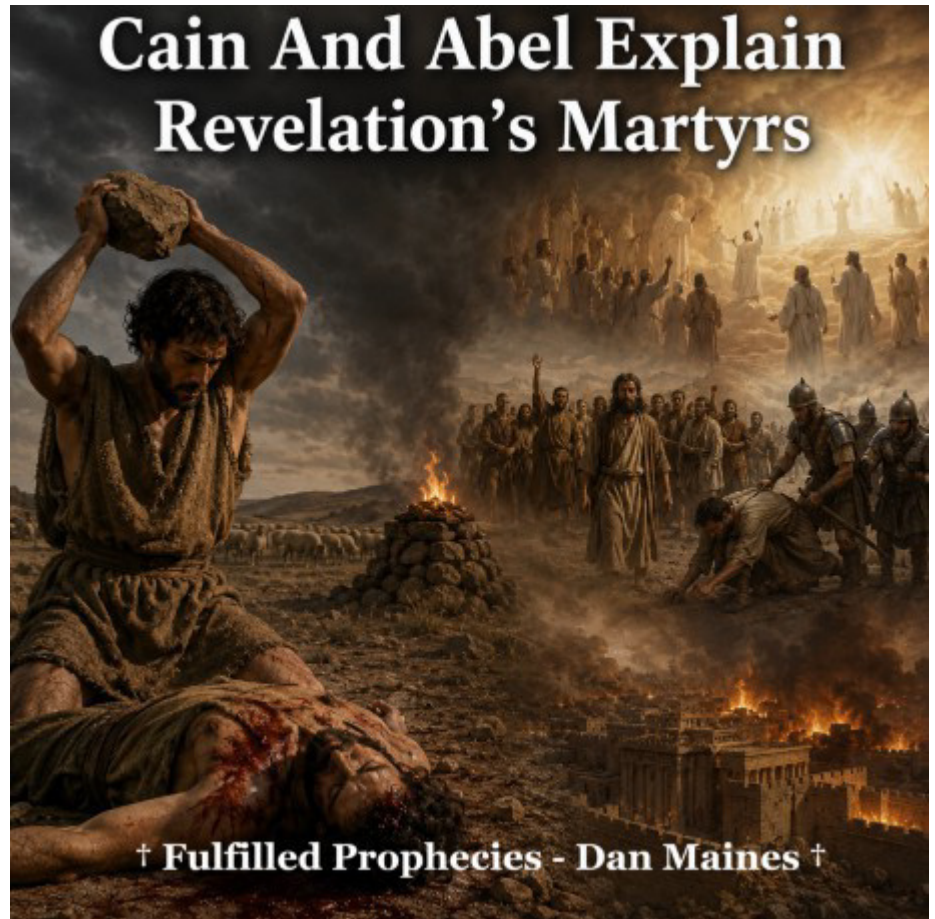


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Cain And Abel Explain Revelation's Martyrs



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† The Bible's blood-guilt theme begins near the opening of Genesis and reaches its covenantal climax near the end of Revelation. Abel's blood cried from the ground, Jesus identified Abel as the beginning point in a long history of righteous bloodshed, and Revelation portrays the martyrs crying out for judgment.

† These aren't disconnected stories. Scripture develops one continuous pattern, righteous servants are murdered, their

blood demands justice, the guilt accumulates, and eventually God brings judgment upon the guilty persecuting power.

† Jesus gives us the key to identifying where that accumulated blood-guilt would finally be judged. He said the blood from righteous Abel onward would be required of His own generation, and He spoke those words while announcing judgment upon Jerusalem (Matthew 23:35-38).

† Revelation doesn't abandon that theme. It brings it to its climax. The martyrs cry for vindication, Babylon is charged with the blood of prophets and saints, and God judges the city responsible for that blood (Revelation 6:9-11; 18:20, 24; 19:2).

Genesis 4:10

Then He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to Me from the ground.

† Abel's murder establishes a biblical principle that continues throughout Scripture, innocent blood cries out to God for justice. Cain couldn't bury the evidence of his crime because God Himself heard the testimony of Abel's blood.

† The language isn't teaching that literal blood had a voice. It's judicial imagery. Abel's unjust death stood before God as a demand for righteous judgment (Hebrews 12:24).

† This becomes extremely important when we reach Revelation because the slain martyrs are pictured doing exactly what Abel's blood did, crying to God for justice against those who murdered them (Revelation 6:9-10).

Matthew 23:35-36

so that upon you will fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

† Jesus deliberately reaches all the way back to Abel. He gathers the history of righteous bloodshed into one enormous covenant lawsuit and tells His first-century enemies that the accumulated judgment was coming upon them.

