

The People of the Apocalypse
“Revelation 3:10 and The Church in Philadelphia”

“Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.” (Revelation 3:10)

This verse which is found in the midst of the Lord’s message to the church in Philadelphia is one of the most studied prophetic verses in recent times. It is used to prove and to disprove the timing of the rapture which has become a somewhat controversial and often times emotional topic in Christian circles.

Those who hold to the pre-tribulation rapture say that this verse proves their position of the church being promised exemption from “*the hour of temptation*” by the rapture. Those who hold to a post-tribulation rapture say that the church will be protected by being kept out from within the midst of “*the hour of temptation*”.

Therefore in order to resolve this highly charged issue which in fact is separating believers and causing much discord among the brethren let us define the terms the Lord used by asking a few simple questions:

1. What is the Lord promising?
2. What is “*the hour of temptation*”?
3. Who is being kept from “the hour of temptation”?
4. Who will go through “*the hour of temptation*”?
5. Where will “*the hour of temptation*” take place?

The Lord says He will “*keep thee from the hour of temptation*” which is the same as the grammatical construction in the request He made of the Father in His great high priestly prayer:

“I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil [one] (John 17:15)

The Lord Jesus Christ is asking the Father to “*keep*” believers “*from the evil [one]*” while continuing to be in the world in order that the world might believe that God the Father is the One Who sent the Lord Jesus Christ. (John 17:21, 23, 25)

The only time the words “*keep...from*” appear together in the New Testament is in these two verses. Therefore, being kept from while in the midst of the world which is ruled by “*the evil one*” (John 17:15) or being kept from while in the midst of the worldwide “*hour of temptation*” is the literal sense of both of these phrases.

Exactly what “*the hour of temptation*” is must then be defined. The word “*hour*” is used ten times in the Revelation and refers to a certain but often short period of time when accompanied with the article “*the*”:

“the hour of temptation” (3:10)

“the hour of His judgment is come” (14:7)

“the time [hour] is come for Thee to reap” (14:15)

Even though the New Testament word “*temptation*” is usually associated with being tempted to do evil it can also refer to a time of testing or proving in order to determine or improve the quality of those who are being tested.

The Septuagint which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament completed before the time of Christ uses this same word to define “an experiment, attempt, trial, proving”. New Testament examples include: “The trial made of you by my bodily condition, since this condition served to test the love of the Galatians towards Paul, Gal 4:14...the trial of man’s fidelity, integrity, virtue, constancy etc.: I Pet 4:12” Thayers Greek-English

Lexicon of the New Testament p.498.

John, the human author of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, uses the verb form of “*temptation*” five times (John 6:6, 8:6; Revelation 2:2, 2:10, 3:10) and the noun only once (Revelation 3:10) in his writings. In all but one occurrence (John 8:6) the word is used to describe a test being given to produce a result which will prove or improve the quality of those being tested.

The Lord Jesus Christ when addressing Philip His disciple set before him a simple test using this same word: “*And this He said to prove him: for He Himself knew what He would do.*” (John 6:6)

The Lord also gave the patriarch Abraham a major test which is later recorded in the New Testament: “*By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that received the promises offered up his only begotten son.*” (Hebrews 11:17)

James in the classic “*temptation/testing*” passage (James 1:1-15) records this verse: “*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.* (James 1:12)

These examples illustrate how this word is used to try or test a person in order to produce a response or outcome from the test being given. The tests were not given in order for the Lord to find out how these two men would respond for He already knows the beginning from the end in every circumstance.

The purpose of the tests was to teach and prove/improve these men in order that they might grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord with the ultimate purpose being that He might be glorified through it all.

Both the noun “*temptation*” and the verb “*try*” are utilized in Revelation 3:10 and in both instances they are being used to prove the quality of those being tried or tested. Which brings the focus upon exactly who is being tried in this “*the hour of temptation*”.

