

# A CLOSER LOOK AT PRETRIBULATIONISM AND REVELATION 3:10

By Andy Woods

## Introduction

*Pretribulational rapturism* is the belief that the rapture of the church will take place before (*pre*) the seven-year Tribulation period begins. *Imminency* figures prominently in pretribulational thinking and indicates that Christ's return for His church through the rapture is the very next event on the prophetic horizon. Since the rapture is a signless event no predicted sign must first transpire before the rapture can occur.

If the rapture is imminent then it logically follows that it must precede the Tribulation period, also known as *Daniel's Seventieth Week*. The church is never exhorted to look for the signs of the Tribulation period but is instead commanded to look for Christ's return. Thus, pretribulationists are quick to point to the numerous New Testament passages conveying the idea that the rapture of is the next event on the prophetic horizon (Jas. 5:8; 1 Thess. 1:10; 4:15; 1 Cor. 1:7; 15:51; Titus 2:13; Philip. 3:20; John 14:3; 1 John 2:28; 1 John 3:2-3).

Imminency supports pretribulationism since it is the only rapture position contending that the rapture could take place today. Prophecy scholar John F. Walvoord had a plaque in his office that read "perhaps today." Only pretribulationists can confidently assert "perhaps today." The other rapture positions that place the rapture either in the middle of (*midtribulation rapturism*) or three quarters into (*pre-wrath rapturism*) or at the end of (*posttribulationism*) the Tribulation period must, by their very definition, point to a series of prophetic events in the Tribulation that first must take place before the rapture can occur. Not so the pretribulational position since it precedes the Tribulation and therefore is signless or an imminent event.

If the New Testament teaches that the rapture is imminent, then it stands to reason that this concept would also occur in Revelation 2–3. Christ conveyed to John the *Apocalypse*, which is also known as the Book of Revelation. In Revelation 2–3, Christ

addressed seven struggling churches of Asia Minor. These chapters represent Christ's final word to His church. If imminency is a New Testament idea, then it is reasonable to expect that this concept would also be found in this section of Scripture. This expectation is heightened given the fact that Revelation in general emphasizes Christ's imminent return (Rev. 1:1a, 3b; 22:7a, 12a, 20a). The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the imminent return of Christ for His church through the rapture is a concept clearly taught in Revelation 2–3, as it is elsewhere in the New Testament. Specifically, this paper will defend the doctrine of imminency in one of the clearest rapture passages found in this section, which is Revelation 3:10.<sup>1</sup>

### **Revelation 3:10**

In Revelation 3:10, Christ promised the church at Philadelphia: "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth." This analysis focuses on this verse since commentators of all stripes readily acknowledge that it represents the most significant verse in the debate over the timing of the rapture. In fact, posttribulationist Robert Gundry concedes, "Probably the most debated verse in the whole discussion about the time of the Church's rapture is Revelation 3:10."<sup>2</sup> Is this verse a promise of divine preservation through the events of the Tribulation period as posttribulationists contend or is it promise of divine protection by being kept out of this time period altogether as pretribulationists contend? Much of the debate centers around *tēreō ek* translated as "keep you from." According to posttribulationist George Ladd, "...the promise of Revelation 3:10 of being kept [from] *ek* the hour of trial need not be a

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<sup>1</sup> This material was originally published in Andrew M. Woods, "John and the Rapture: Revelation 2–3," in *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*, ed. John F. Hart (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 195-224.

<sup>2</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 54.

promise of removal from the very physical presence of tribulation. It is a promise of preservation and deliverance in and through it."<sup>3</sup> Gundry echoes:

Essentially ἐκ, a preposition of motion concerning thought or physical direction, means *out from within*. Εκ does not denote a stationary position outside its object, as some have mistakenly supposed in thinking that the ἐκ of Revelation 3:10 refers to a position *already* taken outside the earthly sphere of tribulation.... If ἐκ ever occurs without the thought of emergence, it does so very exceptionally.<sup>4</sup>

Ryrie sums up the controversy:

Posttribulationists say that "from" (*ek*) refers to protection of the church within the Tribulation. Pretribulationists understand it to mean preservation by being absent from the time of tribulation. One is internal protection (while living through the Tribulation); the other is external protection (being in heaven during that time). Which meaning does "from" (*ek*) support? The answer is either, if the preposition is considered alone. But for the record, let it be said that *ek* does denote a position outside something without implying a prior position inside and then emergence from within. The pretribulationist understanding of *ek* is supported by a number of verses that have nothing to do with the rapture and therefore do not beg the question.<sup>5</sup>

As will be demonstrated, the weight of the evidence favors the pretribulational understanding. This evidence will be examined in the following four areas: some initial problems with the posttribulational interpretation of the passage, the meaning of "keep you from," a brief analysis of what exactly the church is promised to be kept from, and how the pretribulational understanding of this verse harmonizes well with the rest of Revelation's contents (Rev. 4–22).

### *Initial Problems with the Posttribulational Interpretation*

There are at least *three* general problems with the posttribulational understanding that Revelation 3:10 merely teaches that God will preserve the church through the Tribulation period. *First*, if this is a divine promise, then God does a poor job

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<sup>3</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 85-86.

<sup>4</sup> Gundry, 55-56.

