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THE MEANING OF "EARTH DWELLERS" IN REVELATION

by Thomas Ice

Revelation 3:10 is rightly know as a passage that supports the pre-trib rapture doctrine, but the second half of the verse introduces us to the first use of the term "earth dwellers." "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 upon the earth." 3:10 is the first use in Revelation of a phrase I call "earth dwellers" but usually translated "those who dwell upon the earth." This phrase 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). A preliminary working definition is that "earth dwellers" is a designation for persistent unbelievers during the tribulation.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

Like most New Testament terminology, "earth dwellers" originates in the Old Testament. A couple forms of the construct is used almost 50 times in the Hebrew Old Testament,[1] not including a similar phrase "world dwellers" that occurs five times.[2] The overwhelming majority of times that "earth dwellers" is used in the Old Testament it is rightly translated "land dwellers" or "inhabitants of the land" since the context references a localized area of land or country like Israel. Thus, the majority of the occurrences of this term are in the context of a localized piece of land, most frequently to the land of Israel. However, in a global context, the same Hebrew phrase is best rendered "inhabitants of the earth" (Psa. 33:14; Isa. 18:3; 24:6, 17; 26:21; Jer. 25:30; Joel 2:1; Zep. 1:18). All five uses of "inhabitants of the world" appear to be in a global context (Psa. 33:8; Isa. 18:3; 26:9, 18; Lam. 4:12), which makes sense since the meaning of "world" does not have a localized sense.

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[1] From a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.
[2] From a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

In all but one instance (Lam. 4:12), "inhabitants of the world" are used in the same context with "earth dwellers."

When "earth dwellers" and "world dwellers" are used in the same contexts it serves to strengthen the notion that a global rather than local context is intended. This is important since preterists usually want to turn "earth dwellers" into "land dwellers" and declare that it is a reference to the land of Israel and a local judgment. They contend that "world," as used in Revelation 3:10 refers to the Roman Empire in the first century since *oikoumene* can mean "inhabited world." This is true that it can mean that, but does it? *Oikoumene* can also mean "all inhabitants of the earth."[3] How do we determine what the author intended?

Context is always the deciding factor. Thus, if this is a future event, which most believe it is, then it has to be global since the known inhabited world includes just about the entire land mass. Also, knowing that the Old Testament usage stands behind the New Testament meaning also further supports a global connotation since, as we shall see, the Hebrew words do not mean "Roman Empire." Peter Steveson says, "It is true that *'eres* often refers to Israel and the surrounding nations. It is also true, however, that *'eres* often refers to the whole earth, e.g., 6:3; 8:9; 12:5; 14:9, 16; 49:13. In addition, the word *tebel*, v. 4, and the context of v. 21, argue that the passage refers to the whole earth. Applying *'eres* this way gives us a natural conclusion to c. 1—23 in which Isaiah has broadened his message. He no longer focuses on his nation or the biblical world. He now includes a wider group of people."[4] G. K. Beale also recognizes that context is king when commenting upon the use of earth dwellers in Revelation 11:10 and notes the following: "The present context enforces the idea that the phrase is a

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[3] Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, a translation and adaptation by William F. Arndt & F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 700.
[4] Peter A. Steveson, *A Commentary on Isaiah* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2003), p. 195, fn 1.

reference to persecutors dwelling throughout the earth (for the universal use of the phrase in the OT see Isa. 24:6; 26:21)."[5]

Isaiah 24:21 says, "So it will happen in that day, that the LORD will punish the host of heaven, on high, and the kings of the earth, on earth." The juxtaposition of "heaven" and "earth" in this construct would not make sense if *'eres* is reduced merely to "land" or the land of Israel. As noted by Steveson above, the preceding chapters have focused on judgment upon Israel and surrounding nations, now in 24—27 Isaiah prophesies of global judgment. If these passages speak of global judgment, then they clearly have not yet happened when one observes that these events have not taken place at any time in the past.

