THE TRIBULATION PERIOD

Rev. 5:1-14
And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. [2] And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? [3] And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. [4] And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. [5] And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. [6] And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. [7] And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. [8] And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. [9] And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; [10] And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. [11] And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; [12] Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. [13] And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. [14] And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

The book: Actually it was a scroll. It contained the revelation of what God has determined for the future course of the world and humanity. It describes how the world
will be judged at the end and portrays the final triumph of God and His people over all evil. When each seal is opened, a portion of the book’s content is revealed in a vision (as we see in chapter 6 of Revelation).

The elders: The identity of “the elders” is of paramount importance in understanding the book of Revelation. We are introduced to them in Rev. 4:4: And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

“These elders are significant because they are seated, they are robed, and they are crowned. These significant things suggest that these twenty-four are the symbolic representation of the Church. In Ephesians 2:6 we read that God has ‘made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.’ In Revelation 19:8 it is stated, ‘And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.’ Again Paul testifies in II Timothy 4:8, ‘Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing.’ These considerations seem to identify the twenty-four elders as the Church. Now when are they seen in heaven in their glorified position? At the very outset of the Tribulation, to be described by John in Revelation 4-19, they are seen in heaven, seated, robed and crowned. Thus the Rapture must precede the Tribulation.”

There are some - including close friends of mine - who are convinced the Church will go through the Tribulation - or at least part of it. It is our conviction in the Assemblies of God that we will NOT go through it. Listen to our Lord’s promise to the Church of Philadelphia (in Turkey, not Pennsylvania): Rev. 3:10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

That phrase “hour of temptation” is translated “hour of testing” and refers to the coming 7-year Tribulation period. God never told the Church that He would keep them “through” the Tribulation; He said He would keep us “from” the Tribulation.

Further, the Tribulation will a terrible time of God’s wrath on the Earth, not man’s wrath. Note 1 Thes. 5:9: For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ....
Paul really clinches this discussion in 2 Thes. 1:7-8:  And to you who are troubled
rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty
angels, [8] In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that
obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

What a powerful statement:  The Tribulation will be a time during which God TAKES
VENGEANCE ON THEM WHO DO NOT KNOW HIM.  Just as God delivered Noah
from the flood and rescued Lot from the judgment on Sodom, so God will deliver His
children from the Tribulation.  Praise God!

[The Lion of the Tribe of Judah:]  This is none other than Jesus Christ.  Here He is
pictured as a lion - the king of all God’s creatures.  Not only is He from the Tribe of
Judah, He is also ‘the root of David,’ another title for Him as the Messiah King.  These
titles portray Jesus as the conquering Messiah:  Genesis 49:9-10  Judah is a lion’s
whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a
lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?  [10] The sceptre shall not depart
from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him
shall the gathering of the people be.

Note Jesus is described with seven horns and seven eyes which are the seven spirits of
God.  The seven horns represent Christ’s power and strength for all eternity.  The
seven spirits represent seven different and vital manifestations of God’s personality
through scripture and all ages.  (The Seven Spirits are a whole study in themselves
which we don’t have time to incorporate into this study.)

When Jesus takes the scroll into His hands, Heaven erupts in praise:

Rev. 5:8-10  
And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell
down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of
odours, which are the prayers of saints.  [9] And they sung a new song, saying, Thou
art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and
hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people,
and nation;  [10] And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall
reign on the earth.

As I indicated in an earlier study, the “scroll,” the book of God’s judgment, will be
divided into three sets of horrors visited on the Earth:

✓ Seal Judgments
✓ Trumpet Judgments
✓ Vial Judgments
THE SEAL JUDGMENTS

We studied the first four of those Seal judgments last week:

**Rev. 6:1-4**

And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. [2] And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer. [3] And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. [4] And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

1. Seal # 1  Advent of Antichrist who comes on a peace platform
2. Seal # 2  War follows as Israel is viciously attacked (see Ezekiel 38 and 39)
3. Seal # 3  Famine
4. Seal # 4  Death  (One-fourth of the remaining people on earth die as a result of these first four seal judgments.)

Now we come to the remaining three seal judgments:

**Rev. 6:9-17**

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. [12] And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; [13] And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. [14] And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. [15] And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; [16] And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: [17] For the great day of his wrath is
come; and who shall be able to stand?

Seal # 5: When the fifth seal is torn off the scroll, John saw Tribulation martyrs. This period will be just unbelievably bad for those who accept the gospel and remain faithful to God and His Word. Now - before the Rapture - you and I can be saved

Seal # 6: This will involve a proliferation of earth disasters. There will be a literal shaking of the Earth, cosmic upheaval, and a great darkness and terror for those still living.

Isaiah 34:4 And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree.

Joel 2:30-31

And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. [31] The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come.

Haggai 2:6

For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;

Matthew 24:29

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

Seal # 7: This is a strange one:

Rev. 8:1-5

And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. [2] And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. [3] And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. [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. [5] And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

The opening of this last seal initiates the seven trumpets of judgment. In other words, the seven trumpet judgments ARE the seventh seal judgment. Why is there silence in Heaven before seal # 7? I believe is due to the aghast horror of our knowledge of what is about to hit the earth.
I am going to save for later the study on the Trumpet and Vial judgments. These things all happen on Earth. BUT WHAT ABOUT THE MILLIONS AND MILLIONS OF BELIEVERS WHO HAVE ALREADY BEEN RESURRECTED AND RAPTURED TO BE WITH THE LORD. WHAT ARE WE DOING ALL DURING THIS TIME?

OUR FIRST EVENTS FOLLOWING THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

When the Bible teaches us that “there is no more condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit,” (Romans 8:1) some followers of Christ just assume that no believer will ever face a judgement before God. Well, that is not true as we learn particularly in 1 Corinthians 3. While it is true we will NOT be judged for our sins for they are covered by the blood of Christ, never to be remembered against us any more, we WILL be judged for our works. Here is the equation:

We are not saved by works; we are saved by faith in Christ.

However, REWARDS are not automatic with salvation. Rewards are earned. Salvation is a GIFT; rewards are EARNED.

When we study the life of the Apostle Paul, we find the controlling factor in his life was his expectation of meeting his Lord Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ. One commentator has observed:

_Every step the apostle took, every act he performed, every ministry he carried on, he did anticipating a day of reckoning at the judgment seat of Christ._

Note Paul’s warning to us in 2 Cor. 5:9-10

_Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. [10] For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad._

Did you note that little three letter word in verse 9? ALL! We must ALL appear before the judgment seat of Christ. That means you, friend. That means me! But this judgment is not to determine whether we’re going to heaven or not. No, no! Paul’s words would have truly struck home to the Corinthians for they were very familiar with the BEMA judgment stand in the center of the city. Let me quote Pentecost once again who gives such a brilliant explanation of what we read in 1 Cor. 3:9-15: _For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. [10] According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I_
have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. [11] For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. [12] Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; [13] Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. [14] If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. [15] If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

“The original language for the apostle’s statement says, ‘We must all appear before the bema of Christ.’ The word bema was one that would be familiar to these Corinthians, for just outside Corinth was a large Olympic stadium where athletes from all over Greece would assemble periodically to contest in the Greek Olympic games. It was the custom, when these Olympics were being prepared, to erect a platform in a prominent position in the stadium. During the contests, the honored citizens and heads of state would be ushered into the place and seated on the platform where they would sit as spectators. The judges were down on the field. When a contest was being run, the judges would watch carefully to make sure that every rule of the contest was observed. The victor in a given contest, if he had participated lawfully, would be led by the judges from the scene of victory to this platform which was called the BEMA. There one of those honored citizens would take an oak leaf cluster, or a laurel wreath, and place it has a chaplet upon the victor’s forehead or as a garland upon his shoulders. The victor could wear it during the rest of the Olympic games as a sign that he had contested lawfully and had triumphed. Paul then is picturing the believer as a contestant in a race. Those who are victors in the contest will be brought before the bema, on which not some honored citizen sits, but upon which no less than the Lord Jesus Christ sits. He will give a REWARD to those who are victors.”

Ibid/page 153-154

Verse 14 should pierce our hearts: “If any man’s (woman’s) work abide.....he shall receive a reward.”

We think somehow that rewards are automatic. We sing, “I’ve got a mansion just over the hilltop.” It isn’t necessarily so. After the Rapture, you and I will have a command appearance before King Jesus and give an accounting for our Christian lives SINCE we believed. The text reads that all our works are: gold, silver, precious stones or hay, wood and stubble. Really, those six can be categorized in two columns:

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<th>DESTRUCTIBLE</th>
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What is destructible? Those things we have done for our own gratification. What is
indestructible? Those things we have done for Christ!

The destructible commodities are hay, wood and stubble and they will be tried by FIRE (verse 13). Hay, wood and stubble are consumed and destroyed by fire. The indestructible commodities are gold, silver and precious stones which fire can only refine. It is from the “refined” results of the fire test that we will have anything at all to lay at Jesus’ feet. Some believers will be shocked and embarrassed when all they have to lay at Jesus’ feet is a handful of ashes.

The Apostle John informed us in Revelation 4:10 that we will one day lay our rewards (our crowns) at Jesus’ feet. THE REWARDS WILL NOT BE GIVEN US FOR OUR OWN PRIVATE ETERNAL POSSESSIONS, BUT TO BE PLACED IN FOREVER GRATITUDE AT THE NAIL-PIERCED FEET OF JESUS.

Side bar: We often read one of Paul’s passages (1 Cor. 4:2 _Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful_) and miss the point. We think we have to do something huge, ala Billy Graham or someone. But what God commanded us was to be FAITHFUL! It will be our faithfulness that will count at the Judgment Seat of Christ and our pure motivation.

By God’s grace, may we be able to say as did Paul shortly before his death, 2 Tim. 4:7-8 _I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: [8] Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing._

Next week, Lord willing, we will delve into the Trumpet and Vial judgments and then spend a great deal of time on the advent (or coming) of Antichrist. It should prove to be one of the most interesting of all our studies.