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REV 3:10: RAPTURE OR PRESERVATION?

"*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.*" Rev 3:10

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ABSTRACT: At Rev 3:10 the risen Lord makes a promise to the Church at Philadelphia. While it is a rather straightforward pledge, it has far-ranging implications depending on how one understands the details of the verse. Understandably, it has become somewhat of a *crux interpretum* for many. Many of those in the dispensational tradition understand that this verse refers to the secret rapture of the church. Those in the historic premillennial and amillennial tradition often see this as a reference to the saints being preserved through the tribulation period. In the treatment below I will interpret Rev 3:10 in somewhat of a different trajectory. I will suggest that the promise given by the Lord must be understood to directly include the Philadelphian believers as well as subsequent followers. I will also suggest that the promise is an assurance of spiritual safety through (at least) the preliminary judgments represented by opening the first four seals of the opisthograph described at 5:1–6:8.

KEY WORDS: rapture, preservation, historic premillennial, amillennial,

At Rev 3:10 the risen Lord makes a promise to the Church at Philadelphia. While it is a rather straightforward pledge, it has far-ranging implications depending on how one understands the details of the verse. Understandably, it has become somewhat of a *crux interpretum* for many. Many of those in the dispensational tradition understand that this verse refers to the secret rapture of the church. Those in the historic premillennial and amillennial tradition often see this as a reference to the saints being preserved through the tribulation period. In the treatment below I will inter-

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At the outset I want to avoid two problems that might affect how I approach the passage. The first is to avoid protecting some matter outside of the text itself. Each of us has read, defended, and sometimes written an exegesis that is more about defending a beloved doctrine or interpretive grid rather than a direct interpretation of the passage at hand. While it is important to understand the "unintended consequences" of the interpretations we make, it is equally important that we resist the temptation to impose anything on a given text. Yet we all know that this has happened. I want to avoid this in the pages that follow without accusing others of having done the same.

I also want to keep a spirit of grace and humility in the matter. It is the propensity of human beings to conduct "witch-hunts" and unfairly accuse godly men and women of interpreting a passage falsely and then questioning the exegete's honesty, intelligence, sanctification, or all three. The result can only be strife and division. I have no desire to go there. Instead I view my offering as illustrative and perhaps instructive rather than accusatory. My appeal is to approach the text with fresh eyes.

In the spirit of honesty, let me lay my own eschatological views on the table at the outset. I was raised in the classical dispensationalist wing of conservative Southern Baptists. I cut my theological teeth on the New Scofield reference Bible, Day of Discovery, and listening to some of the great preachers of the age. Dispensationalism was the theological atmosphere of my early training. It was the air I breathed, and I am personally grateful for the faithful men and women of God who taught me the Word of God. However, in personal study of things pertaining to the return of our Lord, more and more questions arose regarding some of the tenants of dispensational thought. Ultimately I grew convinced that a pre-tribulation rapture was unlikely. Today, I am what is normally called a historic premillennialist.

The caveats given above arise from the strategic importance many place on Rev 3:10. Some of the classical dispensationalists place a heavy emphasis on this verse; some consider it decisive (Chafer 1948: 369–71; Feinberg 1996; Ryrie 1982: 87; Thiessen 949: 478–79).

This weight comes from the lack of direct statements regarding the timing of the rapture elsewhere in the New Testament. So, then, whether rightly or wrongly, one can certainly understand the vigorous defenses that have been made for they feel much is at stake.

Likewise, many who hold to a different view of eschatology also stake out a *magineaux* line here as well. These, instead, see the Lord promising to keep His own safe through the tribulation period not removed from it. Again, rightly, or wrongly, one can understand the importance some have placed on "I will keep you from the hour of testing."

Both views can be susceptible to thinking this verse proves their point. However, neither understanding of the end times or rapture stands or falls with these verses. What is more, I find myself disagreeing with both positions. I am under the opinion that when the resurrected Lord tells the Philadelphian Church, "I will keep you from the hour of temptation that is coming upon the whole world," that He is promising they will be kept spiritually safe during a period of great trial. I am further convinced that the rapture is not directly addressed at all (pre-, post- or even mid-tribulation).