Every global use of "earth dwellers" in the Old Testament appears in a judgment context and probably all phrases also will take place in the future, during the day of the Lord or tribulation period. It is of special significance that both "earth dwellers" and "world dwellers" are used multiple times in Isaiah 24—27. "Chapters 24—27 have often been called the Apocalypse of Isaiah, because their focus is upon the worldwide triumph of God."[6] Chapter 24 tells us that God's worldwide judgment will come upon all mankind because of specific sins of "the inhabitants of the earth" (24:5, 6, 17). Isaiah 26:9b says, "For when the earth experiences Thy judgments the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness." The final two verses of chapter 26 speak of the tribulation period. Verse 20 says that Israel will be hidden away and protected "until indignation runs its course." Since the remnant of Israel will be protected during the tribulation, then what will be God's purpose for the judgment of this period? Verse 21 answers that question as follows: "For behold, the LORD is about to come out from His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; and the earth will reveal her bloodshed, and will no longer cover her slain." Thus, we see

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[5] G. K. Beale, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 595.

[6] John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on The Old Testament, The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1—39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 440.

that a purpose for the tribulation will be to "punish" the earth dwellers. This is very similar to the statement in Revelation 3:10 that says the Lord will "test those who dwell upon the earth." It seems clear that Isaiah 24—27, and especially 26:21 provides the backdrop for understanding what is meant in Revelation 3:10, as well as John's used of "earth dwellers" throughout Revelation.

THE EVERLASTING COVENANT

The legal basis upon which God executes global judgment upon the "earth dwellers" is stated in Isaiah 24:5 to be the "everlasting covenant," which is the Noahic Covenant. The Noahic Covenant (Gen. 8:20—9:17) restates God's authority over man and his duties as found in the Adamic Covenant (Gen. 9:1), and then it adds further responsibilities. This is a conditional covenant that was made between God and all mankind. These new items include the following: 1) Animosity between mankind and the animal kingdom (9:2). 2) Man should now eat animal flesh for food (9:3). 3) While eating flesh, the blood shall not be consumed, but drained (9:4). 4) Human life is so valuable that God requires the death of the one who murders another—capital punishment (9:5-6). 5) "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Gen. 9:1,7). The Noahic Covenant is made between God and all subsequent humanity, including the entire animal kingdom (9:8-10). In this covenant God promises to never destroy the world again through a flood (9:11). The sign that God will keep His promise is the rainbow set within a cloud (9:12-17). A rainbow is likely chosen because it is presented elsewhere as an item that surrounds the very throne room of God (Ezek. 1:28; Rev. 4:3) representing His person and presence. The Noahic Covenant is mentioned again specifically in Isaiah 54:9-10.

Steveson notes that, "Since God made this covenant before the division of the peoples into different language groups, it included the whole human race."[7] Because mankind has broken this covenant, God will judge or "test" the earth

[7] Steveson, *Isaiah*, pp. 196–97.

dwellers during the global judgment upon all mankind. This covenant provides the legal jurisdiction for such an accounting of all mankind.

TO TEST THE EARTH DWELLERS

Since one of the main purposes of the judgments of the tribulation are to "punish" (Isa. 26:21) or "test" (Rev. 3:10) the earth dwellers,[8] it is important to know what this means. The Greek word for "test" is *peirazo*, which means "to endeavor to discover the nature or character of something by testing, try, make trial of, put to the test."[9] David Aune says that *peirazo* "has two primary meanings: (a) 'testing,' in the sense of trying to learn the nature or character of someone or something by subjecting them or it to extensive examination." He says the other meaning is "(b) 'temptation' in the sense of attempting to cause someone to sin."[10] It is clear from the context that the first connotation is intended by the author. Stephen Smalley tells us, "The noun . . . appears only here in the Apocalypse (the cognate verb is used here and at Rev. 2:2, 10). 'Testing', in this context, means discrimination, not temptation: it implies the process of determining the true character of a situation or a society though careful scrutiny."[11] "The trials of this period are designed to test the wicked, either to lead them to repentance or to punish them for failing to repent,"[12] notes Robert Thomas. Certainly the tribulation will provide such scrutiny. The rest of the book of Revelation reveals that in every instance in which a test occurs, an "earth

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[8] The other main purpose of the tribulation is to lead to Israel's conversion and acceptance of Jesus as their Messiah (Isa. 26:11–20; Jer. 30:1–24; Ezek. 20:33–44; 22:17–22; Dan. 12:1–13; Zech. 12:10—13:1, etc.).

[9] *BDAG*, p. 793.