Those who are being tried/tested are called “*them that dwell upon the earth*”. This phrase appears numerous times in the Revelation indicating those who are in direct opposition to God and His people:

1. They are responsible for the martyrdom of God’s people:

“*And they [martyrs] cried with a loud voice, saying, How loin, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?*” (6:10)

2. They are the focus of the “*three woes*” of judgment sent by God:

“*And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels which are yet to sound!* (8:13)

3. They rejoice upon the death of God’s two prophets:

“*And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them [two prophets], and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them who say them.*” (11:10)

4. They “*worship the beast*” [Antichrist]:

“*And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him [Antichrist], whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*” (13:8)

“*And he [false prophet] exerciseth all the power of the first beast [Antichrist] before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.*” (13:12)

5. They “*make an image*” of “*the beast*”

“*An deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast, saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast which had the wound by a sword, and did live.*”(13:14)

6. The “*inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her [The Great Harlot’s] fornication*” (17:2)
7. “*They that dwell on the earth shall wonder [marvel], whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.*” (17:8).

These are the people who are the subjects of “*the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*”

This “*hour of temptation*” is a global event as it comes upon “*the whole world*”. And even though there is some confusion as to exactly when this time of testing will occur, it can be identified by the fact that it is designed to test “*them that dwell upon the earth*” and not believers.

The “*day of the Lord*” which comes upon unbelievers or “*them that dwell upon the earth*” is clearly indicated by Paul:

“But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety: then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But, ye brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. For God hath not appointed us to [the day of the Lord’s] wrath but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.” (I Thessalonians 5:1-5, 10)

Paul continues to instruct the Thessalonian believers in his second letter concerning the timing of the day of the Lord:

“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ [the Lord] is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.” (II Thessalonians 2:1-4)

He indicates two events that will take place before the day of the Lord begins:

1. “*The falling away*” [*Jewish apostasy*] (Daniel 11:30)
2. “*That man of sin [Antichrist] be revealed*” (Daniel 11:31; Matthew 24:15)

However, the “*day of the Lord*”, which is the most prophesied event in Scripture, must not be confused with the time of “*great tribulation*” spoken of by the Lord Jesus Christ:

“For then shall be great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no nor ever shall be. And except those days [of great tribulation] be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.” (Matthew 24:21, 22)

The time of great tribulation is clearly focused upon “*the elect*” who are God’s people, those believers who are on earth when the Antichrist brings to pass the greatest persecution ever experienced by the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is also indicated in the book of Daniel:

“I beheld and the same horn [Antichrist] made war with the saints, and prevailed against them. And he [Antichrist] shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they [the saints] shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time [3-1/2 years].” (Daniel 7:21, 25)

The Revelation also records this same time of the Antichrist's great tribulation against the saints:

"And there was given unto him [Antichrist] a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months [3-1/2 years]. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues and nations." (Revelation 13:5-7)

The glorified saints in heaven are seen before the throne of God having just been rescued by rapture out of the "great tribulation":

"And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? And whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of [the] great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:13, 14)

This fierce persecution called "[the] great tribulation" is summarized by the Lord (Matthew 24:9-14) then detailed in chronological order (Matthew 24:15-28) in His focused step-by-step response to His disciples questions.

But, the "great tribulation" is not "the end" (Matthew 24:14) but merely the final act before the beginning of the end for when the Lord shortens/cuts off the great tribulation "the end" will come as the following verses indicate:

"Immediately after the [great] tribulation shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give her light and the stars shall fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from one end of heaven to the other." (Matthew 24:29-31)

The Lord will display this miraculous series of heavenly wonders as a sign and prelude "before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come" (Joel 2:30,31). The earth will be completely darkened just before He sends His Son who arrives "with power and great [Shekinah] glory" illuminating the earth so that "every eye shall see Him" (Revelation 1:7) when He comes to "gather His elect" through the agency of His angels! (Matthew 24:30, 31)

