

ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

PART 55

RAPTURE PASSAGES, PART 5

Revelation 3:10

Revelation 3:10 contains an indirect prophecy of the Rapture. One thing to remember is that Replacement Theology prevents most people from correctly understanding this Scripture. The only interpretive course they have is to place the church in the Tribulation.

Revelation 3:10 ¹⁰‘Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from [τηρέω σὺ ἐκ] the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

We also need to understand that the churches of Revelation, while real, individual churches existing at the time, also represent churches throughout the dispensation. Therefore, this promise is not just a promise to the believers belonging to the church at Philadelphia during that time, but to believers throughout the age. The message to each church was concluded with the encouragement and admonition: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” The application is that all churches are to hear and heed these words to the seven churches of Revelation.

The promise in this verse is specifically related to keeping believers in this dispensation from the hour of testing that is going to come upon the world; this is not about Tribulation believers who are not part of the Church. The hour of trial is a very specific period of time in world history. It is “the right time, the time fixed, the time determined upon or demanded, the fit time.” [Hermann Cremer, trans. William Urwick, s.v. “ῥα,” *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek*]. It is “A definite point of time, *time, hour.*” [G. Abbott-Smith, s.v. “ῥα,” *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*]. This is obviously referring to the Tribulation, although that is unstated, that will be the subject of so much of the Revelation, but the promise is not to keep them from the testing itself in any way, but from the actual hour, or time period, of that testing. Believers will be kept from the hour of trial; the promise is not that they will be kept from harm in the midst of the hour of trial. Some theories of the Rapture keep the Church in part, if not all, of the Tribulation, but the promise is they will be kept from that entire hour of testing. “When the all-important word *hour* is factored into the discussion, it becomes clear that the promise relates to the *time* of trial and not its effects.” [Tony Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, p. 1:262].

Non-dispensationalists have to claim Jesus is promising to keep believers from suffering any of the effects of the judgments during the Tribulation even though they are present when those things are happening. “[I]t is far from clear that the removal of Christians

from the earth would be the only possible way in which Jesus could keep His people from the wars and plagues anticipated to occur at that time." [Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views: A Parallel Commentary*, p. 76]. This is an incorrect understanding of the text because the promise is not that believers will be kept from the wars and plagues but they would be kept from the very hour of their occurrence. Notice also he refers to Christians in the Tribulation which, in his mind, means members of the Body of Christ which is also not correct. Part of the problem with this theology is no one, including believers, will escape the effects of the terrible judgments that are going to befall the world during this time. Some of them do have an answer for this problem as we will note later. The other problem is that believers are not spared tribulation during that time because many of them will be imprisoned, tortured, starved, and murdered.

Those who deny the Rapture claim the promise to the church is they will be preserved in or through the Tribulation rather than taken out of it together. They want the word ἐκ, which means out of, out from; it is a marker of disassociation in the sense of being independent from someone or something, to mean in or through rather than from. Showers presents an argument against this doctrine. "The idea of the saints being shielded from the testing while living within and through its time period [the Tribulation] 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* [from it]." [Renald Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come!* p. 212].

On its face, this argument sounds pretty good and many dispensationalists make it, but it isn't as strong or compelling as those of us who hold to the Rapture position would like it to be. It is a good argument to make, it shouldn't be abandoned, but it far from settles the issue. This same phrase was used by the Lord to ask the Father to keep the disciples safe from Satan while operating in his domain. Revelation 3:10 reads, τηρέω σὺ ἐκ, "keep you from," and John 17:15 reads, τηρέω αὐτούς ἐκ, "keep them from" the only change in grammar being the pronoun. Obviously, there is a huge change between John's Gospel and the Revelation in terms of context. The problem is the word was, in fact, used by John in his Gospel to mean what those who deny the Rapture in Revelation 3:10 want it to mean, that is, the request is to keep the disciples safe from Satan while in his domain in this age, but the context of the two verses is different rendering that claim invalid. In John, the Lord asked the Father to keep the disciples safe from the evil schemes of Satan even as they operate in Satan's domain as they established the church at that foundational period of time. In Revelation, the promise is that the Church will be delivered completely from the effects of the hour of testing that is about to come upon the whole world. While the contexts of these two Scriptures are different, the grammar used is the same; therefore, for those who believe this verse supports the Rapture, using the grammar alone to defeat the idea that the Church will experience some or all of the Rapture doesn't work. It simply is not an ironclad, definitive argument. This is the argument that postmillennialist Mathison makes to defeat the Rapture in this verse. "Revelation 3:10 does not require the physical removal of the