[10] David E. Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary, Revelation 1—5* (Dallas, Word Books, 1997), p. 240.

[11] Steven S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), p. 92.

[12] Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1—7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), p. 289.

dweller" fails God's test. Thus, God is just in bringing on the next phase of wrath in order to demonstrate for the historical record that He is just in condemning those who are amazingly persistent in their unbelief.

It is important to keep in mind that a major purpose for the judgments of the tribulation in Revelation (4—19) are to test the earth dwellers under the most extreme circumstances in order to vindicate their rejection of the Lamb (Jesus) and His message (the gospel). No matter the severity of the judgments that are issued from heaven, not a single earth dweller repents (see Rev. 6:15–17; 9:20–21; 16:9, 11, 21).

The fact that not a single earth dweller repents in the detailed account of their testing in Revelation is likely the reason that the retributive term "punish" is used in Isaiah 26:21. Isaiah's prophecy pictures a finished evaluative conclusion, while John speaks of the purpose before it has produced a certain outcome. However, the subsequent events of Revelation make it clear that the testing of the earth dwellers vindicates God's judgment upon them.

It has been noted that this time of testing in 3:10 is called "that hour" and could very well be an allusion to Daniel 12:1, which says, "Now at that time."[13] That time in the context of Daniel 12, as is "that hour" in Revelation 3:10, are both references to the tribulation period. Daniel 12:10 describes "that time" as a testing period when it says, "Many will be purged, purified and refined; but the wicked will act wickedly, and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand." Thus, both passages teach that the "wicked" in Daniel and the "earth dwellers" in Revelation will not be reformed but will display their true character under the pressure of testing.

MIGRANTS IN PALESTINE

It would be hilarious if it were not so sad to see some liberals argue that "inhabitants of the earth" really means "migrants in Palestine." One such liberal

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[13] See Beale, *Revelation*, p. 292.

turns his whole section on the Philadelphia church into an excursus about the migrants in Palestine.[14] Talk about a trip into never, never land, Buchanan attempts to make this reference to "earth dwellers" refer to localized residents of the land of Israel that he insists on calling Palestine. How does he do this? I am still not sure! It appears to be a chain reaction of contextless imaginative thoughts that creates a grand explosion. When the smoke clears away, out came some notion relating to "migrants on the land" and "migrants in Palestine." This section is complete with some wonderful background material on "migrants" in New Testament times. This only shows how dangerous it is to leave some people alone in a kitchen or laboratory. The only think more dangerous would be to put this guy in the kitchen together with Hank Hanegraaff. No telling what they might cook up and call exegesis or eschatological exegesis. Even amillennialist E. J. Young recognized that this is a global passage: "It may be noted that *inhabitant* is singular, thus designating all who dwell upon the earth. . . . It would seem that all who dwell upon earth will have their iniquity visited upon them."[15]

WHO ARE THE EARTH DWELLERS

In analyzing the phrase "earth dwellers" a great deal of emphasis should be put upon the Greek substantival participle *katoikeo*. This compound word is made up of the preposition *kata*, "down" and the verb *oikeo*, "to dwell." The preposition inserted as a prefix to the verb "to dwell" intensifies the verb and carries the idea of "to dwell down in something," in this case the earth. Thus, it carries the idea of those who settled down on the earth, in contrast to a heaven dweller.

Robert Govett describes the "earth dwellers" as follows: "They are men whose hearts are where their bodies are. Their home is here, here their treasures, their

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[14] George Wesley Buchanan, *The Book of Revelation: Its Introduction and Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), pp. 126–34.
[15] (italics original) Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, III vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), vol. II, pp. 230–31.

honor, their pleasures."[16] Tony Garland correctly surmises that the term "earth dwellers" conveys a "soteriological/eschatological[17] meaning in the book of Revelation for it denotes the *unsaved at the time of the end who steadfastly continue in their rejection of God*."[18] Thus, "earth dwellers" are a moral rather than a geographical term, even though the phrase has a geographical connotation. "Earth dwellers" appear to be a figure of speech called a synecdoche, where the whole (earth dwellers) is put for one of its parts (unbelievers during the tribulation).[19] I agree with Smalley who believes that each use in Revelation is a "technical term" which refers "negatively to unbelievers who are subject to divine judgement because they persecute the people of God, and practice idolatry." He as notes that this term "often appear[s] in early Jewish literature, in the context of the universal judgement of the nations of the world."[20] J. B. Smith sees them "as a special class of obdurate sinners distinct from the nations of the world. . . . The world is in the participial form, denoting their continuance in complacency and obduracy."[21]