<sup>5</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *What You Should Know About the Rapture*, Current Christian Issues (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 114-15.

keeping it since Revelation also records numerous martyrdoms of believers during the Tribulation period. This posttribulational assumption of preservation in the midst of the Tribulation period exists largely because the Book of Revelation often portrays God's people as being supernaturally protected from many of the apocalyptic judgments during the Tribulation period. For example, Revelation 9:4 says, "They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but *only those who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads*." Revelation 16:2 similarly says, "The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out *on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image*."<sup>6</sup> Thus, according to posttribulationalism, just as God supernaturally protected national Israel from the various plagues of the Book of Exodus (Exod. 8:22; 9:4, 6; 10:23; 11:7), God will do the same thing for His church in the midst of the Tribulation period. True, both Revelation 9:4 and 16:2 teach that believers on earth during the Tribulation will be exempted from the fifth trumpet and the first bowl judgments. However, these are the only verses which specify that God's people will be spared from any Tribulational judgments. The implication is that believers will still experience the rest of the suffering described in the Book of Revelation. Thus, it is inaccurate to suggest that if the church is on the earth during the Tribulation period it will enjoy divine protection.

If this were so, then the countless martyrdoms during this time period are inexplicable.<sup>7</sup> Notice how the Revelation consistently portrays the frequent martyrdoms that Tribulation believers will endure as a consequence of Christ's opening the first seal judgment, which will usher in the reign of the Antichrist (Rev. 6:1-2; 2 Thess. 2:9-12). Revelation 6:9-11 says, "When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the

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<sup>6</sup> Italics added in both Revelation 9:4 and 16:2.

<sup>7</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary*, ed. Kenneth Barker (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 286.

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 dwell on the earth?' And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also."

Revelation 7:9, 13-14 similarly says, "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches *were* in their hands... Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, 'These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'My lord, you know.' And he said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'" Revelation 13:10 echoes, "If anyone *is destined* for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints." Revelation 13:15 also says, "And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed." Revelation 20:4 adds, "And I *saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand." These prophesied wide-scale martyrdoms simply cannot be reconciled with any prophetic theory arguing for the church's preservation during the Tribulation.

*Second*, since Christ's promise in Revelation 3:10 was given to comfort the Philadelphia church, how would such a promise of selective preservation serve as any real source of comfort to this church? Townsend asks, "It must be questioned whether

this kind of 'preservation' would be of any comfort and encouragement to the persecuted Philadelphians."<sup>8</sup> *Third*, had it been God's intention to communicate preservation in the midst of the Tribulation, there were far more effective ways of expressing this idea.

English notes:

The usual Greek for 'through' is *dia*, and for 'in,' *en*, *eis*, *epi*, and *kata*. It would seem that, if the Spirit of God intended to convey to the readers of this passage that the Lord would keep His own *through* or *in* the hour of trial, He would have used *dia*, or *eis*, or *epi*, or *kata* and not *ek*, which surely implies *out of* rather than *through* or *in*.<sup>9</sup>

Showers also explains:

The idea of the saints being shielded from the testing while living within and through this time period also would have been expressed more clearly through the use of another preposition, either *en* (meaning "in") or *dia* (meaning "through") [thus, "I will keep you *in* or *through* the time period of testing] rather than *ek*.<sup>10</sup>

### *Keep You From*

The Greek preposition translated "from" in Revelation 3:10 is the word *ek*, which can carry the idea of separation from something. For example, this is the same preposition translated "out of" in Matthew 7:5, which says, "You hypocrite, first take the log *out of* your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck *out of* your brother's eye" (italics added). Thus, by the use of this identical preposition in Revelation 3:10, the idea is conveyed that the church at Philadelphia will be kept entirely out of the Great Tribulation in the same way a log must be completely removed from someone's eye before he has the ability to completely remove the speck that is in his brother's eye.

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<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey L. Townsend, "The Rapture in Revelation 3:10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, (July 1980): 253.

<sup>9</sup> E. Schuyler English, *Re-Thinking the Rapture: An Examination of What the Scriptures Teach as to the Time of the Translation of the Church in Relation to the Tribulation* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1954), 89.

<sup>10</sup> Renald Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1995), 212.

In other words, if this is also how *ek* is used in Revelation 3:10, then the idea expressed here is total removal from rather than sustenance or protection in the midst of.

Townsend has produced a helpful word study demonstrating that the preposition *ek* often denotes total removal from its object.<sup>11</sup> He explains, "...sufficient evidence exists throughout the history of the meaning and usage of ἔκ to indicate that this preposition may also denote *a position outside its object with no thought of prior existence within the object or of emergence from the object.*"<sup>12</sup> In classical Greek literature, Liddell and Scott list several instances where *ek* means "of Position, *outside of, beyond.*"<sup>13</sup> Examples include the *Iliad* (ἐκ βελέων: "Thereafter will we hold ourselves aloof from the fight, *beyond the range of missiles*, lest haply any take wound on wound..."),<sup>14</sup> the *Odyssey* (ἐκ καπνοῦ: "out of the smoke"),<sup>15</sup> and Herodotus (ἐκ μέσου κατήσατο: "stood aside").<sup>16</sup>

Examples also abound in the Septuagint, or the Greek translation of Hebrew Bible, or the Old Testament, produced two centuries before Christ. Proverbs 21:23 says, "He who guards his mouth and his tongue, *Guards his soul from troubles*" (italics added). Here, the Septuagint employs *ek*, which is translated "from." Interestingly, the word translated "guard" here is *diatēreō*, which is almost identical to *tēreō* rendered "keep" in Revelation 3:10. The only real difference between the two verbs is that the former adds intensification. Thus, the combination of the preposition coupled with the nearly identical verb makes Proverbs 21:23 and Revelation 3:10 linguistically parallel. Guarding one's

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<sup>11</sup> Townsend; 254-59.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>13</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 498-99.

<sup>14</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, 2.14.130.

<sup>15</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, 2.19.7.

