

## Revelation Fourteen

10/19/2025

Hymns: 33 When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder 34 When We All Get to Heaven  
71 He's got the Whole World in His Hands

Scripture: Psalm 31:1-5;  
Big idea: Our Souls Are in His Hand

As we can see all around, Halloween season is upon us – a time for spooky and often hideous creatures to roam the streets and celebrate the realm of the dead. Fittingly, today's study in Revelation broaches the subject of souls of the bloody dead in heaven. Specifically, we will seek to learn where precisely **your** soul will go when you **die**?

### Revelation 6

*[9] And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:*

*[10] And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?*

*[11] And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.*

Okay, let's dig into this in detail now:

*[9] And*

The narrative proceeds directly from verse 8. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was opening seals of a seven-sealed scroll that initiated escalating judgments of the Tribulation symbolized by the four horses of the apocalypse.

*when*

When is a time marker. Time still moves forward in heaven as it does now on earth.

*he*

Who is He? He is the Lamb that was slain – Jesus Christ. The only one worthy to open the seals.

*had opened the fifth seal,*

Last time

He opened seals 1 through 4. Now He opens the fifth seal of the seven-sealed scroll.

*I*

That's John the apostle.

*saw*

Recall John was transported to heaven (Revelation 4:1) and given a body suitable to his task of observing and hearing the events as they transpire.

*under the altar*

What altar? This is the first mention of an altar in Revelation. Let's dig deeper by reading ahead to see what else Revelation says about the altar and its location.

Revelation 8

*[3] And another angel came and **stood at the altar,***

These angels stood around the throne of God. The altar must be in that general vicinity.

*having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints*

We see here an offering of incense and prayers of the saints. Incense requires fire. This is the second time we have encountered the prayers of the saints.

The first was back in Revelation 5:8 where these prayers were brought before the throne of God as part of the worship ceremony.

*upon the **golden altar***

We learn here that the altar was golden. The Holy Place of the Jews in the temple on earth had an altar of wood overlaid with gold where incense was burned morning and evening. That altar was 18" wide, 18" deep, and 36" tall.

<https://www.blbclassic.org/lang/lexicon/Lexicon.cfm?Strong=H520&t=KJV>, accessed October 12, 2025

Once a year, the high priest sprinkled blood on the horns of it to atone for the sins of the people (Exodus 30:1-10).

*which was before the throne.*

John describes this altar located in front of the throne of God.

*[4] And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand.*

Now that we know the altar burns incense, is golden, and is located before the throne of God, we can proceed in Revelation 6.

*the souls of them that were slain*

These souls were not just those of people who had died. These were put to death. Why?

*for the word of God,  
and for the testimony which they held:*

They spoke God's truth to others and displayed His righteousness through their daily actions. These martyrs are generally called Tribulation saints.

Where were these souls located? Before we broke to understand the size, construction, placement, and purpose of the altar, the verse placed these souls **under that altar**.

What is the significance of these souls being **under** the golden altar? In Leviticus 4:7, the LORD gave the high priest instructions pour the blood of the sacrifice **under this altar**. Perhaps, this symbolized the blood of these martyrs described here.

At this point, we need to pause to break and take a breath. In our study of Revelation we've been reading about spirits, souls, angels, creatures, God, and the Lamb. Let's review these various living beings:

God is Spirit (John 4:24), King, eternal, immortal, invisible, all-wise, almighty (1 Timothy 1:17), and holy. No man can see Him and live (Exodus 33:20, John 1:18). While scriptures refer to Him doing human things like seeing, speaking, hearing, sitting, and holding in His hand, these are simply figurative representations of His abilities (anthropomorphisms) and not statements of His essence. He is also able to assume various forms to interact with His creation including with man – Adam, Cain, Enoch, and Moses (Exodus 33:22) for example.

Jesus Christ is God in the flesh (John 1:1,14). He is the Word of God (v. 1), eternal (v. 2), creator (v. 3), light (v. 9), Lamb of God (v. 29), Savior (Luke 2:11), and firstborn from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:23) to have a perfected spiritual body (vv. 42-47).

Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4) also can manifest a physical appearance (Matthew 3:16), empowers believers (Acts 2:3-4), reveals truth to men (1 Corinthians 2:10), regenerates believers (Titus 3:5), indwells believers (1 Corinthians 6:16), baptizes believers (1 Corinthians 12:13), and seals them (Ephesians 1:13). He is our comforter, helper, and advocate (John 14:26) and our intercessor in prayer (Romans 8:26).

Angels are created spirits that minister to the saints (Hebrews 1:14), can blend right in if they manifest as human (v. 13:2), can manifest an awesome appearance and deliver messages (Luke 1:11-14), will be judged by saints (1 Corinthians 6:3), are innumerable (Revelation 5:11), can wield mighty power (1 Chronicles 21:15).

Demons are fallen angels cast out of heaven led by Satan who was also a fallen angel (Revelation 12:7-

9; Luke 10:18), can possess people and animals (Mark 5:2-15). A Halloween note is in order here. There are no ghosts of the variety that haunt houses. Demons though are real and active in our world.

This brings us to man. He was created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). He was given dominion over the earth (vv. 26-28). He was not created in a form that would live forever (v. 3:22). When he failed the test by his own free will, God condemned him to death (v. 19) and man forfeited his dominion to Satan (Luke 4:6-7). Jesus gave his life a ransom for all men that believe in Him (Matthew 20:28) that they may have eternal life (John 3:16).

Man consists of three parts (1 Thessalonians 5:23):

1. Body – the physical portion of his being often referred to as the flesh (Romans 8:13).
2. Soul – (psyche) the immaterial, psychological aspect of a man that makes him unique from all other men – often described as *mind* (Psalm 139:14), *will* (Deuteronomy 6:5), and *emotions* (Psalm 42:5).
3. Spirit – (pneuma) the other immaterial part of man that defines his human nature. It also gives the body life (Genesis 2:7). For a Christian, this spirit is regenerated at the new birth. The regenerated spirit wars against the flesh until the Christian receives his perfect body at the resurrection. The Christian also receives the Holy Spirit of God (Romans 8:16).

At death. Where does the body go?

The grave (Acts 7:29) where it turns to dust (Genesis 3:19; Ecclesiastes 12:7) awaiting the resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:16; John 5:29).

And where does the immaterial part go?

God the Father (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 23:46). Note here we referred to the immaterial part of man which lumps together soul and spirit. While they are distinctly different (Hebrews 4:12) as we outlined, they are also closely linked since they are both immaterial.

The final point we need to see before returning to today's scripture passage is that soul and spirit often are used interchangeably to refer to both – the immaterial part of man.

Note the Bible uses the word *soul* differently in different places. Sometimes it's limited to *soul*, others it's *soul* and *spirit*, and sometimes it means *people* and refers to the complete person – *body*, *soul*, and *spirit*.

This passage gives strong evidence for the concept of the *active intermediate state*. What is the *intermediate state* and why does it matter?

The term *intermediate state* is **not** found in the Bible. Only on rare occasions does even the *concept* appear in scripture. However, the active intermediate state is considered a core belief among Catholic and Protestant (reformed and fundamental) sects. Rather than rely on tradition, we will just see what the Bible has to say. Only two passages describe spirits/souls before the resurrection as doing things as if they had bodies. They are Luke 16:19-31 and this passage in Revelation 6.

Luke 16:19-31 (Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus). Is this a real-life story or a parable? Parables

use ideas familiar to the hearers to convey and at the same time hide (Matthew 16:10-13) a simple truth. The simple truth in that passage is found in verse 31:

*...If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. To seek more than this from the story is to tread on shaky ground, yet it is commonly used to support a whole framework of eschatology (that is teaching on future events).*

But what is a parable? It's often called an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a short story with a moral. But what is the purpose of these parables? For this we need not speculate. The Bible tells us:

Matthew 13

*[10] And the disciples came, and said unto him [Jesus], Why [do] [y]ou [speak] unto them [the multitudes gathered to hear Him] in parables?[11] He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto **you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven**, but to **them it is not given...**[13] Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing, see **not**; and hearing, they hear **not**, neither do they **understand**.*

Some try to argue that this passage is not a parable. That's a very hard sell for the following reasons:

1. Context: this parable is preceded directly by many parables (Luke 14:7 – 16:18) and the two chapters that follow it (17 and 18) also contain parables.
2. It was a story given by Jesus (Luke 14:3) who spoke in parables (Matthew 13:10) .
3. It has a moral or final point (Luke 16:31).
4. It was spoken to Jesus' enemies – the Pharisees (v. 14).