"Earth dwellers" are contrasted to the proper focus in Revelation upon the heavenly temple, from where God's orders go forth in order to establish the Kingdom of God upon earth. Instead, the focus and ambitions for the "earth

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[16] Robert Govett, *Govett On Revelation*, 2 vols. (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Company, [1861] 1981), p. 191.

[17] Soteriological means the study of the doctrine of salvation, while eschatological means the study of the doctrine of last things.

[18] (italics original) Tony Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2 vols. (Camano Island, WA: SpiritAndTruth.org, 2004), vol. 1, pp. 264-65.

[19] See Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in The Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, [1898] 1968), pp. 637–38.

[20] Smalley, *Revelation*, 92. See also G. K. Beale, who argues that, "'those dwelling on the earth' is a technical term throughout Revelation for unbelieving idolaters, who suffer under various forms of retributive tribulation." Beale, *Revelation*, p. 290.

[21] J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1961), p. 89.

dwellers" are limited to the earth and not God's will, which is issued from heaven and enacted upon the earth. "This fact explains," notes Garland, "why the events of Revelation include great judgments poured out upon the natural systems of the earth for the earth has become an idol of worship for the earth dwellers."[22] "In contrast to the faithful who are *aliens* and *sojourners* upon the earth (Lev. 25:23; Num. 18:20, 23; 1Chr. 29:15; Ps. 39:12; 119:19; John 15:19; 17:14, 16; Php. 3:20; Heb. 11:13; 1Pe. 2:11) and whose hope is heavenward (Heb. 11:13–16; Rev. 13:6), these that *dwell* upon the earth are trusting in man and his environment."[23] Renald Showers tells us: "All of these Revelation references to 'them that dwell upon the earth' clearly indicate that they will be unsaved people of the future period of testing who will never get saved. . . . In spite of the devastating horrors of the sixth trumpet, which will kill one-third of mankind, the earth-dwellers will not repent of their wicked deeds (Rev. 9:20–21)."[24]

EARTH DWELLERS IN REVELATION

When we survey the eleven uses of "earth dwellers" in Revelation, we see an interesting composite that develops. Not only are they to be tested in order show their true metal (3:10), they are clearly identified as those who are persecuting and killing believers during the tribulation (6:10). Many of the judgments of the tribulation are targeted for the "earth dwellers" (8:13). It is the "earth dwellers" who rejoice and send gifts to one another when the two witnesses are killed in Jerusalem during the middle of the tribulation (11:10). When the Beast (Antichrist) is introduced in Revelation 13, it is noted that, "all who dwell on the earth will worship him" (13:8, 12). Thus, 100% of the "earth dwellers" receive the

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[22] (italics original) Garland, *Revelation*, vol. 2, p. 281, e.n. 77.
[23] (italics original) Garland, *Revelation*, vol. 2, p. 265.
[24] Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha, Our Lord Come* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1995), p. 265 as cited in Tony Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2 vols. (Camano Island, WA: SpiritAndTruth.org, 2004), vol. 2, p. 265.

mark of the beast and will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. During the tribulation, as followers of the Beast, the "earth dwellers" will be deceived by the false signs and wonders of the Beast and will erect an image of the Beast, likely in the Jewish Temple (13:14). While the target of the preaching of the gospel by an angelic messenger will be "earth dwellers" (14:6), not a single one of the will follow the Lamb, instead they will wonder after the Beast (17:8).