<sup>16</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, 2.3.83.

tongue obviously causes him to escape trouble entirely rather than merely sustaining him through trouble.<sup>17</sup> Josephus also furnishes examples where the preposition *ek* coupled with the verb *rhyomai* ("to rescue") is used to convey totally an outside position. "He *delivered them from* those dire consequences which would have ensued from their sedition but for Moses' watchful care" (italics added).<sup>18</sup>

The New Testament also furnishes numerous examples where the preposition *ek* coupled with a verbal expression conveys a position completely outside of something.<sup>19</sup> Acts 15:29 says, "that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you *keep yourselves free from* such things, you will do well" (italics added). Here *ek* translated as "from" communicates to Gentile believers to abstain from these practices, or keep themselves away from them entirely, so as not to avoid an unnecessary offense for the Jew. Interestingly, the word translated "keep" here is again *diatēreō*, which is nearly identical to *tēreō* translated "keep" in Revelation 3:10. As noted earlier, the only real difference between the two verbs is that the former adds strength to the notion of keeping. Thus, like Proverbs 21:23, the combination of the preposition coupled with the nearly identical verb makes Acts 15:29 and Revelation 3:10 linguistically parallel.

John 12:27 also uses *ek* alongside *sōzō* to convey complete removal from its object when it says, "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, *save Me from* this hour'?" (italics added). Here, Christ prays for a complete exemption from the ordeal of the cross. This verse also bears substantial similarity to Revelation 3:10 in that John is the author, Jesus is speaking, and reference is made to a future hour of

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<sup>17</sup> Ryrie, 115-16. For other examples throughout the Septuagint where *ek* (or sometimes a synonym) is used with synonyms of *tēreō* also conveying a complete removal from, see Townsend; 254-55.

<sup>18</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, 4.2.1. See also Josephus, *Antiquities*, 12.10.5; 13.6.3.

<sup>19</sup> Ryrie, 115-16. For an example of *ek* coupled with a non-verbal expression also conveying something completely outside of its object, see 1 Corinthians 9:19.



divine wrath (John 7:30; 8:20). The same preposition and verb combination shows up again in Hebrews 5:7, which says, "In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to *save Him from* death... (italics added). If this is a reference to Christ's Gethsemane prayer (Matt. 26:39, 42; Mark 14:32-36) then Christ is again portrayed as praying for a complete exemption from the ordeal of the cross. The same combination again shows up in James 5:20, which says, "let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will *save his soul from* death and will cover a multitude of sins" (italics added). Here, *ek* translated "from" is used to communicate that turning someone away from sin will help him entirely escape the consequences of that particular sin, which is death.

In Colossians 1:13, Paul also furnishes yet another example where the preposition *ek* coupled with the verb *rhyomai* ("to rescue") is used to convey a total outside position: "For He *rescued us from* the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (italics added). Here, *ek* translated "from" is used to convey that the believer's citizenship and domain is positionally transferred entirely out of Satan's domain at the point of faith in Christ. First John 5:18 buttresses this point depicted in Colossians 1:13 as it describes the believer's complete and total positional escape from Satan's grasp at the point of faith. This verse says, "We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him." Once again, the idea expressed in all of these passages through the Greek preposition *ek* is total removal from rather than sustenance or protection in the midst of. Likely, the same idea is found in Revelation 3:10.

John 17:15, "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to *keep them from the evil one*" (italics added), deserves special attention since it represents the only other occurrence of *tēreō* coupled with *ek* in all of classical Greek, the Septuagint, and

New Testament Greek.<sup>20</sup> Other significant similarities between John 17:15 and Revelation 3:10 involve John as the author of both passages and both verses portraying Christ as the speaker. Because Christ specifically stated here that the believers are to be left in the world, posttribulationists interpret this verse to mean that the believer is to be preserved in the moral sphere of Satan.<sup>21</sup> Posttribulationist John Piper concurs:

John Piper believes that the main Scripture which some believe supports the pre-tribulational rapture viewpoint (Revelation 3:10) does not necessarily mean that believers will be taken away from the earth, however; rather, it could mean that God will keep or protect His people from evil during the tribulation (see also John 17:15).<sup>22</sup>

However, although the disciples were still in the world, they were not within the sphere of the evil one when Christ prayed. In actuality, Jesus prayed that the disciples would be kept completely out of Satan's domain. His prayer has been answered since Paul later writes, "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col. 1:13). This truth of the believer's protection from Satan's jurisdiction is also borne out in 1 John. First John 5:18 says: "We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him" (1 John 5:18). Thomas Ice explains, "I am sure Piper would agree Christ's prayer has been answered since all genuine believers are protected from Satan. In the same way, all Church-Age believers will be kept out of the time of the tribulation via the rapture before that seven-year event."<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, the context of John 17:15 has

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<sup>20</sup> Harald Riesenfeld, "Tēreō," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 8:142. See also Gundry, 58.

<sup>21</sup> Gundry, 59.

<sup>22</sup> Lauren Leigh Noske, "Nine Reasons Why John Piper Disagrees with Nicolas' Cage's 'Left Behind' Movie's View of Rapture," *The Gospel Herald*, August 6, 2014; [www.gospelherald.com](http://www.gospelherald.com). See also John Piper, "Definition and Observations Concerning the Second Coming of Christ," *Desiring God Ministry*, August 30, 1987; [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org).

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Ice, "John Piper and the Rapture," online: [www.pre-trib.org](http://www.pre-trib.org), accessed 4 September 2014, 3.

nothing do with preservation from Satan's attacks as the posttribulationist presumes.

Rather, it pertains God's preservation of His own. Townsend notes:

Gundry interprets John 17:15b as a prayer for the preservation of the disciples in the moral sphere of Satan, since they are to be left in the world (John 17:15a). In the context of John 17:11–16, the idea of keeping is related to salvation and the possession of eternal life, not preservation from the moral assaults of Satan. The issue is the keeping of salvation (i.e., the perseverance of the saints) not progression in sanctification (which is taken up in 17:17).<sup>24</sup>

Thus, when considered in this light, far from supporting posttribulationism, John 17:15 actually becomes a pretribulation proof text. In sum, when the preposition *ek* is coupled with either *tēreō* or equivalent verbs throughout classical Greek, the Septuagint, Josephus, and the New Testament, a strong case can be made that when the same or nearly identical combination is employed in Revelation 3:10, the Philadelphians would also be kept in a position completely outside of its object.