I will begin with a structural analysis of the individual letter. I will note the linguistic boundary features that make it a sustained thought, and construct a Semantic and Structural analysis of the whole discourse. As we do so we will note certain intertextuality with the OT (especially the prophet Isaiah) and make some preliminary observations on meaning.

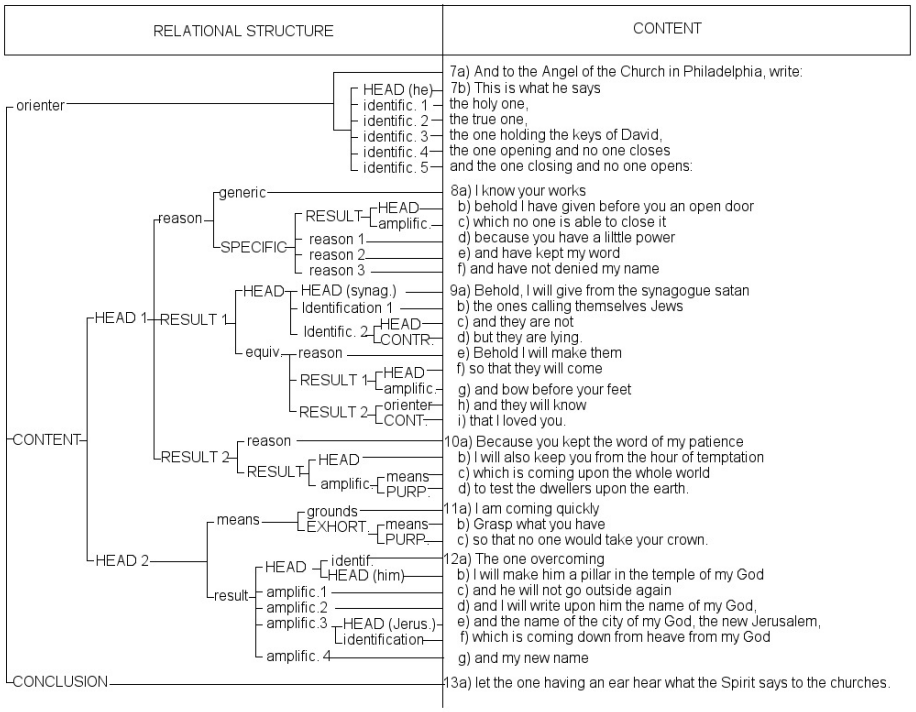
Structural Analysis Boundary Features

The extreme ends of the passage are clearly marked by phrases that are repeated at the same position in the other six letters. At 3:7 the letter to the Philadelphians is introduced by the instruction to write that is virtually identical at the beginning of every one of the seven letters except for the city named: Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφίᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· thus, it takes on a formulaic status. The repeated formula is a boundary marker that indicates a new section has begun. In a similar manner the concluding boundary is also a repeated constituent. At 3:13, our Lord states: Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. This concluding formula also occurs at 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, and 22, formally closing the individual letter.

The letter to the church at Philadelphia also mirrors the other letters in that it begins with the phrase, τάδε λέγει, followed by a description of Christ that is germane to the message to the individual churches. In this case, the Philadelphians are apparently receiving some sort of hostility from the local synagogue. The opposition from the synagogue surely at least denied the claims of Christ. Thus, Christ is described by five identifications, 1) ὁ ἅγιος, 2) ὁ ἀληθινός, 3) ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυίδ, 4) ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει 5) and κλείων καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίγει· First, "The holy one" is reminiscent of the description of God in the OT [See, 2 Kgs 19:22; Ps 71:22, 78:41, 89:18; Isa 1:4, 5:19, 24, 10:20, 12:6, 17:7, 29:19, 30:11f, 15, 31:1, 37:23, 41:14, 16, 20, 43:3, 14, 45:11, 47:4, 48:17, 49:7, 54:5, 55:5, 60:9, 14; Jer 50:29, and 51:5.] Likewise, the second identification is characteristic of Johannine literature in that Christ is referred