† Notice the time statement. Jesus didn't say this blood-guilt would be punished thousands of years later. He said, All these things shall come upon this generation. The generation standing before Him was approaching the climax of Israel's covenantal blood-guilt.

† This is one of the strongest interpretive connections to Revelation's martyrs. If Jesus said the blood of the righteous would be required of that generation, we shouldn't move Revelation's cry for vengeance into an unrelated generation thousands of years later (Matthew 23:32-36; Revelation 6:9-11).

† Jesus then immediately identifies Jerusalem as the persecuting city in the same discourse, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killed the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her (Matthew 23:37). The blood-guilt theme and Jerusalem's coming judgment are inseparable.

Luke 11:49-51

For this reason also, the wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill, and some they will persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of

Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.'

† Luke makes the connection even more explicit. Jesus says prophets and apostles would be sent to that generation, some would be killed and persecuted, and the blood of the prophets would be required of that same generation.

† This means the martyrdom wasn't merely ancient history. Jesus predicted that His own messengers would soon join the long line of murdered prophets (Matthew 23:34; Acts 7:52, 58-60; 12:1-2).

† The language of Revelation therefore fits the world Jesus described perfectly. Prophets, apostles, and faithful witnesses were being persecuted, their blood was awaiting vindication, and Jesus had already declared which generation would face the reckoning.

† The phrase from the foundation of the world connects the murder of Abel to the persecution occurring in the first century. The entire history of righteous blood was moving toward a covenantal day of accountability.

Revelation 6:9-11

When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been killed because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who live on the earth?" And a white robe was given to each of them; and they were told that they were to rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers and sisters who were to be killed even as they had been, was completed also.

† Here Revelation deliberately returns us to the blood-cry theme. Abel's blood cried from the ground, and now the blood of God's murdered witnesses is represented by the martyrs crying beneath the altar.

† Their question is How long? The answer isn't thousands of years. They're told to rest for a little time. Their vindication belonged to the approaching judgment described throughout Revelation (Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10).

† Their cry specifically asks God to judge and avenge our blood. That closely matches Jesus' declaration that the blood of the righteous would be required of His generation (Matthew 23:35-36; Luke 11:50-51).

† More martyrs would die before the judgment arrived. This agrees with Jesus' warning that His messengers would continue to be killed, crucified, scourged, and persecuted before judgment fell (Matthew 23:34).

Revelation 18:20

Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.

† The cry of Revelation 6 receives its answer. The martyrs asked God to judge their persecutors, and Revelation 18 announces that God had judged their judgment upon the guilty city.

† Notice who is specifically told to rejoice, saints, apostles, and prophets. These are the same categories of people Jesus said would be persecuted and killed before Jerusalem's judgment (Matthew 23:34; Luke 11:49).

† This isn't random language. Jesus predicted the persecution of prophets and apostles, promised judgment upon that generation, and Revelation celebrates God's judgment on the persecuting city.

Revelation 18:24

And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on the earth.

† This statement sounds remarkably like Jesus' indictment in Matthew 23. Jesus said all the righteous blood shed upon the earth would come upon His generation, and Revelation says the guilty city contained the blood of prophets, saints, and all who had been slain upon the earth (Matthew 23:35-36).

† The verbal and theological connection is powerful. Jesus identifies Jerusalem as the city that kills the prophets, and Revelation condemns its symbolic Babylon for the blood of prophets and saints (Matthew 23:37; Revelation 11:8).

† Revelation itself had already identified the great city spiritually as the place where their Lord was crucified (Revelation 11:8). That geographical marker points directly to Jerusalem.

† The blood that began crying in Genesis reaches its covenantal judgment here. Abel's blood cried, the prophets' blood accumulated, Jesus' messengers were persecuted, the martyrs cried for vengeance, and the guilty city was finally judged.

Revelation 19:1-2

After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation, glory, and

power belong to our God, because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great prostitute who was corrupting the earth with her sexual immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her."

† Revelation now gives the explicit answer to the martyrs' prayer. They asked God to avenge our blood, and after the judgment of the great harlot heaven declares that God hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand (Revelation 6:10).

† The literary movement is complete. Revelation 6 contains the request, Revelation 18 identifies the blood-guilty city, and Revelation 19 announces that the requested vengeance has occurred.

† This matches Jesus' prophecy exactly. The blood-guilt accumulated from Abel through the prophets and continued through the persecution of Christ's messengers. Jesus said the reckoning would fall upon this generation, and Revelation depicts that reckoning arriving.