church from the earth during the hour of testing. In John 17:15 Jesus makes it very clear that one can be 'kept from' evil without being 'taken out of the world.' [Keith A. Mathison, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?* p. 119]. "The problem cannot be solved simply by appeal to similar passages since *both models* of protection are found in Scripture. This is because saints occupying different roles in history find themselves in different situations with regard to what God is doing in their midst. There is not a 'one size fits all' approach to how God chooses to protect the faithful: at the time of Noah's flood, Enoch 'walked with God and he was not, for God took him' (Gen. 5:24), yet Noah and his family were preserved *through* the flood within the Ark (Gen. 7:13). We believe that by these typological examples, God is teaching us that some saints will be raptured whereas others—who come to faith later—will be protected in the midst of His wrath." [Tony Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, p. 1:262]. I agree with Dr. Garland that an appeal to the grammar isn't definitive. I also agree with him that God does things in different ways at different times throughout history, but I disagree with his analogy. Noah was a believer before the Flood and was preserved through it. Church age saints, believers before the Tribulation, will not experience the Tribulation at all. Those who come to faith during the Tribulation are not guaranteed survival through it; some will survive to populate the Kingdom but they are probably relatively few in number compared to the vast number that will come to faith during the Tribulation. Believers may die due to being caught up in the disasters that strike the earth as God's judgment or they may be martyred. Whatever Dr. Garland was trying to prove with this example simply doesn't work.

For an excellent article on this issue including the use of ἐκ to indicate a position outside of an object with no thought of prior existence within the object or of emergence from the object, see Jeffrey L. Townsend, "The Rapture in Revelation 3:10" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, no. 547 (July-Sept 1980): 252-263. The posttribulational argument is that believers will be kept from harm during the time of the Tribulation to emerge out from it at the end unscathed.

John 17:15 ¹⁵"I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from [τηρέω αὐτούς ἐκ] the evil one.

Another argument used to deny the Rapture in Revelation 3:10 is to deny that the descriptions and the prophecies of Revelation 3 and 4 to the churches have any meaning beyond those first century local bodies. However, the context of the churches of Revelation, which is specifically said to be a prophecy (Rev. 1:3, 22:18-19), seems to be a description of the church as it will exist throughout the age. The various churches of Revelation describe characteristics and conditions in the church that will exist throughout the dispensation. The book does not specify the timing of these things but only that they will occur in the future. There is nothing inherently contained within them to require restricting them to a first century fulfillment absent any application to other, future churches.

Revelation 1:3³Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

Revelation 22:18–19¹⁸I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; ¹⁹and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

Some theologians claim the subject of this prophecy is the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. This cannot be correct because the book was written in 95 A.D. long after that event. If it was written after the destruction, it would not be a prophecy but it would instead be a historical account. Of course, opponents of the Rapture claim John wrote Revelation before 70 A.D. as a prophecy for that year but we obviously believe that is incorrect. For an excellent study of the subject of dating Revelation and a confirmation of the late date, see Mark Hitchcock's doctoral dissertation entitled "A Defense of the Domitianic Date of the Book of Revelation" and it is available for study at pre-trib.org.