to as "the true x." [See John 1:9, 4:23, 6:32, 15:1; 1 John 2:8, 5:20 and here at Rev 3:7.] Whether ἀληθινός means "genuine" or "faithful" may not be the driving force behind the choice of the word. Since the word is used at Isaiah 65:16, in a context about who are the people of God, the use here may be an allusion to that passage, especially where it states "and they that swear upon the earth shall swear by the true God." [The LXX uses the phrase twice at Isa 65:16 to describe God as "the true God" (τὸν θεὸν τὸν ἀληθινόν translating בֵּאלֹהֵי אָמֵן). The usage at Zech 8:3; Luke 16:11; Heb 8:2 and 9:24 do not refer to God or Christ.] If so, it also has implications regarding the claims of Christ and even the inclusion of the Gentiles. The third – fifth descriptions clearly refer to Isaiah 22:22 "Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, When he opens no one will shut, When he shuts no one will open." [The Hebrew reads: וְנָתַתִּי מַפְתֵּחַ בֵּית־דָּוִד עַל־שִׁכְמוֹ וּפָתַח וְאֵין סֹגֵר וְסָגַר וְאֵין פֹּתֵחַ:] Jesus, affirms His Messianic status.

Semantic and Structural Analysis



The body of the letter is composed of two major units: 3:8–10 and 3:11–12. The first is a declaration of the knowledge of Christ regarding their works, οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, (3:8a) is, again, a repeated formula found in the other six letters and marks the beginning of the individual content of the letters. The "formula" at 3:8a is a generic

statement that is fleshed out at 3:8b-f. In these propositions, three overlapping reasons (8d-f) produce the result of the open door of opportunity (8b-c). This paragraph is elaborated upon in the next two paragraphs in a reason-RESULT (3:9 and 10) relationship. At 3:9, the risen Lord makes a promise to His faithful Philadelphians. Those who claim to be the people of God will know of the Philadelphians place, γνῶσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησάσε. This is the language of election as the people of God [See Mal 1:2–3 and Rom 9:13; cf. Deut 4:37.] The synagogue at Philadelphia will confess that the claims of the Philadelphian church are valid.

The next elaboration, Rev 3:10, is another promise to the Philadelphians based on their faithfulness. The reason-RESULT that forms the major semantic structure of 3:10 is a play on the word τηρέω. Because they kept His word (ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον), He will keep them from the coming hour of temptation (σε τηρήσω ἐκτῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμου). I believe it is best to associate 3:10 with 3:8-9 rather than 3:11 because of the cohesion (in this case, a restatement) achieved by the initial topic at 8e ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον "you have kept my word." 3:10 then is a statement similar to the seł mantic relationship between 3:8 and 9. The repetition of both topic and verbiage make it virtually certain that 3:10 is in a series with 3:8 and 9.

There is a marked shift at 3:11 in at least two dimensions. First, there is a shift in the way that the sentence is organized. 3:11 begins with a verb-initial arrangement. No other sentence in the passage begins with a verb except the sentence at 3:8 where a new section is begun. Although a verb-initial sentence is an unmarked arrangement, the usage here does introduce a new topic. This suggests a new section has begun at 3:11. Second, the promises at 3:8–10 are based on the past obedience of the Philadelphians. At 3:11 the tone is no longer indicative but imperative. It is not "you have kept" but "grasp what you have." It is not a promise based on past but future faithfulness. It seems clear that Christ has moved on from one topic to another related topic.

Matters Necessary to Interpret Rev 3:10

Due to my constraints I have described the major contours of Rev 3:7–13 in broad-brush strokes. It should, however, be helpful in describing the context of the question at hand. Having done so, I now turn to matters that are necessary to answer the question what is meant by "I will keep you from the hour of temptation coming upon the whole world to test the earth-dwellers." The two basic matters are the meaning of τηρήσω . . . ἐκ (I will keep you from...) and the identification of "τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμου" (the hour of testing).

What Does the Use of Τηρήσω . . .Ἐκ Mean?

