

Rev. 6:9-11 (WCF 32:1) “Intermediate Martyrs”

For the Children: When God’s people die, their body goes into the grave, but their soul goes to be with the Lord. Their soul is then made completely perfect. They rejoice in the blessing of being with God. The Lord is holding back from judging the world until all the ones He has chosen have been saved. Though we are sad when people whom we know leave this life, we are very glad to know that they are filled with joy as they praise God in heaven, free from all pain and misery. There will also be more rejoicing when the Lord Jesus returns to end this world. For then, all the souls waiting in heaven without their bodies, will get them back again – even better than before! **Questions:** What do you think it will be like to be in heaven without a body? What do you think it will be like to have a body that is even better than before? Why should God’s people be glad that the Lord is going to judge the world?

Introduction:

First Point: The Destiny of the Souls of the Martyrs

- **The Souls of the Slain:** What happens to the martyrs shows what happens to all believers in the “intermediate state” between death and the Second Coming of Christ. Hence v. 11 lumps the martyrs in together with all of the elect.
- **Under the Altar:** The souls of the martyrs are “under the altar” – representing the fact that all who trust in the Lord Jesus are enabled to offer their life (and their death) as a thank-offering to Him. The language is like that of Lev. 4:7, in which the blood of animal sacrifices is poured at the base of the altar of burnt-offering. Our sacrifices are not sin-offerings – Christ has accomplished that once-for-all (Heb. 9-10).
- **Conscious and Communicating:** The souls of the martyrs do not lapse into unconsciousness when the body dies. They are able to communicate with the Lord, and to receive gifts and communication from Him. Some have used passages like 1 Thess. 4:13f to argue for “soul-sleep” between death and the 2nd Coming. But “sleep” is only used as a metaphor for dying to show that we are then dead to this world – though that is only temporary. It is not saying that we die to the next world. See Lk. 23:43, 2 Cor. 5:1,6,8; Phlp. 1:23; Heb. 12:23.

Second Point: The Question of the Souls of the Martyrs

- **How Long?:** There are only 2 categories of men – those who are at home in this world (“those who dwell on earth”) and those who cry out “How long, Lord, before You judge and avenge the blood of the martyrs?” This is a legitimate question, asked by perfected saints in heaven in this vision.
- **Not a Matter of Revenge:** Scripture makes it clear we are to be forgiving and merciful, rather than seeking personal vengeance (Lk. 23:34, Acts 7:60, Rom. 12:19). But the Bible also calls on us to sing “Imprecatory Psalms” (such as Pss. 5, 10, 17, 35, 58, 59, 69,, 70, 79, 83, 109, 129, 137, 140). Rev. 19:2 also makes it clear that the Lord answers the cry for vengeance. But the cry for vengeance is only legitimate when it arises from a desire to see God’s Name glorified, His righteousness fill the universe, and His church delivered. Though we call on God to destroy all opposition, we must leave that vengeance to Him.

Third Point: The Answer to the Souls of the Martyrs

- **The White Robes:** In the meantime, we must be satisfied with the display of His righteousness in the imputed righteousness of Christ and the imparted righteousness that the Spirit works in God’s people. Upon death, the imparted righteousness is brought to completion in the saints. This is symbolized here by the gift of white robes to the souls of the martyrs.
- **A Little While:** The other part of the answer given is that the final judgement and avenging must wait until all the elect are brought in. This is a matter of God’s mercy, and we should not desire to have it cut short.
- **The Day of Vengeance:** The Day will come, however, when all the elect are gathered in, and the God will judge the world and avenge the blood of the martyrs. Then He will banish all evil to hell.

Conclusion: