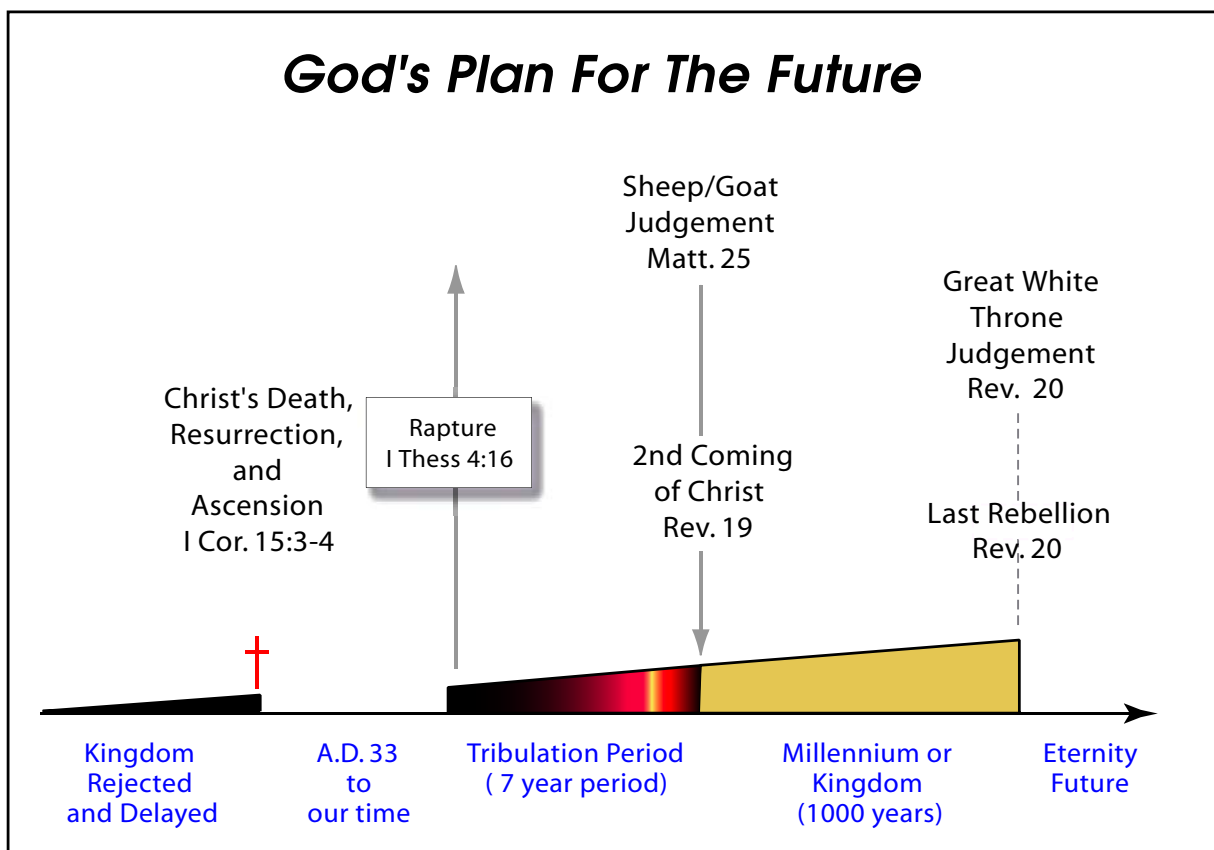
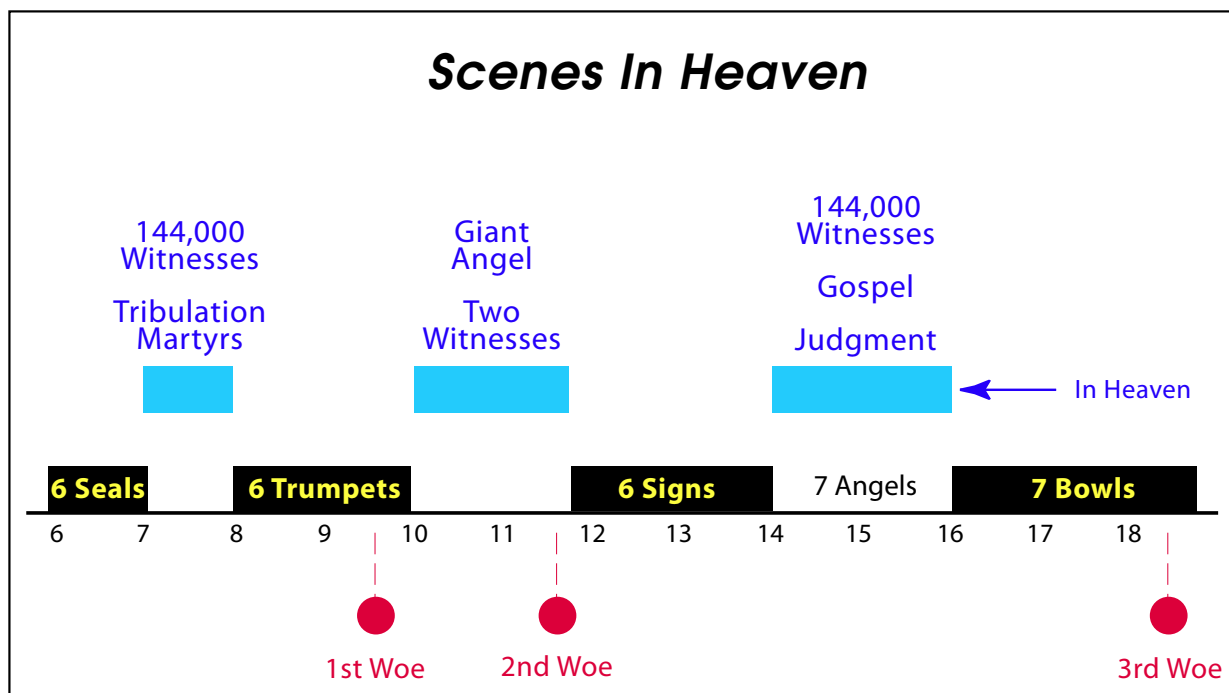


Love In The Darkness

GOD USED MOSES TO BRING DARKNESS AND PAIN on the land of Egypt. God did this to rescue His people, the Israelites, from the Egyptians who were oppressing them. A new pharaoh had come to power and forced them into slave labor. Pharaoh did not understand that God was watching. As a result Egypt was going to suffer for Pharaoh's brutal decision. God used Moses, the prince of Egypt, to bring darkness and pain on the land, and together they turned water into blood and created hordes of frogs, gnats, flies, and locusts. People and animals were killed by disease and hail. It was a horrible time (Exodus 7-11). The Egyptians were in pain when God brought a deep darkness across the land and then killed the first born in each family. But God spared those Israelites who believed in Him and placed a mark of blood above the door of the house and the two doorposts. He brought death to the Egyptians, but safety to the believing Israelites. God showed His love for His people in the darkness of horrible suffering and death.

TIME OF DARKNESS AND PAIN. In our last study, Revelation 6, the horrible period of time known as the Tribulation started when Jesus Christ broke the first of seven seals. The first seal symbolized the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation - a period of peace. Then as each of the next five seals were broken, we saw that suffering and pain would be unleashed on the world. These seals symbolized an exceptionally horrible 3.5 year period of war, famine, and death. Many will





die during this part of the Tribulation, including many Christians. All Christians will be raptured or removed from the earth before the Tribulation begins (see the study “The Church Is Missing”). During the dark and painful period of the Tribulation some people will become Christians, and God will rescue some of the Christians, just as He rescued Israel from the darkness and pain inflicted on Egypt, but not all. This is the message of Revelation 6:9-11. Which Tribulation Christians will suffer and who will not? That question is answered in this study.

FIRST SCENE IN HEAVEN. Revelation 6 ends with the world in the horror of suffering, but Revelation 7 opens with a beautiful vision - a scene in heaven. This is the first of three scenes that occur between the seven trumpets, the seven signs, and the seven bowls. Each one is like a pause in a movie. The Holy Spirit seems to give us a break from the descriptions of darkness and suffering by giving us positive glimpses of the saints and God’s coming victory.

John’s vision of the seals closes at the end of Revelation 6. As Rev. 7 opens he sees four angels who were preventing the wind from blowing on the earth.

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any

tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.” (NASB) Rev. 7:1-3

These angels prevented winds from blowing from the north, west, south, and east. Still winds will cause the earth and the sea to be warmer and uncomfortable. Great portions of the earth will be without rain. The impact will be misery on the earth.

Then John saw another angel arrive who told these four angels not to harm the earth until the 144,000 bond-servants of God had been sealed. These are the ones whom God will protect from the darkness and pain of the Tribulation. The Greek word for “bond-servant” or “servant” in Rev. 7:3 is DOULOS. It means “slave.” These men are God’s slaves. The apostle Paul called himself a bond-servant or slave of God many times. Paul’s greatest desires were to know and to serve God. Paul wanted to serve God - to be His slave.

It is not true that pain and death come to a Christian only as the result of sin and disobedience. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus encouraged us when He said that Christians will suffer for simply being righteous - for following

Him.

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men . . . persecute you . . . on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (NASB) Matt. 5:10-12

Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you . . . (NASB) John 15:20

All Christians will suffer for Him in some way, and some will die for Him. Whether we die or live for Him, His love always shines on us in the darkness as some are rescued from eternal darkness. This is our calling.

THE 144,000. The 144,000, who are to be sealed, will



Then why did God spare Israel from suffering and pain in Egypt and why will He rescue all Christians before the start of the Tribulation but only some during the last half of the Tribulation? The answer is found in the word “bond-servants” used for these men.

It is easy for Christians to forget that if we really want to serve God, we will suffer for Him. If we are serious about serving Him, Jesus told His disciples to expect suffering to come.

come from the twelve tribes of Israel. These 144,000 have seals on their foreheads according to verse 3.

Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe

of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000. (NASB) Rev. 7:4-8

If we compare these twelve tribes to the those found in Exodus 1:2-5, we find a difference. Exodus lists Dan, but Revelation 7:4-8 substitutes Manasseh. Why? The tribe of Dan was very idolatrous, but the tribe of Manasseh was

from around the world standing before God.

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on



faithful. Apparently, God will give the honor of telling others about Himself to only the faithful tribes of Israel.

Many wonder about the lost tribes of Israel. I have received questions about this topic. This passage reveals an important truth. God knows who belongs to each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Some of them are lost to us, but not to Him. He will find 12,000 from each tribe to be His witnesses during the tribulation. The honor of being part of this select group of bond-servants will be for 144,000 of His chosen people.

THE CROWD AT THE END. The vision moved to the end of the Tribulation when John saw a great crowd of people

the throne, and to the Lamb. All the angels were standing round the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" (NASB) Rev. 7:9-12

This is a great crowd of people from around the world. This group of people are standing - not kneeling - before God along with the angels, the twenty-four elders, and the four Seraphim. Who are these people? The answer is found in the

next few verses., when one of the elders asked the Apostle John to identify these people.

Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes-- who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (NASB) Rev. 7:13-14

John answered, "I do not know!" Then the elder gave the answer. These people are Christians. These men and women are wearing white robes which symbolize their holiness. This is the same symbol used earlier in Rev. 3:4-5. In that passage the "soiled" referred to non-Christians and clean, white robes referred to Christians.

This passage also reveals that they are Christians since their robes have been washed in the blood of Jesus. As a result their robes are white. Wow, who ever heard of blood turning dirty clothes white? The elder did not give John lessons on how to clean clothes but on how to wash away our sins. Jesus' death forgives our sins. This scene in heaven is a great crowd of Christians who are thanking God for their salvation.

THEIR REWARD. The elder has more to say to the apostle.

Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (NASB) Rev. 7:15-17

Because their sins are forgiven, they will be with God day and night forever and ever. They will never again experience hunger, thirst, extreme heat, or darkness. They will never again cry in the night when they are alone and no one seems to care. They will never again cry, for God will wipe away

their cares and pain. This is part of the great reward that Jesus promised those who suffer for Him in Matthew 5:10-12.

CONCLUSION. Will people be saved during the Tribulation? Some ask, "How can people be saved during the Tribulation when all the Christians are removed from the world before it starts?" The answer is that there will still be Bibles, books about the Bible, web sites, sermons on tape, and CDs for example. Many who are left behind at the time of the rapture will realize the truth of the gospel message and will give their lives to Jesus. God will also select 144,000 people to preach the good news - telling others about Jesus and His death in order to forgive their sins.

We will see later that God will select two men to preach about heaven and hell. We will also find that angels will preach the eternal good news to the world. There will be many opportunities for people to believe that Jesus can and will forgive their sins if they trust Him to do that. The gospel will be preached and many will be born again, but not all. What great news those in the Tribulation will hear! God will offer them light in the middle of darkness and pain. If only they will believe or trust Jesus to forgive their sins, they can have light and happiness for eternity.

Today God wants His bond-servants to tell others about Jesus' forgiveness and that all they need to do is trust in Him.

During the French Revolution political prisoners were imprisoned in dungeons. In one place, a prisoner had a Bible and his cell was crammed with prisoners who wanted to hear the Bible. The men discovered that for a few minutes each evening a light would shine through the cell window. The prisoners devised a plan. Each evening when the light appeared, they would lift the owner of the Bible onto their shoulders and into the light. In that position, the man would read the Bible. After the light was gone, they would bring him down and say, "Now tell us, what did you read while you were in the light?" (Focal Point, Denver Seminary. vol. 6, no. 3)

Now we need to go and share the message of light!

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