Much has been said regarding the unusual combination and choice of words expressed here [The classic work is (Stanton 1991) based on his 1954 dissertation. For

more recent discussions see, (Thomas 1992: 269 – 94); (Townsend 1980: 253–63); (Niemelä 2000: 53–67); (Essex, Fall 2002: 216–39). For a brief discussion see (Svigel in *TJ* 22 Spring 2001: 26–29).] The phrase σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμου at 3:10 is unusual. The choice of τηρὲω is especially unusual semantically if we understand it as taking the hearers physically from the presence of the problem (in this case the hour of temptation) in that it describes a state. Louw and Nida locate three semantic domains for τηρὲω: (1) keep (semantic domain 13.32- under "state"—in this case to cause a state to continue), (2) guard (semantic domain 37.122—under "guard, watch over"—in this case to continue to hold in custody – 'to guard, to keep watch, custody' and (3) obey (semantic domain 36.19—under *Guide, Discipline, Follow* (in this case "to continue to obey orders or commandments – 'to obey, to keep commandments, obedience'") (Louw and Nida 1989:153, 487, and 468 respectively.) The normal usage of the word τηρὲω does not suggest "remove."

However, it is in the use of the preposition ἐκ in the context of Rev 3:10 that is the major issue of discussion. Some say it demands movement from one place to another. The idea, they say, is "to keep out of" that is a preservation "away from the hour of temptation." Although in the past some pretribulationists have suggested the phrase directly means "rapture" (Pentecost 1958: 216, Ice 2009: 357.) many note that the phrase does not specifically mention the rapture only the results of the rapture (Essex: 227). I find this latter interpretation within the bounds of the lexical stock employed.

Some from both pre- and post-tribulationist camps have attempted to describe ἐκ with a "basic meaning." (Brown in *JBL* 85, 1966: 310). For example, Gundry suggests that the basic meaning of the preposition is "out from within," and goes on to suggest that the meaning is that the church will be spared from wrath during the tribulation period (Ibid., 54–61.) Those responding to him have made similar but differing arguments. I believe it is best simply to see the preposition as one way to express the equivalent of a genitive [In Wallace's term this is equivalent to separation (although here it is metaphorical separation, i.e., not necessarily a physical one). (Wallace 1995: 107–109.) Wallace also notes that with stative verbs the transitive nature of the preposition is not always in play. (Wallace, *Grammar*, 358–60).] Such usage is common throughout the johannine literature [See e.g., John 1:13, 16, 24, 44, 46 (in chapter one alone). In the epistles we see 2:16 (bis), 21, 3:8, 9 (bis), 10, 12, 19, 24, 4:1, 2, 4, 5 (bis), 6 (ter), 7 (bis), 13, 5:1, 4, 18 (bis), 5:19 and 3 John 11. A few salient examples from Revelation are Rev 2:5, 7, 9, 11, 22, to name a few.]

The standard historic pre-millennial understanding of the sentence, whether or not the exegete agrees with Gundry in all the details, is preservation through the tribulation. For these, the parallels to John 17:15 are compelling. Τηρέω is modified

by prepositions some 21 times in the Greek Bible (23 including the Apocrypha) [1 Esd 4:11; Jdt 12:16; Prov 7:5; John 2:10, 17:11, 12, 15; Acts 12:5, 6, 25:4, 21 (bis); 2 Cor 11:9; Eph 4:3; 1 Tim 6:14; 1 Pet 1:4; 2 Pet 3:7; Jas 1:27; Jude 6, 13, 21; and at Rev 3:10.] Only at John 17:15 is it ever used with ἐκ outside of Rev 3:10. There, the parallels are compelling [The classic defense of the connection is found in (Gundry 1973: 56–59).] It is the same writer (John), the same speaker (Jesus), the same combination (τηρέω ἐκ). There it clearly means preservation from the evil one. In the context of John 17, this preservation should be identified as being kept from the temptation of the devil. They are not to be removed from the sphere of temptation (the world) but from the influence of temptation (the devil). I personally find these compelling as well (Winfrey *Grace Theological Journal* 3 (1982): 5–18). See also, Thomas, *Revelation*: 285–88).

Osborne suggests that the point here is protection from the wrath of God during the tribulation and not necessarily persecution. He is undoubtedly correct in the larger point that the "wrath of God and the wrath of the dragon" are greatly different [(Osborne *Revelation*: 194.; Ladd 1972: 62). "God's wrath poured out on the Kingdom of Antichrist, will not affect God's people."] The problem that I see here is that "physical safety" is just as much an imposition on the text as "rapture." Dispensationalists have argued that the meaning "physical safety" is unlikely because of the devastation of the eschaton (Thomas *Revelation*: 286 and Patterson *Revelation*, NAC 39, 2012: 133). This is also flawed in that it assumes the meaning of τηρέω is "kept safe" as in physical safety. So, oddly, enough some from both dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists make this error.