### *Kept From What?*

Now that we have surmised that the promise of Revelation 3:10 indicates that the church at Philadelphia will be kept completely outside of its object, the next question to consider is what is the object? In other words, what is the Philadelphia church promised to be kept from? The remainder of the verse answers, "the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Rev. 3:10b). Further questions must be answered in order to understand what the Philadelphians are promised to be exempted from? *First*, what is meant by "the hour"? *Second*, what is meant by the expression "the whole world"? *Third*, what is meant by "the testing of the earth dwellers"? *Fourth*, what is meant by "which is about to come"?

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<sup>24</sup> Townsend; 258.

## The Hour

*First*, what is meant by "the hour"? In Johannine literature, the term "hour" (*hōra*) is often used to convey an extended period of time as opposed to a specific twenty-four hour cycle (John 2:4; 4:21, 23; 5:35; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:25, 32, 42; 17:1; 19:27; 1 John 2:18; Rev 14:7; 17:12). In Revelation 3:10, the term "hour" is preceded by a definite article in the Greek text indicating that it is referring to a specific period of time already well-known to the audience. Showers notes, "the fact that Christ's statement placed the definite article 'the' before the words translated 'hour' and 'about' indicates that He had a specific or definite period of testing in mind. He was not referring to history in general with its sporadic testings."<sup>25</sup> Because the hour that is in view is not specifically identified in the immediate context, it is likely something already defined by prior Scripture. Newell notes that "There is no reasonable doubt that it *must* refer to The Great Tribulation of which Daniel wrote (12:1), and to which our Lord referred in Matthew 24:15-21."<sup>26</sup> Understanding this hour as the Tribulation period fits well with the extended context of the book, which examines this time period in Revelation 6–18.

The term "hour" is helpful in ascertaining exactly what the church is promised deliverance from. It is common for non-pretribulational rapture perspectives to postulate that because the wrath of God will not actually begin until a later point in the Tribulation period, the church must be present for part of this period. Although the premise that God's wrath does not begin until later can be challenged, let's assume argument's sake that the wrath of God will not begin until some later point. Even so, pretribulationalism is still not overthrown since the promise of Revelation 3:10 is that the church will be kept

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<sup>25</sup> Showers, 214.

<sup>26</sup> William R. Newell, *Revelation: A Complete Commentary* (Chicago: Grace, 1935; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 71. This future Tribulation period is well attested to throughout both the Old and New Testaments (Deut. 4:26–31; Isa. 2:10–21; 13:6–13; 17:4–11; Jer. 30:4–11; Ezek. 20:33–38; Dan. 9:27; 12:1; Zeph. 1:14–18; Zech. 14:1–4; Matt. 24:9–31; 1 Thess. 5:1–4; 2 Thess. 2:1–12).

from the *time* of the Tribulation period and not merely from God's wrath. According to Rhodes:

The posttribulational view, expressed in the writings of George Eldon Ladd, Robert Gundry, and others, is the view that Christ will rapture the church after the tribulation period at the second coming of Christ. This means the church will go through the time of judgment prophesied in the book of Revelation, but believers will be kept from Satan's wrath during the tribulation (Revelation 3:10). Pretribulationists...respond, however, that Revelation 3:10 indicates that believers will be saved out of or separated from (Greek: *ek*) the actual time period of the tribulation.<sup>27</sup>

Geisler similarly observes, "In context, the statement about being saved 'out of' (Gk: *ek*) the time of trial does mean saved from it (not through it). One cannot be saved from an entire hour by being in any part of it."<sup>28</sup> Thiessen notes, the promise "holds out exemption from the period of trial, not only from the trial during that period."<sup>29</sup> Constable observes, "...it is not just the testing God promised to deliver them from but the 'hour' of testing, the time in history during which these trials will come (cf. John 12:27)."<sup>30</sup> Showers explains:

Christ promised to keep these church saints from the *time period* characterized by the testing Christ had in mind. If the Lord had meant that He would keep them from just the testing itself, He could have made that very clear by omitting the words "the hour" and simply saying, "I will keep you from the testing"...If people live within a time period, they are not separated from it...The only way to keep people from an entire time period is to prevent them from entering it.<sup>31</sup>

Ryrie notes, "The promise of Revelation 3:10 not only guarantees being kept from Tribulation trials but from the Tribulation period itself. The promise is not, 'I will keep

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<sup>27</sup> Ron Rhodes, *The End Times in Chronological Order: A Complete Overview to Understanding Bible Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2012), 50.

<sup>28</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 4 vols. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 2004), 4:654.

<sup>29</sup> Henry Clarence Thiessen, "Will the Church Pass through the Tribulation Period?," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 92, (April-June 1935): 202-3.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Revelation," online: [www.soniclight.com](http://www.soniclight.com), accessed 3 September 2014, 43.