Revelation 3:10

We see in the first use of "earth dwellers" the purpose for the tribulation, which is "to test those who dwell upon the earth." The logic of the entire verse is that since you (Philadelphia church of the first century, but extended to the entire church) have kept the word of My perseverance, the Lord will keep the church out of the hour or time of testing (via the rapture before that time). Why will he keep the church out of the hour of testing? Because that hour of testing is not for the church since the church has already been tested and endured during the church age. The hour of testing, which is about to, but has not yet arrived, test the entire world, which here is set in contrast to the believing world of the church, to test those who dwell upon the earth. Here we have a key summary verse that I think many miss that states the purpose of the tribulation is to test the metal of unbelievers, who are called earth dwellers here. John MacArthur says concerning this testing: "Unbelievers will either pass the test by repenting, or fail it by refusing to repent. Revelation 6:9–11; 7:0–10, 14; 14:4; and 17:14 describe those who repent during the Tribulation and are saved, thus passing the test; Revelation 6:15–17; 9:20; 16:11; and 19:17–18 describe those who refuse to repent, thus failing the test, and are damned."[25]

We see the testing theme throughout the Old Testament as the purpose for the tribulation in relation to Israel. In fact, all of history is probational and pedagogical, but the tribulation is like a final exam, it is the great test at the end.

We have already looked at the testing of the earth dwellers in Isaiah 24–26, but there are a number of other passages that speak of testing Israel in the tribulation (cf. Ezek. 20:33–44; 22:17–22; Dan. 12:1, 10; Zeph. 1:7–18; Zech. 13:8–9). The purpose for testing Israel is to "purge from you the rebels" (Ezek. 20:38), so that only the elect are left to "call on My name" (Zech. 13:9), "thus all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26).

Revelation 6:10

The fifth seal judgment involves tribulation believers who have been martyred to ask the following: "and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'" Thus, we see that it is the earth dwellers that are the primary ones responsible for killing believers in the first half of the tribulation. This would seem to denote some type of vigilantism by the earth dwellers. The imprecatory prayer is justified during the tribulation since it is a time of God's wrath upon unbelieving individuals. This is contrasted with Stephen's prayer in Acts 7:60, since his martyrdom occurs in the present church age, the age of grace. Stephen said, "And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!' And having said this, he fell asleep."

In this context, Thomas describes the earth dwellers as "a semitechnical designation for mankind in their hostility to God." He continues, "They are ungodly people who have no home but earth and want no home but earth. . . . The whole race is in rebellion and is set on removing as many of God's servants as possible."[26] Allen tells us, "The earth-dwellers have identified with earth and its satanic ruler and thus share his guilt for blood of the saints."[27] At this early point

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[25] John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Revelation 1—11* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), p. 124.
[26] Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 446.
[27] J. Allen, *Ritchie New Testament Commentaries: Revelation* (Kilmarnock, Scotland: John Ritchie LTD, 1997), p. 208.

in the tribulation the martyrs make a heavenly appeal against the earth dwellers for justice. Who will win, heaven or earth? The Lord postpones justice until later (their prayer begins to be answered in 8:13 with the three woes, including the seven bowl judgments, 15:5—16:21) and gives them a white robe and tells them that He will act when their number is complete (Rev. 6:11).

In essence, what we have in this passage is an imprecatory prayer by the "heaven dwellers" (cf. Rev. 12:12; 13:6) against their opponents, the earth dwellers. These two factions are at war, lead by the Lamb on one side and the beast on the other. All humanity will move to one side or the other as the events of the tribulation unfold. Of course, victory is assured to those who follow the Lamb (12:11).

Revelation 8:13

The next reference to earth dwellers is found as part of the fourth trumpet in the form of a warning of great judgment that will be specifically directed toward the earth dwellers. "And I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, 'Woe, woe, woe, to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!'" Here we see an announcement coming from heaven directed at the earth dwellers. It is a warning that the last three trumpet judgments will be specifically directed at them. Those three judgments include trumpet judgments five and six, which are specific judgments involving the attack of fallen angelic beings upon the human earth dwellers (Rev. 9:1–21). The second woe is so severe that "a third of mankind was killed" (Rev. 9:18). It is presumed that the third of mankind killed are earth dwellers because of the warning to them in Revelation 8:13.

Revelation 10 is a whole chapter talking about how bad the judgment of the seventh trumpet (10:7) will be, which are also the third woe (11:14) and all seven of the bowl judgments (16:1–21). It is interesting to note the juxtaposition of the many references to heaven that counter the earth dwellers throughout the

judgment sequences. Revelation 10:1 has a strong angel "coming down out of heaven" with the little scroll (10:2), presumably the orders and battle plan for the third woe and the seven trumpet judgments. The point is that from this point on the bleak destiny of the earth dwellers is very bleak since God in heaven sets into motion the wheels of justice in opposition to His human opponents.

