei,aj authj). Although the term bdel ugma,twn generally denotes anything abhorrent, it is most commonly associated with pagan practices and worship.<sup>75</sup> This idea is made even more explicit with the use of aka,qarta especially as it relates to sexual immorality (pornei,aj).<sup>76</sup> The religious connotation of the cup’s contents conveys an even more sinister and gruesome quality to the wine.

Her wine is apparently mixed with the shed blood of the saints (Rev 17:6). John indicates that she was drunk on the blood of the saints (ek tou ai[matoj twh a[gi,wn) and the witnesses of Jesus (ek tou ai[matoj twh martu,rwn Ihsou). This evokes the memory of all the witnesses that were slain for their faith (Rev 2:13; 11:7; 13:7), but most specifically the souls crying out for justice (Rev 6:9–10). Since she is intoxicated (mequ,ousan) on the blood of the saints. Aune remarks that “becoming drunk on blood” was a metaphor in the OT and ancient world for the blood lust of soldiers in battle.<sup>77</sup> The idea, then, is that Babylon’s power, wealth, and idolatry precipitated and resulted in the senseless slaughter of the faithful saints who refused to commit adultery with her.

The tour of Babylon’s judgment (to. kri,mā) promised by the angel of Rev 17:1 comes sharply into focus in Revelation 18. Once the verdict of her judgment is announced in Rev 18:2, another voice from heaven commences with Babylon’s sentencing in Rev 18:4. The sentencing is characterized by a series of imperatives. The first imperative represents a preliminary order for the withdrawal of the people of God from Babylon before the execution of the final judgment. In the same way that God judged the ancient Babylon, he will destroy the new Babylon. An additional o[ti clause (Rev 18:5) indicates the reason for God’s judgment against Babylon is because this harlot city has reached maximum capacity in its sinful corruption (ta. adikh,mata authj).<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> See Werner Foerster, “βδέλυγμα,” TDNT, vol. 1, 600.

<sup>76</sup> It specifically denotes demonic spirits leading people astray in Rev 16:3; 18:2. See also Mounce, *Revelation*, 310–11; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 855–56; Osborne, *Revelation*, 612; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 430–31.

<sup>77</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, WBC, vol. 52c (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 937. Cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, 613; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 432.

<sup>78</sup> This comports well with the biblical notion that God waits until a city or nation reaches the full measure of sin before he judges them. In other words, since the city is beyond redemption it must be destroyed. Cf. Gen 15:16; Jer 51:9.

The second string of imperatives comprises the actual sentence that God has decreed for Babylon (Rev 18:6–7a). The imperatives are not voiced to earthly saints, but rather to some undesigned agents of God’s vengeance (possibly the glorified saints).<sup>79</sup> Four imperatives (apo,dote, diplw,sate, kera,sate, do,te) expressly conveys the principle of *lex talionis* and divine retribution.<sup>80</sup> The justice of the sentence is demonstrated in that each command stems as a direct result of Babylon’s action. God administers justice through rendering judgment warranted by the crimes committed (Jer 50:29; Ps 137:8; cf. Isa 40:2). The language of paying back double constitutes a metaphor for rendering a full recompense or requital.<sup>81</sup> In this sentencing, the martyr’s prayer for vindication concerning their shed blood (Rev 6:10) has been fully satisfied. Babylon unjustly condemned the saints to death and now God condemns her accordingly.<sup>82</sup>

### 5. Revelation 19:1–10

The transition in Rev 19:1, signaled by the phrase *meta. tauta h;kousa*, marks the end of the trial of Babylon and records the heavenly response to God’s justice. Revelation 19:1–10 functions like a bridge interlocking the preceding courtroom scene regarding the verdict culminating from the lawsuit against Babylon (Rev 18:1–24) with the return of Christ who carries out the sentence rendered against her (Rev 19:11–21).<sup>83</sup> John hears the sound of a massive multitude (*mega,lhn o;cl ou pol l ou*) praising God. The multitude certainly includes all the angelic inhabitants of heaven (*en tw ouranw*), but it specifically denotes the entirety of redeemed saints (cf. Rev 7:9).<sup>84</sup> The saints expressly praise God for vindicating them through the just judgment rendered against Babylon. The reason (*oti*) the heavenly multitude

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<sup>79</sup> Mounce, *Revelation*, 325; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 504.