Essentially, it is inescapable, as most agree, that the phrase describes some sort of preservation in the face of a time of temptation/testing. However, this neither proves nor disproves, in itself, any eschatological position. This exegetical standoff has led many on both sides of the hermeneutical debate admit that the grammar and syntax alone will not settle the issue. As Patterson rightly notes "An honest assessment of the text leaves us with no ability to resolve the question based on vocabulary, grammar, and syntax alone." [(Ibid.) Dr. Patterson goes on to defend a pre-tribulation rapture position on two bases. First, the nature and extent of the judgments are so extensive that keeping some safe when so much of the world population dies is unlikely. Second, Patterson appeals to what he calls substantial evidence that the church is removed before the tribulation. In his introduction he lists eight reasons, some more persuasive than others, one of which is his interpretation of Rev 3:10. Osborne also makes a similar statement, "It must also be admitted that both readings are possible from the language, so context must tell which is more likely." (Osborne, *Revelation*, 193).]

The major problem at this point in the debate is that the context of the promise is only briefly discussed by most dispensationalists and historic pre-millennialists alike [Osborne sees the Philadelphians representing all faithful believers (Osborne, *Revelation*, 194). However, even if they did so, there is a real promise to real people. Our interpretation must include the Philadelphians. Stanton also argues that the reference is to all believers. He does so in the following steps: (1) the application is for the whole church, (2) the temptation to come is universal, (3) the Philadelphians are not "earth dwellers," and (4) τηρήσω ἐκ means, most likely, rapture (building off the promise "I am coming quickly"). (Stanton: 46–50).] The letter to the Church at Philadelphia was a real message sent to real Christians. This, at once, supposes a real promise to them. As David Aune has noted, how can the promise of removal by rapture of the church be associated with a promise to the Philadelphians? (Aune, *Revelation*, 240.) They were kept out of the great tribulation by virtue of dying thousands of years before it happens. Likewise, given the other view addressed here, how does the promise of deliverance through the tribulation relate to those who will never experience it? Niemelä has defended that the promise is a general promise of preservation to the Philadelphian Christians that was fulfilled when they died before the tribulation. Believers, however, alive at the time of the tribulation, it will be rescued by rapture. Yet, he admits that not all in his camp agree (Niemelä, "For You Have Kept My Word," 64).

Again, our best clue is the parallel at John 17:15 (this time without parsing out the meaning of ἐκ). Jesus' prayer for the disciples was that they be kept from the evil one. It should not be interpreted as kept safe physically from the evil one but kept in spiritual safety from the attacks associated with the tempter. All the apostles suffered hardship and gave their lives for the gospel; they were hardly kept safe physically. They were, however, kept safe spiritually: the Lord Jesus kept them. The truth is that all believers are kept by the power of God. Jesus' prayer is that they would be preserved from the snares of the devil. Understanding the meaning of "kept from the hour of temptation" as a matter of spiritual safety is, therefore, compelling (Smalley *Revelation*: 92; Beale *Revelation*: 291.)

Furthermore, the promise made to the overcomers in this section should also be connected to the promise of spiritual security given to the Philadelphians. They are promised at 3:12 "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name." [Ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι καὶ γράψω ἐπ᾽ αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ

μου καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἰερουσαλὴμ ἡ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν.]