Revelation 11:10

Revelation 11:10 twice mentions the earth dwellers as they celebrate the death of the two witnesses, likely just before the middle of the seven-year tribulation. "And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth." Beale notes that, "unbelieving persecutors are also called 'earth dwellers' because they are idolaters. The phrase is used exclusively of idolaters in chas. 13—17 (so 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6–9; 17:2, 8; cf. also 8:13 with 9:20). Idolaters are labeled 'earth dwellers' because they ultimately trust in some aspect of the world and not in God."[28]

We learn earlier in Revelation 11 that the Jewish Temple will have been rebuilt at some point in the first half of the tribulation. The two witnesses "will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth" (11:3), apparently in the rebuilt Temple compound area. John Whitcomb suggests that it is the two witnesses who innate Temple sacrifices and oversee Temple activities in the first half of the tribulation because they have the supernatural ability to call down fire from heaven if anyone messes with them (11:5).[29] Who would mess with the two witnesses? Clearly it would be the earth dwellers. In opposition to the earth dwellers comes the fire from "heaven" to protect the two witnesses, who are representatives of heaven. A key statement is found in 11:6, which says, "And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss

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[28] Beale, *Revelation*, pp. 595–96.

will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them." Thus, God allows them to be killed by the beast, which results in a celebration by their opponents, the earth dwellers. (This is similar to the way the Muslims rejoice when events like 911 occurred in America.) This is the first of 36 mentions of the beast in Revelation, who up to this point has been prevented by the presence of the two witnesses from going into the rebuild Jewish Temple and setting up his image in opposition to God.

Revelation 11:10 says that the earth dwellers were "tormented" by the two witnesses. What do they do to torment them? Do they play acid rock music too loud so as to disturb the peace? Not likely! It is that the earth dwellers had to endure their proclamation of the Word of God for three and a half years, (We see many today who are often tormented by anything that the Bible has to say), as well as the physical torments some endure at the hands of the witnesses. The beast, in an effort to humiliate God's two messengers, have their bodies lie in the street for all to see. Thomas notes, "The worst indignity perpetrated on a person in that culture was to be left unburied after death."[30] However, the earth dwellers celebration was short-lived when three and a half days after their death, the Lord resurrects His witnesses and then "they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, 'Come up here.' And they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies beheld them" (11:12). Once again, the earth dwellers are trumped by the actions from heaven. We are told in the next verse: "in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; and seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven" (11:13). Apparently there are a great number of non-earth dwellers in Jerusalem who are affected by the ministry of the two witnesses. Garland explains as follows:

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[29] John C. Whitcomb, "The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11" (A paper presented to the 16th Annual Pre-Trib Study Group in Irving, TX, Dec. 11, 2007), p. 2.
[30] Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8—22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 92.

> Although the ministry of the two witnesses obviously affects the entire world, it is uniquely Jewish and seemingly designed to have the greatest impact upon those who are Jews and who have not yet accepted Jesus as Messiah. When a tenth of the city falls, the remaining population is said to give glory to the God of heaven. Their response to the final ministry of the two witnesses—their resurrection—and the subsequent earthquake is markedly different than that of the earth dwellers in general as recorded elsewhere in the book of Revelation for these apparently repent.[31]

So it appears likely from this passage that this is one of the main points in the tribulation when a great harvest of Jewish souls occur. Right before the middle of the tribulation when the Beast or Antichrist, who now has unobstructed access to the Temple, sets up his image in it causing an abomination that causes desolation. Jesus tells Jewish believers in Matthew 24:15 to flee to the wilderness (Petra) when this happens. It would appear that for Jews to follow the words of Christ in the middle of the tribulation that they would need to be believers. Thus, it makes sense that the culmination of the ministry of the two witnesses in Jerusalem would result in a great turning of Jews to recognize Jesus as their Messiah.