<sup>31</sup> Showers, 211-12.

you from the trials.' It is, 'I will keep you from the *hour* of the trials.'"<sup>32</sup> Ryrie further comments, "It is impossible to conceive of being in the location where something is happening and being exempt from the time of the happening."<sup>33</sup> Ryrie explains how understanding this time component of the divine promise significantly undermines posttribulationism and promotes pretribulationism:

However, the promise of Revelation 3:10 not only guarantees being kept from the trials of the Tribulation period but being kept from the time period of the Tribulation. The promise is not, I will keep you from the trials. It is I will keep you from the hour of the trials...But how clear and plain is the promise. "I...will keep you from the hour of testing." Not just from any persecution, but from the coming time that will affect the whole earth. (The only way to escape worldwide trouble is not to be on the earth.) And not just from the events, but from the time. And the only way to escape the time when the events take place is not to be in a place where time ticks on. The only place that meets those qualifications is heaven.<sup>34</sup>

Despite Christ's plain statement that the church will be exempted from the actual time of the future Tribulation period, posttribulationists sometimes counter this perspective by employing Jeremiah 30:7, "Alas! for that day is great, There is none like it; And it is the time of Jacob's distress, But he will be saved from it." Gundry notes that Israel was given a promise similar to Revelation 3:10 of being saved from "the hour of testing" or "the time of Jacob's distress." In the Septuagint translation of this verse (Jer. 37:7), *sōzō* is used alongside *apo*, which conveys the notion of separation even more forcibly than does *ek*. Consequently, Gundry argues, "If a pretribulation rapture was not or will not be required for deliverance from the time of Jacob's distress, neither will a pretribulation rapture be required for preservation from the hour of testing."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Come Quickly Lord Jesus: What You Need to Know About the Rapture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 1996), 135.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 170.

<sup>34</sup> Ryrie, *What You Should Know About the Rapture*, 116-17.

<sup>35</sup> Gundry, 60.

However, the weakness to this argument is that it fails to comprehend that Israel and the church represent separate divine programs. A basic Bible interpretation rule is to recognize that the church and Israel represent separate programs of God. They are two trains running on separate railroad tracks. Chafer, notes twenty-four differences between Israel and the church.<sup>36</sup> While the church's program involves preservation from God's wrath (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Rom. 5:9; 8:1), Israel's program involves the incorporation of divine distress to awaken the unbelieving Jewish remnant to their need to trust in Jesus or *Yashua* for personal and political salvation (Dan. 9:24-27; Matt. 23:37-39). Since the patriarch Jacob's name was changed to Israel (Gen. 32:28; 35:10), the designation "Jacob's distress" in Jeremiah 30:7 leads to the realization that God's program for Israel rather than the church is in view here. Because Revelation 3:10 was given to the church in Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7) and because Jeremiah 30:7 is describing God's program for Israel, the two verses should not be conflated. Newell clarifies this point in his treatment of Revelation 3:10: "It cannot mean merely, preserved *in* and through *it*: for the remnant of Israel, God's earthly people, will have that preservation (Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 12:1), whereas this is a promise given by a *heavenly* Christ to His *heavenly* saints."<sup>37</sup> In sum, Revelation 3:10 indicates that the church will be exempted from the actual time period of the coming Tribulation period.

## **Whole Earth**

*Second*, what is meant by the expression "the whole world"? An argument used by those contesting that Revelation 3:10 speaks of a pretribulational rapture is to suggest that this expression is not really referring to a global Tribulation of the future. Rather, the expression is merely describing a past, localized event. After all, if this

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<sup>36</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary, 1948; reprint, [8 vols. in 4], Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993), 4:47-53.

<sup>37</sup> Newell, 71.

expression is not referring to a future worldwide Tribulation but only to a historical, localized event, then Revelation 3:10 obviously cannot be speaking of a pretribulational rapture prior to the future Tribulation period. In this regard, much is made by pretribulational critics of the Greek word *oikoumenē*, which is translated "earth" in Revelation 3:10. They suggest that *oikoumenē* refers merely to the habitable and known world of the Roman first-century world.<sup>38</sup> Some posttribulationists, such as William Bell, contend that *oikoumenē* shrinks the hour of testing to the known Roman world of the Apostle John's generation. He writes, "The seemingly universal terms are used elsewhere in the New Testament to mean the civilized world of that day, i.e. the Roman Empire.... The several empire-wide persecutions of Christians could easily satisfy the universal terminology."<sup>39</sup>

Although *oikoumenē* can at times refer to a limited realm (Luke 2:1; Acts 11:28; 17:6; 24:5), it is not a technical word meaning the exact same thing every time it is employed. Rather, its meaning must be determined by its surrounding context. Clearly, in other contexts, *oikoumenē* can take on a global meaning. Most would ascribe to *oikoumenē* a global nuance in Matthew 24:14 given the global and futuristic import of this chapter (Matt. 24:21-22, 29-31). It certainly has this same universal meaning in both Luke 4:5 and Revelation 12:9 if indeed Satan is the "god" of the entire world (1 John 5:19). It would also take on a global nuance in passages describing the final judgment of all of mankind (Acts 17:31). It also seems to have a global interpretation in Revelation 16:14 as the kings of the entire world are gathered together for the battle of Armageddon at the conclusion of the Tribulation. Standard lexical works readily acknowledge how *oikoumenē* can at times have a global meaning. Johnston notes, "οἰκουμένη may have a

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<sup>38</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, "The Great Tribulation Is Past: Exposition," in *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future? Two Evangelicals Debate the Question*, ed. Thomas Ice and Kenneth L. Gentry (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 44.

<sup>39</sup> William Bell, "A Critical Evaluation of the Pretribulation Rapture Doctrine in Christian Eschatology" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1967), 304.



very wide reference.... Sometimes it is synonymous with αἰών and κόσμος.... Hence, *oikoumenē* may mean also mankind as a whole..."<sup>40</sup> Of the use of *oikoumenē* in Matthew 24:14, Michel similarly writes, "It is certainly not to be linked here with political imperial style. The reference is simply to the glad message which is for all nations and the whole earth."<sup>41</sup>

A future global meaning rather than a past local understanding of *oikoumenē* better fits the immediate context of Revelation 3:10. *First*, the adjective *holos* translated "whole" is used to modify "earth" thereby giving *oikoumenē* a global understanding. Surely most would assign the same global nuance to the same adjective attached to the word "world" (*kosmos*) in one of John's other writings found in 1 John 5:19. Why cannot this nearly identical combination have the same global nuance in Revelation 3:10?