So then, immediately after the "great tribulation", which focuses on believers, the sign of the day of the Lord and the "same day" (Luke 17:29) coming of Christ occur followed by the day of the Lord judgment which comes upon unbelievers. Paul makes it clear that believers will be delivered from God's wrath which is the Day of the Lord:

"For God hath not appointed us to wrath but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Thessalonians 5:9)

But, after the Lord delivers His own by rapture it will be time for God's day, the long awaited day of the Lord which will serve to "try" the remaining inhabitants of the earth through "the hour of temptation" with most of them refusing His marvelous redemptive grace found in the shed Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The accounts of their rebellious and unrepentant hearts are given in Revelation 9:20, 21 and Revelation 16:9-11 in response to the two major series of events that will occur during the day of the Lord, the seven trumpet judgments (Revelation 8:1-11:15) and the seven vial judgments (Revelation 15:1-16:21).

However, the Scripture is clear, there will be many who are “*purified and made white and tried*” (Daniel 12:10) being “*refined*” (Zechariah 13:9) who turn and call upon the Lord in that day, Jew (Isaiah 59:20; Romans 11:25-27) and Gentile (Isaiah 19:16-25; Micah 7:15-17) alike demonstrating the ageless principle which proceeds from the loving God of eternal mercy: “*For His mercy endureth forever.*” (Psalm 136:1-26)

This is the ultimate purpose for “*the hour of temptation*” from which certain believers will be exempt. Who are these believers in the church of Philadelphia that receive the promise of being kept from [in the midst of] “*the hour of temptation*”?

Who will be God’s servants in that future day of worldwide judgment? Who are those that are not hurt by the day of the Lord judgment described in Revelation 9:1-12?

“*And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.*” (Revelation 9:4)

The servants of God who are kept from the sixth seal judgment which occurs during the day of the Lord called “*the hour of temptation*” by having the seal of God in their foreheads are the 144 Thousand from all the tribes of the sons of Israel. (Revelation 7:3-8, 14:1).

There are also two other New Testament groups of saints who will have God’s name/signature upon them, however, they appear to be glorified saints:

1. The “*overcomers*” of the church in Philadelphia (Revelation 3:12)
2. The “*servants*” of the Lamb in heaven (Revelation 22:4)

There is only one group in the word of God that have the seal of God upon physically placed upon them and that is the 144 Thousand. But, this does not necessarily exclude others from having God’s seal. It may very well be that all who are saved during this future dispensation [The 70th Week of Daniel/day of the Lord] a.k.a. the last Jewish dispensation may also have this physical seal of God.

There is another group of faithful Jews who are protected by God during the last half of Daniel’s 70th Week: “*And the woman [faithful Israel] fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and three score days [3-1/2 years].*”

“*And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time [3-1/2 years], from the face of the serpent.*” (Revelation 12:6,14)

Could it be that “*the church in Philadelphia*” represents the time of the end assemblies which will be Jewish congregations where the 144 Thousand “*servants of our God*” (Revelation 7:3), “*the woman*” of Revelation 12 and “*the two witnesses*” (Revelation 11:3-13) will serve?

The “*church in Philadelphia*” does have numerous Old Testament/Jewish aspects adding to the possibility that this letter applies to the time of the end Jewish church:

1. The Lord Jesus’ title of “*holy [one]*” (3:7) hearkens back to one of His O.T. titles: “*Holy One*” (Psalm 16:10).
2. The Lord Jesus has “*the key of David*” (3:7; Isaiah 22:22)
3. Those who “*say they are Jews*” (3:9)
4. “*The synagogue of Satan*” (3:9)
5. The “*temple of God*” (3:12)
6. The “*city of My God, the new Jerusalem*” (3:12)

The faithful suffering sister church of the church in Philadelphia which is “*the church in Smyrna*” (Revelation

2:8-11) contains some significant parallels to the church of Philadelphia:

