

The Book of Revelation (Three of Three Questions)

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The last of three questions submitted by Brock Fariss, son of Tim Fariss one of the Deacons serving with the Central Church of Christ in McMinnville, Tennessee, will be answered in this article. Before we leave the subject for a while, allow me to again express my appreciation for the opportunity to study the wonderful Book of Revelation in a formal setting during their Homecoming and Gospel Meeting this year. Also, for those who might like to see the actual lessons presented from the pulpit, another of their Deacons, Frank Reynolds, has placed them on the church's website which is www.churchatcentral.org (go to "Media" on the home page menu bar, select "Classes" where you will find the Introductory lesson, and then back to the menu bar on the home page to "Sermons 2012" where you will find the Revelation Series).

Why do the faithful get beheaded for a life full of service to Christ?

The passage from which the question emerges is Revelation 20:4, "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." How the martyrs died back in chapter 6:9-11, who had cried with a loud voice, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" we are now told in chapter 20 at verse 4 was by beheading. The word "behead" occurs 5 times in the New Testament. Four times it translates the word *apokephalizo* meaning "behead" (Matt. 14:10; Mark 6:16, 27; Luke 9:9). The only time the word "beheaded" appears in the Book of Revelation it translates the word *pelekizo* which carries a specific meaning: to "cut off with an axe" (Moulton and Milligan, p. 502.)

The reason they got beheaded is stated in the text. It was "for the word of witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands." The word "witness" here translates the Greek word *marturian* from *martureo* meaning "attest, affirm, confirm" and points to their testimony which contained proof and evidence of the gospel facts (cf. Newman, p. 111). Clearly, they were beheaded for presenting and practicing Christianity.

But, the question lingers "why would the faithful get beheaded for a life full of service to Christ?" The immediate context of the Book of Revelation shows that those in power at the time, the Romans, demanded absolute allegiance from its citizens. Loyalty to Christ was by them viewed as traitorous and rewarded with a death sentence. Between Revelation 6 and Revelation 20 more would suffer and die for their faith in Christ as shown in Revelation 6:11, "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." It might be expected that a faithful Christian life would always be free from pain and suffering, but such is not the case. Perhaps hearing it from the Lord himself will prove convincing, "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his

lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also” (John 15:20). In John 16:33 Jesus said, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” The Lord rewards the righteous in the Day of Judgment. Carefully consider the promise of Jesus in his answer to Peter.

Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. (Mark 10:28-30).