Notice too this parable preceded Jesus rising from the dead by just a few weeks or perhaps months. And you may recall that the name of the man who Jesus rose from the dead immediately before his own death and resurrection was *Lazarus*. Given the point of this story had to do with not believing even after someone who came back from the dead (they didn't after Lazarus and Christ rose), the choice of the name *Lazarus* in this parable seems to be more than just a coincidence.

Also, apparently elements of the story regarding eschatology were known to and taught by the Pharisees. Those came from Greek and Jewish writings back as far as 4 B.C. So one could surmise that **as** Jesus used examples from everyday life with the multitudes, it's not a stretch He may use stories and ideas familiar to Pharisees in parables told to them.

Despite these problems with using this parable to build theories of eschatology, there are also a few very strong verses that are used to argue in favor of an active intermediate state.

1. Luke 23:43 *And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*

While the word choice of this verse strongly supports the idea of a of immediate conscious fellowship with the LORD upon death, it does not demand it.

2. 2 Corinthians 5:8

*We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.*

This verse uses words that indicate spacial and not experiential presence. Again, the intermediate state is permitted but not mandated by it.

3. Philippians 1:23

*[23] For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:*

While the word choice of this verse strongly supports the idea of a of immediate conscious fellowship with the LORD upon death, it too does not demand it.

For completeness, we will also mention here three other passages which have been used but really present a very weak case for the intermediate state. In past messages we addressed each one in much greater detail.

1. Saul consults a medium who conjures up a demon impersonating Samuel (I Samuel 28:7-25).
2. Jesus appears transfigured with Moses and Elijah to Peter, James, and John (Matthew 17:1-9). This is simple time travel.
3. After Jesus rose from the dead, the graves were opened and the bodies of saints went into the city (Matthew 27:52-53). These like Lazarus subsequently died a natural death.

With that, let's return back to our passage in Revelation.

*[10] And they cried with a loud voice,*

These souls have not yet received their bodies. That happens at the last phase of the first resurrection immediately after the Tribulation. Yet these beings without their glorified bodies cry out with a loud voice, or do they? These souls were martyrs. Who was the first martyr? That would be Abel (Luke 11:51). Let's look at one short passage that says something very interesting:

Genesis 4

*[8] And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.*

*[9] And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel [your] brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?*

*[10] And he said, What ha[ve] [y]ou done? **the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.***

Clearly this language is metaphorical. Abel's blood cannot cry, but the LORD sees Abel's blood as representing Abel's blood-bought claim for justice.

*saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, do[] [y]ou not judge and avenge **our blood** on them that dwell on the earth?*

Could this be that figurative language also?

*[11] And white robes were given unto every one of them;*

The usage here implies an immediate physical transfer to these souls.

*and it was said unto them,*

These souls not only speak but also hear.

*that they should rest*

The word *rest* here expresses the need for these souls to be patient – not that they should fall asleep.

*yet for a little season,*

The Tribulation had already begun as these souls were killed during that time. The total length of the Tribulation is seven years (Daniel 9:27). This *little season* must be something less than seven years.

*until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.*

## Summary

So let's boil this all down. Our hermeneutic says, *If plain (literal) sense makes sense, seek no other sense*. The problem here is that plain sense does **not** make sense. The souls described are Tribulation martyrs. They will not receive their glorified bodies until they are given them at the end of the Tribulation. The idea of hordes of immaterial souls somehow being under a tiny altar and then speaking, hearing, and accepting robes is nonsense. The rational interpretation here is: just **as** seeing God on His throne with a scroll in his hand is figurative, so these souls are also figurative.

So what does this symbolize? Saints have died during this terrible time of Tribulation. More will die. The cry of their spilled blood relates directly to this altar of incense and the need for justice for them. The white robes signify that these souls are redeemed saints (Revelation 19:8).

Moving away from the literal here actually makes sense.

Where do you go when you die?

To God the Father – just like Jesus Himself did saying, *Father into **thy hands** I commend My Spirit.*

There can be no better place to go than into His hands where you will await resurrection of your body.

**Benediction**

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen* (Revelation 22:21).

---

© Ron Harrod, 2025.

This document may be reproduced for noncommercial use only.