Wilson notes that Asian temples were the most secure buildings in the ancient world, designed to withstand earthquakes [He describes the building process that included a foundation built on charcoal and fleeces so that the building actually floated on the earth and metal clamps to ensure stability joined each block. (Wilson "Revelation," in vol. 4 of *Zondervan Illustrated Background Commentary* 2001: 275)]. The image is of a fixed position. The overcomer has a permanent status within the eschatological sanctuary—he will not go out anymore. Furthermore, the names inscribed on the pillar (representing the believer) are God, the new Jerusalem and Christ's new name. This suggests ownership and identification with God [(Beale *Revelation*: 295; Wilson *Revelation*: 275–76; Smalley *Revelation*: 95–97) (although he differs somewhat on the details).] Clearly this resonates with the idea of being kept by Christ. Thus, I believe the best understanding of "I will keep you" is a promise of security and permanence in spite of difficult and troubling times in the world (including martyrdom). The main question now is "what is the hour of testing?" [This understanding fits with the other promises given to the overcomers in chapters 2–3. Each of the promises to the overcomers in these letters is related to the historical realities of the church. At 2:7 it is eternal life; at 2:11 it is victory over the second death; at 2:17 a seat at the eschatological supper; at 2:16–29 ruling authority; at 3:5–6 a permanent righteousness; at 3:21–22 a seat on the heavenly throne. All of these promises are related to the eschatological realities associated with salvation. To assume that 3:10 refers to either rapture or physical protection does not readily connect to the promise of security in the eschatological sanctuary. To understand κἀγώ σε τηρήσω as a spiritual security from temptation does connect thematically to security in the eschaton.]

What is the "Hour of Testing?"

One of the chief difficulties presented in the major interpretations of this passage is to understand it as a legitimate promise to the Philadelphians. All those who understand the "hour of testing" to be the tribulation, dispensationalist and non-dispensationalists, struggle to apply the passage apart from the promise to the Philadelphians.

Preterists who understand the reference to be to the fall of Jerusalem do not have this problem but they must extend the disaster to include effects on the whole world (Gentry Jr. 1998: 49). Not only does this require an unlikely early date for the book but it also remains to be seen how the destruction of Jerusalem was a time of testing for the whole world [On the date of Revelation see Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles 2016: 933–43.] So our duty is to understand the passage that has relevance

to the original readers and (through the appeal to those who have ears to hear) relevance to subsequent believers.

The rhetorical structure will help us with some interpretational boundaries. First, let us note that a period of testing (τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ) is for the purpose of testing the earth-dwellers. This means that attempts to attach the period to historical outbreaks of persecution are headed in the wrong direction. Since the promise is given directly to the Philadelphian Church it is compelling to see the testing as something in their lifetimes. As early as Oecumenius' commentary on Revelation (c. AD 550) it has been suggested that the hour of testing is a persecution of Domitian or even Trajan (as reported by Pliny the Younger in Bythinia) [(Oecumenius *Commentary on the Apocalypse*: 47–48). Even though Domitian's persecution is said to have also been leveled against philosophers, Jews, and others (Dio Cassius, *Epitome* 67.14), it does not include every earth-dweller.] Hemer, and others, suggest that the "hour of testing" could very well be some event contemporaneous to the Philadelphians (Hemer: 164–65; Beale *Revelation*: 290). However, the testing is aimed at the whole earth and the earth-dwellers. Presumably, it could include the Philadelphians if not for the Lord's preserving activity. Nevertheless, I believe something broader than persecution of the church seems to be the referent of "the hour of testing." This does not exclude a late first-century reference to this hour, but it is not something that is aimed exclusively at believers. It does seem to suggest, however, that there is a possibility that believers could be affected by the hour of testing or else there would be no need to be "kept" from the hour.

So our second concern is to identify what "testing" (πειρασμος/πειράζω) means. Although "temptation" is in the semantic range of πειράζω, something more seems to be in mind at Rev 3:10. Thus, I prefer to translate it "testing." Beale suggests the use indicates some sort of penal judgment of unbelievers is meant, perhaps the end-time tribulation, or possibly something in Asia Minor of that day (Beale *Revelation*: 290.)

It is this tension between the immediate promise and the impending judgment that has divided interpreters. The fact that it is a promise to the Philadelphians means that in some direct way our interpretation must include them. Yet, the coming hour is coming upon the entire world, removing completely the idea of a local disturbance only. To identify the "hour of testing" exclusively as the tribulation period (i.e., those events immediately preceding the return of the Lord) seems to fall outside the realm of likelihood (Aune *Revelation*: 1–5.) In like manner, a purely local event does not fit the context comfortably.