*Second*, understanding *oikoumenē* in its global sense fits well with the extended context of the entire Book of Revelation, which provides an in depth look at this time period in Revelation 6–18. For example, when studying Revelation 16:18b, it is quite clear that John is describing global future events in this section: "...and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake *was it, and* so mighty." Ice observes, "The 'hour' or 'time' of testing is what we will be kept from. Further, the hour of testing is said to be something that will in the future come upon the whole earth. Thus, it is clear that it is not something that happened in the days of the early church, since no one knows of a global testing that came upon the whole earth in the first century."<sup>42</sup> Thomas further notes, "This is not merely a local time of troubling the community at Philadelphia. It will encompass 'the

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<sup>40</sup> George Johnston, "Oikoumenē and Kosmos in the New Testament," *New Testament Studies* 10, (April 1964): 353.

<sup>41</sup> Otto Michel, "Oikoumenē," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 5:158.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Ice, "Kept From the Hour," online: [www.pre-trib.org](http://www.pre-trib.org), accessed 4 September 2014, 2.

whole inhabited earth' (...*tēs oikoumenēs holēs*)..."<sup>43</sup> Showers also notes, "He was not talking about unrelated incidents of testing, widely separated from each other in time and location and therefore never worldwide in scope, which have been characteristic of history in general (for example, the testing of the church saints in the city of Smyrna, which gave them tribulation for ten days, Rev. 2:10.)"<sup>44</sup>

By defining *oikoumenē* of Revelation 3:10 based upon how *oikoumenē* is used in foreign contexts (Luke 2:1; Acts 11:28; 17:6; 24:5), anti-pretribulationists are guilty of committing a hermeneutical error known as "illegitimate totality transfer." "The error, arises when the 'meaning' of a word" as derived from its use elsewhere is then automatically read into the same word in a foreign context.<sup>45</sup> Words only have meanings based upon the contexts that these words are found within. *Oikoumenē* of Revelation 3:10 means something entirely different than *oikoumenē* of other localized contexts (Luke 2:1; Acts 11:28; 17:6; 24:5), since these uses of the same word transpire in two completely different contexts. In sum, the church is promised an exemption from the global test of the future Tribulation period.

### **The Testing of the Earth Dwellers**

*Third*, what is meant by the testing of those who dwell upon the earth? The words translated "testing" and "to test" in Revelation 3:10 are the Greek noun *peirasmos* and the Greek verb *peirazō*. Constable explains, "The Greek word translated 'testing' (*peirasai*) means to test to demonstrate the quality of a thing, not to purify its quality."<sup>46</sup> For example, the church at Ephesus tested (*peirazō*) the false apostles for the purpose of

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<sup>43</sup> Robert L. Thomas, "The 'Comings' of Christ in Revelation 2–3," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 7, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 173.

<sup>44</sup> Showers, 214.

<sup>45</sup> James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 218.

<sup>46</sup> Constable, "Notes on Revelation," 44.

revealing them to be liars (Rev. 2:2). James 1:14 similarly explains that "each one is tempted (*peirazō*) when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust." Showers concludes, "Christ was declaring that the purpose of the future period of testing will be for God to test 'them that dwell on the earth' to demonstrate or expose the kind of people they are."<sup>47</sup> In secular Greek, *peirazō* conveys the notion of a test for the purpose of exposing someone's true character typically with the negative intent to test to demonstrate a failure.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, the concept of earth dwellers as used by John in Revelation speaks specifically and exclusively of unbelievers. For example, in Revelation 13:8 and 17:8, John uses the expression "those who dwell upon the earth" to refer to those who worship and follow after the beast whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Ice observes:

This phrase "earth dwellers" is used eleven times in nine verses in Revelation (3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10 2xs; 13:8, 12, 14 2xs; 14:6; 17:8). As you examine each individual use, except 3:10, you will see that all refer to a special class of stubborn sinners who are set in their rebellion against the God of heaven. You will also find that the phrase is *only* used to refer to those during the tribulation period. Therefore, since the future hour spoken of by in 3:10 is set in contrast with the present set of believers in the church age, and the future "earth dwellers" will be active during the time period in which believers are said to be kept from, it is clear that John speaks of the time or hour of the tribulation. This is why 3:10 is a clear promise that Christ will keep believers from the time of the seven year tribulation.<sup>49</sup>

An analysis of the phrases "testing," "to test," and "those who dwell upon the earth" in Revelation 3:10 indicates that the coming time to test the earth dwellers as depicted in Revelation 3:10 represents a period when unbelievers rather than believers will be tested

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<sup>47</sup> Showers, 215.

<sup>48</sup> Heinrich Seesemann, "*Peirazō*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 6:23.

<sup>49</sup> Ice, "Kept From the Hour," 2. See also Thomas Ice, "The Meaning of 'Earth Dwellers' in Revelation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166, no. 663 (2009): 350-65; Showers, 216.

(Rev. 6:12-17; 9:20-21; 16:1, 7, 8-11, 21). Thus, the clear inference is that this test is not for the church, which is already in faith, but rather is aimed specifically at unbelievers.

Although the church will be exempted from this test depicted in Revelation 3:10, this is not to say that the church does not experience other kinds of tests beforehand. For example, members of the church remain candidates for the ordinary trials of life (Jas. 1:2-4). In John 16:33, Jesus said, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." Moreover, today's Christians are also not exempted from the wrath of man. This point is clarified in 2 Timothy 3:12, which says, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Nor is the modern Christian exempted from Satan's wrath. To the church at Smyrna Christ said, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). Members of the church are obviously targets of Satanic wrath as we regularly struggle, "...not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*" (Eph. 6:12). In addition, believers of today are not spared from the wrath of the world system. Jesus explained, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you" (John 15:18-19).