1. The command to repent is not given to either of these faithful churches
2. The people who “say they are Jews” (2:9, 3:9) are present in both churches
3. “the synagogue of Satan” (2:9, 3:9) is mentioned in both churches
4. The Lord commends/gives encouragement to both churches:
 - a. “I know thy works, and tribulation, and [physical] poverty” (2:9)
“I know thy works: behold I have set before thee and open door” (3:8)
 - b. “thou art rich [spiritually]” (2:9)
“thou hast a little strength” (3:8)
 - c. “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer” (2:10)
“[thou] hast kept My word” (3:8)
 - d. “be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.” (2:10)
“[thou] hast not denied My name” (3:8)
5. The Lord does not correct/rebuke either church

The two definite links that tie these churches together is the appearance of those people “who say they are Jews” and “the synagogue of Satan”. These two were evident in both first century churches, they existed in the churches throughout the church age including the present-day church, and they will continue to be active during the future time of the end Jewish dispensation.

That these seven letters apply to all three time periods of the church’s existence has been the interpretation of the majority of orthodox Bible students. However, when examining “*the church in Philadelphia*” it must be recognized that it is the only church that has a definite time of the end event mentioned for “*the hour of temptation*” (3:10) and the future world judgment of God called the day of the Lord are synonymous terms indicating the same period of time which gives this church a unique and most significant setting.

Therefore, the faithful church in Smyrna which contains two significant parallels to the faithful church in Philadelphia also sheds light upon the time of the end for the church in Smyrna experiences “*tribulation...tribulation ten days*” (Revelation 2:9, 10) at the hand of “*the devil*” (Revelation 2:10) pointing to the possibility that the tribulation recorded in the end of the age church in Smyrna is “[*the*] *great tribulation*” (Matthew 24:15-29; Revelation 7:21) which is also described as the devil’s “*great wrath*” (Revelation 12:12) ultimately resulting in the martyrdom of many of God’s people including many Jewish believers.
(Daniel 11:33, 35; Revelation 6:10,11, 12:10, 11, 20:4).

But, who are these people “*who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie*” and what is “*the synagogue of Satan*”? It is an historical fact that the 1st century church was plagued with intense persecution from the Jews.

The church in Smyrna was the most persecuted church of the seven churches. Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, was martyred by the Jews without sanction of the Roman authorities. It is said these zealous Christian hating Jews violated their own Sabbath in order to gather the wood for the fire which burned Polycarp. His grave remains in Smyrna to this day.

However, as we near the return of the Lord there are a number of possibilities concerning those “*who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie.*” At this present time there are a number of different groups claiming to be Jews. The immigrants from Ethiopia who say they are Jews and the immigrants from India claiming to be from the tribe of Manasseh are two groups that have come to Israel in recent times.

While there is a certain advantage of being a Jew there also will be a great disadvantage as they will be the focus of Satan’s “*great wrath*” (Revelation 12:12) during the last half of the 70th Week of Daniel, while the satanically

energized Antichrist and his false prophet will zero in on Christians world wide (Revelation 13).

However, only those who know the prophetic Scripture understand these truths, for at the moment it evidently appears to be an advantage to be a Jew. These people who are not Jews will “come and worship before thy feet” (Revelation 3:9) as has been written by the prophet Isaiah:

“Egypt...Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature shall “come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God.” (Isaiah 45:14)

“Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising...the sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.” (Isaiah 60:1-3, 14)

“For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou was precious in My sight, thou has been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by My name: for I have created him for My glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.” (Isaiah 43:3-7)

These time of the end passages in Isaiah foretell the very events that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke of in His promises to the church in Philadelphia:

“Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie, behold I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.” (Revelation 3:9)

As the Lord’s return draws ever closer there will continue to be those who claim to be from the twelve tribes of Israel, however only the Lord knows those who are His earthly people whom He will call to be “*the servants of our God*” (Revelation 7:3).