They also make the argument that "world" only carries a localized meaning confined to the Roman Empire, Israel, or the Middle East. It is totally correct to note the Bible often uses the word to carry that meaning but context has to be considered. The words "world" and "earth" are not technical terms that must apply to only Israel and the Roman Empire; context has to be considered any time these words are used. In this case, the context of the book of Revelation argues for understanding world and earth to encompass the entire planet and the people living on it. The scope of the hour of testing is world-wide; no one on planet earth will be able to escape the effects of this trial. The test is for all those earth dwellers who reject God and rebel against Him. "'The whole inhabited earth' will be overtaken by this hour (cf. Rev. 2:10 where local persecution is in view). Since the church is to be preserved outside a period of time which encompasses the whole world, preservation by a pretribulation rapture is again seen to be a logical inference from the context. Only a rapture to heaven removes the church from the earth and its time continuum." [Jeffrey L. Townsend, "The Rapture in Revelation 3:10" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, no. 547 (July-Sept 1980): 252-263]. If one tries to restrict these words as they are used in Revelation to the Middle East or the Mediterranean region, then language means nothing and we could never understand anything. Revelation reveals that the kingdom of the world becomes the Kingdom of the Messiah which certainly refers to the entire planet; Christ's Kingdom will encompass the whole world. No one makes the effort to argue that the Kingdom of Christ is anything less than a worldwide Kingdom encompassing the entire planet. Of course, amillennialists will try to spiritualize the Kingdom but that is simply untenable. The gospel that will be preached will be preached to all people and therefore cannot be confined to the Middle East. Throughout the book of Revelation, the context clearly argues for a global, worldwide event.

Revelation 7:9 ⁹After 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;

Revelation 11:15 ¹⁵Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."

Revelation 14:6 ⁶And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people;

Preterists define world in this local sense and apply this time of tribulation to the Roman Empire and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. "Preterists argue that an empire-wide crisis would satisfy the normal use of the terminology in Revelation 3:10. The whole world is a term used to designate the Roman Empire in Luke 2:1 and elsewhere. That is to test those who dwell on the earth (or 'land,' i.e., Israel) may suggest that there is a crisis that will shake the whole empire and put the Jews, in particular, into special peril. In A.D. 68, the death of Nero, and the civil wars that followed, greatly threatened the stability of the Roman Empire, until Vespasian was made emperor in A.D. 70. During this same period (A.D. 66-70), the Jews were embroiled in a fight for the survival of their nation against the Romans ... which they lost. *Preterism* suggests that this judgment on Jerusalem is what is implied in the promise, *I am coming quickly!* (v. 11). [Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views: A Parallel Commentary*, p. 77].

It is true that in Luke 2:1, "the inhabited earth" refers to the Roman Empire, but the context makes that very clear. Obviously, Roman emperors had no authority to order a census anywhere but within the confines of their empire. It is an illegitimate totality transfer to make the use of the word in Luke 2:1 the controlling factor for interpreting the same word in Revelation. That is a very specious, phony, and even dishonest argument and the context of both verses makes that very clear.

Earth, γῆ, refers to the planet earth, the dwelling place of mankind. It is used seventy-nine times in the book of Revelation and every time it is used, it refers to the entire planet and the people on it. It is never restricted to Israel or to the Roman Empire. There are two words translated "world" in Revelation and each one occurs only three times. One is οἰκουμένη meaning earth, people (humankind), or empire, and it is used to refer to the entire Roman world but it may be broader in meaning depending on context. This is the word that was used in Luke 2:1 but it is not used that way in Revelation. The other word is κόσμος meaning the universe, the earth, and/or the world system. Every use of these words in Revelation can legitimately refer to the entire planet and not to a localized place in the Mediterranean or Middle East and the context demands it in most passages where it is used. Any intellectually honest and fair reading of the

Revelation text should make it obvious that any interpretation restricting “world” to a local Middle East, Israelite, or Roman Empire setting is faulty exegesis.