While it remains a biblical truism that the church is not spared from various forms of suffering, it will be spared from the test depicted in Revelation 3:10. Trials as well as the wrath of man, Satan, and the world are an ongoing reality for today's Christians, but according to Revelation 3:10, they will have no part in the coming worldwide test of the unbelieving earth dwellers. Simply put, although trials (little "t") are a daily reality, we are not candidates for the Trial (capital "T"). While Jesus never promised the church at Philadelphia an exemption from tests (little "t"), He did promise

them an exemption from the Test (capital "T") that is coming upon the whole earth to test the unbelieving earth dwellers, known as the Great Tribulation period.

Interestingly, it appears that because the church undergoes other tests is actually the very reason why it will be exempted from the ultimate test of the Tribulation. The promise of Revelation 3:10 is preceded by the phrase: "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance..." Showers notes, "Christ based His promise on the fact that the church saints had already passed their test. In light of that, it appears that because they had already passed their test, Christ promised that He would not put them into the period that...will have the purpose of testing a very different group of people."<sup>50</sup>

### **About to Come**

*Fourth*, what is meant by "which is about to come"? This phrase conveys the idea of imminency or an any-moment expectation. In other words, the hour of testing mentioned in Revelation 3:10 could transpire momentarily. The natural question arises: how will Jesus make good on His promise to the church at Philadelphia to keep them completely out of the hour of testing that is about to imminently come to pass? Christ's answer is found in the subsequent verse, "I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown" (Rev. 3:11). Thus, He explains, the promise of being kept out of the imminently coming (*erchomai*) Tribulation period (Rev. 3:10) will be fulfilled at the imminent coming (*erchomai*) of Christ (Rev. 3:11). That Revelation 3:11 is speaking of the rapture is strengthened by the reference to a crown or reward in the latter part of the verse. Rewards are associated with the Day of the Lord's coming for the church. First Corinthians 4:5 links Christ's return for the church to rewards saying, "Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes

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<sup>50</sup> Showers, 212.

who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men's* hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God."<sup>51</sup>

The implication seems to be that if the imminent return of Christ (Rev. 3:11) is the means by which the Lord will fulfill His promise to keep the church from the coming time of Tribulation designed to test unbelievers, then the rapture of the church must precede this time of Tribulation. Townsend explains:

This connection indicates a relationship between the promise of keeping in 3:10 and the coming of the Lord in 3:11. There will be preservation outside the imminent hour of testing for the Philadelphian church when the Lord comes. This, in turn, indicates that although *τηρέω ἔκ* in 3:10 does not refer directly to the rapture of the church, rapture as the means of preservation is a proper deduction from the context.<sup>52</sup>

Showers similarly concludes, "Thus, the more specific implication of Christ's exclamation in Revelation 3:11 is that it will be through the Rapture of the church saints from the earth in conjunction with His imminent coming from heaven that Christ will keep or separate them from the entire period of testing"<sup>53</sup>

### **Summation**

In sum, in Revelation 3:10, the Philadelphia church is promised complete removal outside of its object. This object is described as a specific time well established in prior Scripture as the Tribulation period, otherwise known as Daniel's Seventieth Week. This time period is both future and global in scope. This time period is also divinely designed to "test" or reveal the lack of spiritual quality of unbelieving humanity. Moreover, this time period will come about at any moment. In order to fulfill His promise of keeping the Philadelphians totally out of this time period, Christ promises to return during an even earlier or more imminent time to rapture His church to heaven.

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<sup>51</sup> See also 2 Timothy 4:8.

<sup>52</sup> Townsend; 261.

<sup>53</sup> Showers, 213.

Is Revelation 3:10 only a promise to the Philadelphia church or is it something that is promised to the entire universal church? The latter alternative seems preferable given the fact that the identical promise is also made to other New Testament churches besides Philadelphia (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9). Interestingly, Christ's promise to Philadelphia seems applicable to the other churches as well since Christ concludes His comments to Philadelphia with the following phrase, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Notice the plurality of the concluding noun "churches." Such plurality seems to broaden the promise to the universal church as opposed to isolating it specifically to the church at Philadelphia. Showers observes, "Revelation 3:13 indicates that the Holy Spirit intends Christ's message to the Philadelphia church to be applicable to all churches; therefore, Christ's promise to the Philadelphia church saints is a promise to all church saints."<sup>54</sup> Ice further explains:

The promise in Revelation 3:10 is a universal promise that is applicable to all the churches, which says in 3:13: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (see also 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 22). While our Lord's promise in 3:10 is to the Philadelphia church, it is also a promise to the universal church as well. The same is true, for example, in the Book of Colossians when Christ tells them in 3:1 to "keep seeking the things above;" or to "set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth" (3:2). It is true that the Epistle was written historically to the Colossian believers and there are no passages that specially say these are universal passages for all believers, but what Christian does not take them to be universal of all believers throughout the church age? Is only Philadelphia (and only those alive at the time of writing) to "hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown," since Christ is coming quickly (3:11). Is only Philadelphia to receive the name of God, the name of God's city, and a new name at our Lord's coming (3:12)? Or, will all believers benefit from all the promises made to the seven churches? Certainly these promises made to first-century, Philadelphia believers are universal for the whole church. Therefore, 3:10 is a promise to the universal church. It is rare indeed for a posttribbler to try to argue this point. They rather argue against other points, knowing that this issue is clear.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 217-18.