<sup>80</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 993. He posits, “The principle of *lex talionis* (i.e., ‘proportional retribution’) from the Latin legal term *talio*, ‘payment in kind’ . . . and exemplified by the OT phrase ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’ . . . is a frequent motif in the prophetic judgment speeches of OT prophets (Isa 34:8; 59:18; 65:6–7; Ezek 9:10; 11:21; 16:43; 17:19; 23:31; 23:49; Hos 4:9; 12:2; Joel 3:4, 7 [MT 4:4, 7]; Obad 15–16; see Prov 24:12) and early Jewish literature (Sib. Or. 3.312–14; *Apoc. Abr.* 29.19).”

<sup>81</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 641; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 715; Mounce, *Revelation*, 325; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 504.

<sup>82</sup> Caird, *Revelation of Saint John*, 227–48.

<sup>83</sup> Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 517.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 242; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 720–21; Caird, *Revelation to Saint John*, 232; Mounce, *Revelation*, 336–7; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 331; Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1024; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 926; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 476; Boxall, *Revelation to Saint John*, 266.

shouts “Hallelujah!” is because God has judged Babylon and avenged the blood of his servants (Rev 19:2).

The heavenly multitude affirms God’s judgments as both true and just (αἰὲν ἡμῶν. kai. di,kai ai` kri,seij autou), which echoes Rev 16:7 concerning all the earth’s fresh water being turned to blood. In both cases, God’s judgment is affirmed as true and just by those who have been the recipients of false and unjust judgments at the hands of the harlot queen. What is more, their gratitude is warranted because (οἱ) God has completely answered the martyr’s plea for vindication (Rev 6:10).<sup>85</sup> This is confirmed by the lexical parallels (kri,neij;krinen and ekdikeij exedi,khsen) between the request of Rev 6:10 and the response of Rev 19:2b:

**Rev 6:10**

kai. e:kraxan fwnh/ mega,lh  
 l e,gontej eij po,te( o` despo,thj o`  
 agioj kai. αἰὲν ἡμῶν, ουκ κρι,νειj  
 kai. ekdikeij to. ai-ma himw ek  
 tw katoikou,ntwn epi. thj ghj

**Rev 19:2b**

οἱ e:krinen th.n po,rnhn th.n  
 mega,lhn hti e:fqeiren th.n  
 gh en th/ pornei,a/ authj kai.  
 exedi,khsen to. ai-ma tw  
 dou,lwn autou/ ek ceiro,j authj

God has avenged the blood of his servants because they were unjustly sentenced to death at Babylon’s hand.<sup>86</sup>

The phrase exedi,khsen to. ai-ma tw dou,lwn autou/ ek ceiro,j authj suggests an intentional allusion to 2 Kgs 9:7 [LXX], which reads ekdikh,seij ta. aihmata tw dou,lwn mou tw profhtw kai. ta. aihmata pa,ntwn tw dou,lwn kuri,ou ek ceiro,j Iezabel. In the OT context, a prophet commissions Jehu to destroy the house of Ahab in order to exact God’s vengeance (ekdikh,seij) because Jezebel had ordered the execution of God’s prophets. This allusion effectively combines John polemic against the false prophet of Thyatira (Rev 2:20) and the politically oppressive Babylon (Rev 17:1–6). The notion of God’s vengeance on behalf of his people in both Rev 19:2 and 2 Kgs 9:7 is grounded in Deut 32:43. Therefore, Rev 19:1–2 not only represents the culmination of the martyr’s prayer (Rev

<sup>85</sup> Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 928.

<sup>86</sup> The phrase ek ceiro,j authj represents a Hebraism and could be translated as “from her hand,” “by her hand,” or “at her hand. The point is that Babylon and its corrupt system was directly responsible for the judicial verdicts that sentenced God’s faithful servants to death. Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1024; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 928; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 478.

6:10), but more importantly it signals the conclusion of the lawsuit against the nations.

#### 6. Rev 20:4–6

The entire scene in Rev 20:4–6 corresponds to Dan 7:9–10 where the Ancient of Days holds court and books are opened for judgment and Dan 7:22–27 where he renders a favorable verdict for the saint's by giving them the kingdom.<sup>87</sup> The phrase *kri,ma edo,qh autoij* in Rev 20:4, reflects the LXX of Dan 7:22 (*th.n kri,sin e;dwke toij agi,oi*). Mounce posits that the dative case of *autoij* conveys the sense “in behalf of.”<sup>88</sup> The meaning, then, of *kri,ma edo,qh autoij* relates to a judicial verdict rendered in behalf of the saints.