I think that the key lies with some intra-textuality with the rest of the Apocalypse. It has long been noted that the book of Revelation uses intertextuality through its OT allusions. However, it also has quite a number of intra-textualities—a series

of references to other contexts within the book [For a nice discussion see (Bandy 2007:161–67.) For a detailed list of verbal intra-textualities see (Müller vol. 12 1996: 728–50.] Rev 3:10 may be one of these instances. I have located five of these that will help us identify "the hour of testing."

The first is the description of τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (the earth dwells ers). The phrase is used numerous times in the Greek Old Testament to describe the inhabitants of the promised land (mostly the Canaanites to be driven out) [See, Gen 34:30, 36:20, 50:11; Num 32:17, 33:52, 55; Josh 2:9, 24, 7:9, 9:24; Judg 1:32–33; 1 Sam 27:8; 2 Sam 5:6; 1 Chr 11:4, 22:18; Neh 9:24; Jer. 1:14, 6:12, 10:18; Hos 4:1; Joel 1:14, 2:1. The uses in Jeremiah, Hosea, and Joel include Israel, but the use of this term there may be pregnant with implications as well.] The next occurrence of the phrase "earth-dwellers" in the apocalypse appears with a series of verbal and conceptual links to the time of testing at 3:10. At 6:10, after the opening of the fifth seal, the martyrs under the heavenly altar ask for vengeance against "the dwellers of the earth" (τῶν κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς). Then the sixth seal is opened and at 6:15 the "kings of the earth" and everyone else hide in the wilderness from the wrath of the Lamb. So then, not only is the phrase repeated, but it is in the context of a time of distress for the earth dwellers.

The phrase "earth-dwellers" is not the only verbal link found here. The martyrs under the throne cry out to the Lord, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will you not judge and avenge our blood from the dwellers of the earth?" (Ἕως πότε, ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ἐκ τῶν κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς;). The use of ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός echoes the Lord's self-description at 3:7 almost verbatim [I would further note that in all of biblical literature the use of these terms describing the Lord are only used at these two places.]

The next examples of intra-textuality can be found through the mention of the martyrs and the eschatological sanctuary. The faithful Philadelphians at 3:12 are promised to be a pillar in the sanctuary of God. Likewise, the martyrs at 6:10 are under the altar in the heavenly sanctuary. Both seem to reflect a position of security. Furthermore, the martyrs have been slain for the word of God (διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ) which echoes Rev 3:10's "word of my endurance" (τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου).

Finally, there is another matter of "intra-textuality" at Rev 18. The seals, bowls, and trumpets all conclude with the eschaton. The last matter regarding the earth-dwellers is the judgment of Babylon the great at chapter 18. Several matters of intra-textuality also occur here. First it is only here in the Apocalypse where we see a cluster of uses of ὥρα ("hour," 18:10, 17, 19). The kings of the earth show up again (18:3 and 9). And finally the strong Angel who carried the scroll at 5:2 appears again

at 18:21. The final word at 18:24 "And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth," is the affirmative reply to the martyrs under the altar at 6:10.

Should we identify at least the opening of the first five seals with the "time of testing at 3:10?" [David Aune in the WBC certainly thinks so on the second count and identifies it with the period of tribulation described at 9:3–21 but that 7:1–8 promises their safety through the time of tribulation.] Not entirely. I suggest that we understand the seven-sealed scroll as the ultimate reference to the "hour of testing" but that the opening of the scroll includes preliminary judgments that apply to the Philadelphians as well.

The seven-sealed scroll is introduced at 5:1, "I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals." This book is an opisthograph scroll whose contents have been variously understood (Beale *Revelation*: 340–42). The reference is an allusion to Ezek 2:9-10 where another opisthograph scroll is described as a book of "lamentation, mourning, and woe."[וְכָ֣תוּב אֵלֶ֔יהָ קִנִ֥ים וְהֶגֶ֖ה וָהִֽי] This, in combination with the contents of the seals themselves, should lead us to understand that the major content of the scroll is at a minimum the judgment of the nations as God consummates history.

The anaphora to Rev 3:7–14 at 6:10 takes place at the 5th seal, the request of the martyrs. This suggests a connection between the opening of the first four seals and the time of testing disclosed to the Philadelphians. This creates some tension for my interpretation of "the hour of testing" at 3:10. The anaphora suggests the first five seals have been opened but "the hour of testing" is presented as yet future to the Philadelphians. The author unambiguously employs a form that points to the future (τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι) at 3:10. The construction with μέλλω in Koinē Greek is overtaking the use of the future participle and infinitive.