Revelation 13:8

With the focus of chapter 13 turning to the rise of the beast in anticipation of His heightened role during the second half of the tribulation, it is not surprising to see a statement about who it is that the earth dwellers will worship. "And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain" (13:8). As we move well into the midpoint of the tribulation, whose purpose is to test the earth dwellers, their true colors come to the fore as the man

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[31] Garland, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 459.

that causes some to feint and all adore comes on the scene. During the second half of the tribulation the Beast or Antichrist takes his place in the temple of God in order to declare himself to be god (2 Thess. 2:4) and requires that everyone receive the mark of the Beast or be killed. In this passage we see that every single earth dweller will worship the beast by taking his mark. "The most significant statement about the earth-dwellers," notes Osborne, is "that their name has not been written in the book of life (cf. 17:8). The grammar switches from the plural 'those who inhabit the earth' to the singular relative pronoun (*hou*, whose) to stress that 'not one single person' among the earth-dwellers is named in the Lamb's book of life."[32] Thomas links this passage with Matthew 24:24,[33] which speaks of misleading the elect (Jewish believers), if possible. It is not possible.

It appears that 13:8 cites as the reason why not a single earth dweller will ever come to faith in Jesus is because none of them are elect from the foundation of the world. Some note that the temporal clause "from the foundation of the world," in the original appears at the end of the sentence and best modifies the phrase "the Lamb who has been slain." However, as Beale suggests, "It is so that a further description may be given to 'the book of life.'"[34] Even if one were to attribute the temporal clause to the Lamb in this passage, 17:8 indisputably ascribes the same clause to the book of life. Thus, either way pretemporal election is taught in Revelation. Why? Again Beale notes: "Genuine believers have assurance that their souls can weather any Satanic storm because of the safety accorded by the Lamb's book."[35] Rather than leading to a fatalistic attitude, as some would suggest, this passage produces confidence that a believer can face any circumstance, including the second half of the tribulation, knowing that God has secured his eternal destiny. "In the sovereignty and omniscience of God,

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[32] Grant R. Osborne, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on The New Testament: Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), p. 502.
[33] Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 164.
[34] Beale, *Revelation*, p. 702.
[35] Beale, *Revelation*, p. 703.

many things were determined and accomplished before or from the foundation of the world,"[36] concludes Garland. It appears that verses 9 and 10 support the notion of pretemporal election in verse 8. "If anyone has an ear, let him hear. 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" (13:9–10).

Those who take the mark of the beast are rendered unsavable, even before they die. The last half of the tribulation is a unique period in all of human history. Humanity will be polarized into earth dwellers (unbelievers) and heaven dwellers (believers). In fact, Revelation 13:6 speaks of believers as "those who dwell in heaven," which is juxtaposed to the earth dwellers two verses later. The New Testament on a number of occasions tells us that the believer's citizenship is in heaven (John 15:19; 17:14–16; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11).

Revelation 13:12

This passage shifts from speaking of the Beast or Antichrist in the first half of chapter 13 (vv. 1–10) to a section on the False Prophet (vv. 11–18). "And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed." The False Prophet comes up out of the earth (13:1), so it is that he makes

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[36] Tony Garland goes on to compile an informative list of all the uses of things God prepared before or at the foundation of the world as follows:

- God existed before the foundation (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 90:2; Isa. 40:21).
- Christ existed before the foundation (Isa. 48:16; Mic. 5:2; John 1:1; 17:5, 24).
- Christ was loved by the Father before the foundation (John 17:24).
- Wisdom was established before the foundation (Pr. 8:23).
- Believers were predestined for salvation before the foundation (Eph. 1:4; 2Tim. 1:9).
- God promised eternal life before time began (Tit. 1:2).
- Christ was foreordained before the foundation (1Pe. 1:20; Rev. 13:8).
- Unrevealed secrets of God existed before the foundation (Mtt. 25:34).
- The blood of all the prophets was shed from the foundation (Luke 11:50).

the earth and earth dwellers to worship the first beast or Antichrist. How does he "make" them worship the Beast? He does so because he receives the authority of the Beast, but only in his presence.

It is important to note that the normal term for earth dwellers is not used in this verse, instead a similar but different term is used. In this verse, we see one that places "the earth" in an emphatic position. "This, a Hebrew figure of speech, is a pleonasm or redundancy to speak of all the earth's inhabitants. . . . the expression here speaks more broadly of all earth's inhabitants,"[37] explains Thomas. The earth and those that dwell there are the constituents of the Beast.