Another interpretation separates the notion of spiritually protecting believers in general as people who have been granted eternal life, which is true, from protecting them from the persecution of man and antichrist while in the Tribulation. This allows these theologians to say the promise in Revelation 3:10 only involves spiritual protection but does not keep believers from being killed in any kind of persecution arising from man or antichrist during the Tribulation, but they will not be injured or killed by any of the judgments flowing from God’s wrath. “In John 16:33, Jesus promises believers peace in the midst of certain tribulation. According to Jesus’ words, therefore, believers endure physical suffering, but will be kept spiritually safe in the midst of it. Therefore, this verse does not speak of a physical rapture before the beginning of a coming ‘Great Tribulation.’ Rather, it refers to Christ’s protection through the end-time tribulation, which had already started in the first century and would become worse as the final end neared.” [G. K. Beale, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, p. 86]. Beale is a preterist; therefore, he cannot apply this to Daniels’ Seventieth Week. This is another illegitimate transfer of the meaning in one Scripture into a completely different, unrelated Scripture occurring in a different context. John 16 was not speaking about the period of time we call the Tribulation but to the persecution the church undergoes during this age up to that point in time which is still future. Here is how George Eldon Ladd explains the doctrine that believers will go through the Tribulation. “God will pour out his wrath upon the followers of the beast to try to drive them to repentance before it is too late (9:20; 16:9, 11). The Greek expression translated those who dwell upon the earth appears several times in the Revelation and always designates the pagan world... The outpouring of God’s wrath is pictured symbolically by the plague of the seven trumpets (8:1-9:19) and the seven bowls (16:1-20). Before these terrifying judgments, the people of God are sealed upon their foreheads that they should not be hurt by these plagues. These fearful divine judgments are directed upon those who follow the beast (16:2); those who have the seal of God will be divinely sheltered (9:4). Although the church will be on earth in these final terrible days and will suffer fierce persecution and martyrdom at the hands of the beast, she will be kept from the hour of trial which is coming upon the pagan world. God’s wrath, poured out on the kingdom of Antichrist, will not afflict his people.” [George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 62].

They make much of the fact God protected the Israelites from any harm during the plagues God visited upon Egypt. “[N]o competent posttribulationist argues for God’s people having to experience *his* wrath, for they are protected from the plagues and judgments God unleashes, just not [protected] from satanic attack or state-endorsed persecution. Indeed, a number of the trumpet and bowl judgments—hail, boils, blood, darkness—closely parallel the plagues God inflicted on the Egyptians and Pharaoh. And it is significant that the Israelites were never removed from the land during the plagues, just protected from them.” [Craig L. Blomberg, “The Posttribulationism of the New Testament: Leaving ‘Left Behind’ Behind” in Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook

Chung, *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to 'Left Behind' Eschatology*, p. 82]. It is an exercise in improper exegesis and hermeneutics to say that just because God did something one way at one time for one specific purpose, means He must always do the same thing in the same way with the same motives in another seemingly similar case. It is an exegetical fantasy to say that once God does something one way He must always do things that way in similar situations because He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow (Heb. 13:8). That is the default excuse for the heretical hermeneutics of the Word of Faith movement. It may be correct or it may not be correct that God did the same thing in the same way for the same reasons in differing times and places, but context must always be taken into consideration in order to determine whether or not that is fact. When that exegetical leap is made concerning the meaning of a word, it is called an illegitimate totality transfer and that is no less an accurate description in the case of any particular situation or pericope. In terms of the Exodus, that was a special one-of-a-kind situation during which God was creating Israel to be a nation. Israel was gathered into one physically restricted place, Goshen, and not widely scattered among the Egyptians. It is likely some of the Jews were among the Egyptians and divinely protected there as well, but that does not mean the same thing must apply to those who come to faith during the Tribulation. God was creating the nation of Israel at that time, which is something He has no need to ever do again. Revelation 3:10 is referring to the future Day of the Lord judgment of the unbelieving κόσμος and the discipline of the nation Israel. These are different situations, at different times, for the differing purposes of God at those times in those situations. There are similarities between the Exodus and the Day of the Lord, but the situation described in Revelation 3:10 isn't one of them.

The biblical truth is there will be people divinely protected during the Tribulation but it will be believing Jews who are protected. Replacement theologians cannot comprehend this truth. Many believing Jews will be sheltered and divinely protected at Petra, but believers, Jew and Gentile, who are not there will be exposed to the dangers of God's judgment the nature of which for some of them is indiscriminate disaster visited upon one and all. When believers will be divinely protected from harm during the Tribulation, the Scripture says so. For example, when the demonic beings are released from the bottomless pit, they will be prohibited from attacking believers (Rev. 9:4). That is the only situation where it is said believers are protected. Ladd used this specific promise of protection to extend this promise to divine protection from all the plagues but that is not what the Scriptures reveal. On the other hand, when disasters strike the earth, believers who are in those places will certainly feel the effects.