Hebrews 12:24

and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

† Hebrews brings Abel's blood into direct contrast with the blood of Jesus. Abel's blood cried for justice, while Christ's blood speaks the superior message of the New Covenant.

† This contrast helps us understand the larger biblical movement. The old world of blood-guilt, persecution, and covenant judgment was giving way to the completed New Covenant order centered entirely in Jesus (Hebrews 8:13; 12:22-24).

† The persecutors could shed the blood of God's people, but they couldn't stop the kingdom. The blood of Christ established something greater than the system that was passing away.

Historical References

† Josephus describes Jerusalem during the Jewish War as consumed by internal violence, factional murder, bloodshed,

famine, and destruction before the Romans finally took the city. His account provides an eyewitness historical background for the horrifying judgment that overtook Jerusalem in AD 70 (Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Books 5-6).

† Josephus repeatedly describes bloodshed within Jerusalem itself, including killings around sacred areas. His history doesn't establish the theology, Scripture does, but it provides powerful historical testimony concerning the generation upon which Jerusalem's catastrophe actually fell (Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Book 5).

† Eusebius records the early Christian tradition that believers in Jerusalem were warned to leave the city before the war and went to Pella. This corresponds with Jesus' instructions that His disciples flee when they recognized the approaching judgment (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 3.5; Luke 21:20-22).

† These historical witnesses don't determine the meaning of prophecy. They confirm that the first-century setting described by Jesus ended in an extraordinary historical judgment upon Jerusalem within the generation He addressed.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't need to wait for Revelation's martyrs to be avenged. Revelation itself announces that their blood was avenged when God judged the blood-guilty persecuting city (Revelation 18:20, 24; 19:2).

† We shouldn't take a judgment Jesus explicitly assigned to His generation and relocate it thousands of years into our future. His time statements tell us when the blood-guilt reckoning would occur (Matthew 23:35-36; Luke 11:50-51).

† This also means Revelation should be read through the story Scripture itself develops. Genesis introduces Abel's crying blood, Jesus identifies the generation responsible for the accumulated blood-guilt, Revelation shows the martyrs crying for vindication, and Revelation finally announces that their blood has been avenged.

† For believers today, the message isn't that we're waiting for ancient martyrs to receive justice. The message is that God

keeps His covenant promises, vindicates His servants, judges persecuting powers, and has established the kingdom of His Son.

† We live on the completed side of that covenantal judgment. Our calling isn't to fear an approaching destruction of Jerusalem, but to live faithfully in the everlasting kingdom established through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:22-28).

Q & A Appendix

Q: Why begin Revelation's martyr theme with Cain and Abel?

A: Because Scripture itself begins the righteous blood theme with Abel. His blood cried from the ground, and Jesus specifically traced the history of righteous bloodshed back to Abel (Genesis 4:10; Matthew 23:35).

Q: Who did Jesus say would answer for the accumulated righteous blood?

A: Jesus said, All these things shall come upon this generation. Luke records the same declaration, saying the blood from Abel onward would be required of this generation (Matthew 23:35-36; Luke 11:50-51).

Q: How does Revelation 6 connect with Jesus' words?

A: Revelation's martyrs cry for God to judge and avenge their blood. Jesus had already declared that the blood of the righteous would be required of His generation (Revelation 6:9-11; Matthew 23:35-36).

Q: How do we know Revelation's martyrs didn't have to wait thousands of years?

A: They were told to rest for a little time, and Revelation repeatedly describes its events as soon and near (Revelation 6:11; 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10).

Q: What city did Jesus associate with killing the prophets?

A: Jerusalem. Jesus directly lamented, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto

her (Matthew 23:37).

Q: Does Revelation use the same accusation?

A: Yes. Revelation says the blood of prophets and saints was found in the guilty city, and earlier identifies the great city spiritually as the place where the Lord was crucified (Revelation 18:24; 11:8).

Q: Was the martyrs' prayer for vengeance ever answered?

A: Yes. Revelation explicitly announces that God judged the great harlot and avenged the blood of His servants at her hand (Revelation 19:2).

Q: What is the complete blood-guilt pattern?

A: Abel's blood cries, righteous blood accumulates, Jesus announces that the reckoning will fall upon His generation, the martyrs cry for vengeance, the blood-guilty city is judged, and heaven announces that God has avenged His servants (Genesis 4:10; Matthew 23:35-36; Revelation 6:9-11; 18:24; 19:2).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Genesis 4:10; Matthew 23:35-36; Luke 11:49-51; Revelation 6:9-11; Revelation 18:20; Revelation 18:24; Revelation 19:1-2; Hebrews 12:24

† Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Books 5-6; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 3.5

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