This interpretation impacts the identification of the ones sitting on the thrones (*ei-don qro,nouj kai. eka,qisan epVautou*). The allusion to Dan 7:22 suggests that the dative plural pronoun *autoij* is synonymous with *toij agi,oi*. This would indicate that the thrones belong to saints instead of the twenty-four elders. That resurrected saints occupy the thrones makes even more sense if the occurrences of *kai*, connecting the ones seated on the thrones, with the judicial verdict, and the beheaded souls are taken epexegetically.<sup>89</sup> In other words, the souls from underneath the altar received a favorable verdict that placed them on thrones. Therefore, the judicial verdict awarded to individual saints includes the right to reign with Christ, which would include judicial authority (cf. Rev 2:26–27; 3:21; 5:10; 20:6).<sup>90</sup>

The use of *ta,j yuca,j* coupled with *e;zhsan* indicates that this resurrection is literal and physical rather than spiritual and heavenly. The question remains, however, as to which saints participate in the first resurrection. Is the first resurrection intended for all the saints of all time or is it restricted to the martyrs and the Tribulation martyrs in particular? The qualifying phrase *ta,j yuca,j twh pepel ekismē,nwn* appears to limit the first

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<sup>87</sup> Mounce, *Revelation*, 354; Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 256; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 997; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 506; Boxall, *Revelation of Saint John*, 283.

<sup>88</sup> Mounce, *Revelation*, 354 n. 8.

<sup>89</sup> Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 507.

<sup>90</sup> Reddish, *Revelation*, 394–95. The saints vindication represents a great reversal of roles from judged to judges. Reddish avers, “This is a scene of role reversals. The martyrs have had to stand before the imperial throne (at least figuratively) and receive the sentence of death. Now they are the ones who are seated on thrones and deliver judgment. . . . The millennium is John’s way of offering encouragement to the martyrs. Those who have paid the greatest price receive the greatest reward.”

resurrection primarily to the martyrs.<sup>91</sup> The beheaded souls were condemned in a Roman court because of the testimony of Jesus and word of God. The language clearly connects these souls with the other slaughtered faithful witnesses (Rev 6:9).

A second qualifying phrase seems to restrict the first resurrection to persecuted believers during the Tribulation period. Since the masculine plural pronoun οἱ τῆς ἁγίας has no antecedent, it denotes a second group of faithful saints refusing to worship the beast or receive his mark.<sup>92</sup> These two qualifiers coupled with the slightly ambiguous οἱ ἰσχυροὶ τῶν νεκρῶν (Rev 20:5) seem to suggest that the first resurrection is a reward specifically for the faithful testimony maintained by persecuted believers. All saints throughout history, however, are not necessarily exempt because the promise of reigning with Christ generally applies to all faithful believers (Rev 2:26–27; 3:21; 5:10).<sup>93</sup>

### Conclusion

Is God just to allow his people to be treated unjustly by wicked men? In a sense, that is one of the primary questions addressed in the Book of Revelation when it is voiced by the souls of martyred saints in Rev 10. The answer to this question is found throughout John's vision amid scenes of judgment, wrath, and vindication. The vision unambiguously depicts how the Sovereign Judge of the universe will render just verdicts that accord with his standards of truth and righteousness. He will hold all of humanity accountable for their sin, but especially for the way they treated his own covenantal people. This is a theology that has practical implications for persecuted church of today.

The church in the modern Western world has, for the most part, enjoyed the benefits resulting from policies granting religious liberty. Believer situated in other parts of the globe, however, have not fared so well. Documented cases related to Christians facing hostile judges and not allowed a fair trial abound in Muslim and communist countries. Pastors in China are arrested and imprisoned simply because of crimes like possession of the Bible or holding unregistered Christian assemblies. Believers must maintain their faithful testimony to Christ at all costs. Although the miscarriage of justice stemming

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<sup>91</sup> See also Caird, *Revelation to Saint John*, 252.

<sup>92</sup> Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 507.

<sup>93</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 704.

from Babylon's perverted sense of justice continues to render verdicts against the saints, God is not blind to their predicament and will reverse those verdicts when he exacts his holy vengeance in their behalf.