The primary argument I would use against this doctrine concerns the veracity of God. We've already discussed the fact that believers have been promised by God that they will not undergo the wrath of God (1 Thess. 1:10, 5:9). Through Paul, the Holy Spirit promised believers that the Lord was coming back for them (1 Thess. 4:13-18) to take them to be with Him (John 14:1-3) and only after that will the Day of the Lord begin (1 Thess. 5:1-10). We also know that many Tribulation believers will be martyred during the

Tribulation (Rev. 6:9-11, 13:7, 20:4). One mistake these theologians make, is their presupposition that Tribulation believers are members of the Church, the Body of Christ, which is untrue. If their doctrine is correct, then God is being deceitful when He says believers living in this dispensation prior to the Day of the Lord will not experience the hour of testing which they think means believers will be safely kept in and through it. If believers die during the Day of the Lord, which they will, then their doctrine cannot be upheld. It is incorrect. Believers will die as martyrs and they will die in some of the widespread judgments that strike the earth. As I've mentioned in the past, part of God's wrath will consist of what might seem to look like natural disasters that devastate large areas of the earth at once and any believer in that area will be subject to the danger that judgment represents. "The notion that those who become believers on earth during the period of pre-Kingdom judgments will be divinely guarded from the afflictions entailed, in alleged fulfillment of the promise in Rev. 3:10, is simply false to the record. In that hour the physical judgments will generally fall upon the saved and the unsaved alike." [Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God*, p. 465]. Could God save believers out of those things? Of course. God can save anyone He wants to save out of anything they might face, but the nature of the judgments, the wrath of God, and the Scriptures suggest that isn't part of His plan for that time. The Lord did say in the Olivet Discourse that unless the period of the Day of the Lord was limited, everyone, which includes believers, would perish (Mt. 24:22), but because some believers will live to enter the Messianic Kingdom, those days will be limited. Certainly, God will spiritually save believers no matter what befalls them during the Tribulation; they won't be lost and eternal life is guaranteed, but that doesn't mean they might not lose their physical lives during that time.

It is also helpful to remember the entire seven-year period of time we call the Tribulation is Daniel's Seventieth Week (Dan. 9:24-27) and it is to be considered a cohesive unit of time in terms of fulfilling Daniel's prophecy and completing world history. Some people want to separate out man's wrath from God's wrath and one half from the other half as though these things are all disconnected. We know the second half is the Great Tribulation, but tribulation exists in the first half as well and the theology imposed on each half, or even subdivision of each half, by defining one half as man's wrath and the other as God's wrath is simply an artificial distinction designed to undergird a particular theological theory rather than understanding the text as written. Isn't it possible the wrath that God allows man and antichrist to inflict on the world is part of His wrath just like the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Romans were used for the purpose of exercising His wrath in centuries past? These distinctions are artificial and those propagating them must be carefully scrutinized and analyzed according to the biblical text.

"The preservation promised in Revelation 3:10 is in relation to a specific, well-known hour of trial, the future seven-year tribulation which is to precede Messiah's return and which is described in detail in Revelation 6-18. Revelation 3:10 teaches that the coming of this hour is imminent, that it is worldwide in its scope, and that the purpose of the hour is to

put the ungodly earth-dwellers of the tribulation period to the test to reveal evidence of their wickedness in preparation for the Lord's judgments when He returns to the earth. Although Revelation 3:10 describes the result of the rapture (i.e., the position and status of the church during the tribulation) and not the rapture itself, the details of the hour of testing just mentioned establish the pretribulation rapture as the most logical deduction from this verse. The promise of preservation is from a period of time which will envelope the whole world. Only a pretribulation rapture would remove the church completely from the earth and its time continuum. Thus the pretribulation rapture is found to be a proper logical deduction from the data found in Revelation 3:10." [Jeffrey L. Townsend, "The Rapture in Revelation 3:10" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, no. 547 (July-Sept 1980): 252-263].

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