However, the tension can be resolved [One could argue that in the narrative itself, the revelation of the preliminary judgments is indeed yet future (i.e., at 6:1 ff.). Yet, it would seem best to situate the letters to the churches in "real time" not a "narrative time."] Given that the book is a roll, the seals represent the sequence of revealing the contents of the scroll. The book cannot be read until all seven seals are opened. I see the seven seals as a unity that will culminate in the ultimate judgment of all earth dwellers (Osborne *Revelation*: 269). So that, the complete judgment that is coming upon the whole world is yet future, but there are preliminary judgments that are already underway [Some understand the entirety of the scroll as the preliminary judgments. Although I disagree, it would not affect the interpretation of 3:10.]

So how should we understand the first five seals in connection with the Philadelphians (and us)? It has long been noted that the first four seals (the so-called "four

horsemen of the Apocalypse") are related to Jesus' eschatological discourse (Mt. 24; Mk 13; and Luke 21) (Vos 1965: 181–92; Beale *Revelation*: 370 – 71; Osborne *Revelation*: 270; and McLean MBPS vol. 38 1996: 169–86). I understand the Olivet Discourse to be separated into two parts: the time of the Gentiles and the time of Christ's return. Using Luke as my guide, I see the prediction of false Christs, war, famine, pestilence, and persecution that characterizes the time between the advents. This is quite similar to the sequence of the first four seals. It is the same if we interpret the white rider as false Christs [As does (Beale Revelation: 376.)] The parallels, though, do not necessarily have to be exact. I think it best to interpret the four horsemen as Osborne does, as human sinfulness running its course. As he states, "God simply allows human sin to come full circle, turn in upon itself, and self-destruct" [(Osborne *Revelation*: 272) See also Schreiner's statement, "The first five seal judgments characterize human history from the time of Christ's cross and resurrection until the time of the end (Rev 6:1–11)." (Schreiner 2008: 830)]

If we understand the reference of "the hour of testing" to be the unfolding of God's judgment including the preliminary judgments (not just the great tribulation), then the promise to the Philadelphians is a direct promise to them (as presented in the text). Yet the promise still has broader applications. It would extend to all other faithful believers through the announcement of "let him with ears hear what the Spirit says to the Churches."

Concluding Observations

My appeal has been to approach the text with fresh eyes. So what does that look like as we address this passage? I do not suggest that one is dishonest or blind when they disagree with me. I do suggest that we look at what motivates our choices, what guides our exegesis. Let us not be in a hurry to defend entrenched positions unless the text does so. In this case, I would ask that we address the twin problem of the meaning of "keep" and the identification of the hour in context of a real promise to the Philadelphian Christians that has an application to "he who has ears to hear." I believe the exegesis above accomplishes that goal.

As we conclude, I have a few observations that go beyond an ivory tower dispute. First, both interpretations that see κἀγώ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ as a reference solely to the end-time tribulation have disturbing implications if they are not correct. A church prepared to be exempt from tribulation is not ready to endure. This is true whether we see this a pre-tribulation rapture or physical safety through the tribulation. Are we preparing the people of God to "hold fast what you have" (Rev 3:11)? On the other hand, a church prepared to endure can rejoice in exemption without shaming herself or the name of her Lord. We should take the Lord's parenthetical statement at 16:15 seriously, "Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the

one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame."

Second, many Christians today rightly think of the great tribulation as the final events before the return of Christ. They wrongly assume that the period that we have been born into is simply before these events. That is, we live in a time that is free of eschatological significance. Instead, our existence is in the preliminary judgments. Indeed, "it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18, cf. Heb 1:2). Just because we have not known anything different does not mean that what we experience is "normal." If this is "normal" it is a "new normal." We have been born into an eschatological war between God and the devil. In this period the people of God should not see their existence occurring at a neutral time. Instead, the horsemen have been set loose; the seals are being opened; culminating in the return of Christ and the victory of the Lamb. My prayer for the people of God is that we would be awake to our situation. As Paul states, "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.(1 Thess 5:4-6).

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