<sup>55</sup> Ice, "Kept From the Hour," 2-3.

### *Harmonization with Revelation 4–22*

If the above pretribulational interpretation of Revelation 3:10 is accurate, then this interpretation would find itself in harmony with the rest of Revelation's contents. How well does the pretribulational interpretation of Revelation 3:10 fit with the futuristic section of the book (Rev. 4–22)? Revelation 1:19 furnishes the book's three-part structure. It says, "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things." "The things which you have seen" consist of John's interaction with the glorified Christ as recorded in Revelation's first chapter. "The things which are" comprise the seven letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor as recorded in Revelation 2–3. "The things which will take place after these things" constitute the futuristic section of the book as recorded in Revelation 4–22. That Revelation 4:1 begins this third and futuristic section is evident from the two-fold repetition of the expression "after these things" (*meta tatuta*), which is the same phrase used to describe this final section of the book in Revelation 1:19. This final section of the book contains the most vivid description of the Tribulation period in the Bible (Rev. 4–19).

Yet, this section contains no single clear reference to the church on the earth during this time period. While the Greek word *ekklēsia*, translated "church," is found 19 times in Revelation 1–3 comprising the first two sections of the book, the word is not found a single time in the book's futuristic section (Rev. 4–22). In fact, the only time in this section where *ekklēsia* is used is in the benediction reminding the readers of Christ's exhortation to preach these truths in the churches (Rev. 22:16). Other than this scant reference, the word "church" is totally absent from the book's futuristic section. We might inquire why? The obvious answer lies in the fact that the church will not be on the earth during this horrific time period having already been raptured to heaven before the Tribulation begins just as the Lord promised in Revelation 3:10.



Moreover, in the book's second section, the following exhortation occurs seven times: "To him who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). It is noteworthy that the nearly identical expression occurs in Revelation 13:9, which is given to encourage those experiencing persecution from the Beast during the Tribulation period. This verse says, "if anyone has an ear, let him hear." Notice that the familiar expression "what the Spirit says to the churches" is omitted from Revelation 13:9 despite the fact that it is attached to the same expression seven times in Revelation 2–3. We might ask why "What the Spirit says to the churches" is left off in Revelation 13:9 despite its seven-fold prominence in Revelation 2–3? Once again, the answer lies in the fact that the church will not be on the earth during this seven-year time period having already been raptured to heaven before the Tribulation begins as promised in Revelation 3:10.

Not only is the word "church" (*ekklēsia*) absent from the section of John's Apocalypse directly pertaining to the Tribulation period, but the concept of the church is missing as well. Paul routinely described the church, or the body of Christ, as consisting of all people from all nations on equal footing as joint heirs in one new man or spiritual organism. According to Galatians 3:28, in the Church Age, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Ephesians 2:14 similarly explains, "For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall." Thus, national barriers or boundaries no longer positionally divide believers from one another in the Church Age. Today, the preeminent servant of God is no longer national, ethnic Israel but rather the church, or the body of Christ, consisting of believers in Jesus from all nations.

Yet, the Book of Revelation, chapters 4–22 describes a time when national barriers will once again be erected as God will again use national Israel as His special instrument to bless the world. Prominent among them will be the 144,000 Jews from the

12 tribes of Israel (Rev. 7:1-8) who will evangelize the world (Rev. 7:9-16). Similarly, during the future Tribulation period, He will appoint two Jewish witnesses, most likely Moses and Elijah (Rev. 11:3-14). Moreover, despite the fact that the church is the object of Satanic opposition in the present age (Eph. 6:10-20), during the coming Tribulation, Satan will relentlessly attack national Israel (Rev. 12:1, 13; Gen. 37:9-10). Thus, not only is the word “church” absent from Revelation’s depiction of the future Tribulation, but the Pauline concept of the church as a body with no national barriers is also absent from this time period. Unlike today, the singular national entity Israel will be the object of not only divine blessing but also Satanic wrath in the futuristic section of the Apocalypse. The only logical explanation for this abrupt transition is that the church has already been raptured to heaven before the events of the Tribulation period unfold as predicted in Revelation 3:10.

If the church is ever hinted at or mentioned at all in Revelation’s description of the Tribulation period, she is always portrayed as being in heaven and never on the earth. For example, Revelation 1:20 symbolizes the church as seven lampstands. These lamps or lampstands are described as already being in heaven once the events of the Tribulation period begin (Rev. 4:5). Thus, there is no reference to the church either in word or concept in Revelation 4–22. This deafening silence corroborates with a pretribulational interpretation of Revelation 3:10.

### *Preliminary Conclusion*

Revelation 3:10 teaches the imminent return of the Lord for His church. As has been demonstrated, there are awkward initial problems with the non-pretribulational interpretations of Revelation 3:10 making them untenable. Moreover, the expression “keep you from” refers to a position completely outside of its object. The object that the church will be kept from is the well-known future Tribulation period whose major purpose is to test unbelieving humanity. This understanding harmonizes well with the

remainder of Revelation's prophetic content. Thus, Revelation 3:10, when rightly understood, furnishes persuasive evidence for the imminent and therefore pretribulational return of Christ for His church.

### **Conclusion**

The concept of imminency lends further support to the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture. Not only is the imminent appearing of Christ taught consistently throughout the pages of the New Testament in general, but it also finds specific support in Revelation 2–3, which constitutes Christ's final word to His church. Of these, Revelation 3:10 represents the clearest and most certain promise of Christ's imminent return. While the contribution of other passages to imminency is deserving of careful consideration, they should be touted with more reticence than Revelation 3:10 given the fact that their impact upon imminency is based upon certain debatable presuppositions. Given the New Testament pervasiveness of imminency, the church should eagerly await the very next event on the prophetic horizon, which is the rapture of the church.