Revelation 13:14

Continuing in the section on the Beast and the False Prophet, John provides added information about the unbelief of the earth dwellers. The unbelief of the earth dwellers is conveyed via deception. "And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life." Verse 12 says that the False Prophet "makes" all of the earth dwellers worship the Beast or Antichrist. Verse 14 tells us that it is through the deception of signs that the earth dwellers are made to follow the Beast. One of the most compelling false miracles put forth is the raising from the dead of the Beast or Antichrist.

The earth dwellers are being tested and it is because they "love not the truth" that they reject the message of salvation (2 Thess. 2:10). We see the same thing spoken of by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:9–12: "the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon

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- The Beast worshipers were not written in the Book of Life from the foundation (Rev. 17:8). Garland, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 517.

[37] Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 174.

them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness." Here we have a proactive statement about God sending them a deluding influence, which in context are the false signs and wonders. In other words, as Revelation 13:14 says, they will be deceived.

Revelation 14:6

This angelic announcement will occur right before the middle of the tribulation, just before the Beast goes into the Jewish Temple and declares to the world that he is god and must be worshipped. "And 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." Thus it is, that every last earth dweller is warned about the consequences of rejecting the Lamb and taking the mark of the beast, right before the Beast requires the mark. The text says every earth dweller will receive this warning. I do not know how it will occur, but I do believe it will, just like this passage says. The earth dwellers are said to reside in "every nation and tribe and tongue and people."

This passage describes the ultimate test for the earth dwellers, which is: "Are you going to believe or reject the gospel?" This is the greatest test (Rev. 3:10) that any individual can be challenged with, and every single earth dweller will reject the gospel. Because of their rejection of the provision of the Lamb, God will have been vindicated in history as one who gave so many a real opportunity to believe the gospel, yet so many will fail to reach out. "A key purpose of the time of testing is to turn those who will be turned to salvation and to manifest those who are hardened and will continue to reject it,"[38] observes Garland.

Revelation 17:8

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[38] Garland, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 551.

The final direct reference to earth dwellers in Revelation is found in 17:8. "The beast that you saw was and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come."

In this passage the earth dwellers "will wonder" after the beast. The future passive of *thaumasthesontai* "they will be marveling," carries the idea of amazement about the deeds of the beast, namely, his recovery from a deadly wound. Beale tells us that wonder "has the idea of 'admire' in a worshipful sense, as is apparent from 13:3ff."[39] Osborne connects their wonder to "the counterfeit resurrection" and "the wonder leads to worship."[40] This instance provides further evidence that the earth dweller's devotion is directed away from the Lord and toward the demonic. This final reference provides one last piece of evidence that the earth dwellers will justly be condemned to the Lake of Fire for all eternity. They marvel at the accomplishments of the beast, instead of what the Lamb has done. It is the beast who comes up from the abyss, which is the abode of the demonic, that the earth dwellers love, instead of the Lamb of God who comes down from heaven.

This passage, as in 13:8, conveys predestinarian intent with the use of the perfect passive verb *gegraptai*. "The text is not saying," notes Garland, "that their names are not *presently* found in the book, as if they were at one time but were later blotted out. In the foreknowledge and election of God, their names were *never* recorded there."[41] At this point in the future, what was determined pretemporally will unfold in history.

OTHER REFERENCES

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[39] Beale, *Revelation*, p. 866.
[40] Osborne, Revelation, p. 616.
[41] (italics original) Garland, *Revelation*, vol. 2, p. 45.

A similar phrase is used in Luke 21:35, also within the context of the tribulation, when it says, "for it [Christ's return] will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth." The wording of this phrase is somewhat different than "earth dwellers" since the substantival participle is one who "sits" rather than one who "dwells," and "face of the earth" is used instead of just "of the earth." In this context the phrase also refers to unbelievers. Further, these "earth sitters" are said to have hearts "weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life," so that Christ's return will "come on you suddenly like a trap" (Luke 21:34). In this instance, the "earth dwellers" will be the ones caught off guard by the judgment of the tribulation period.

The same theme of unpreparedness is found in 1 Thessalonians 5 and the sons of darkness (5:1–11). They are unprepared because they have not trusted Christ as their Savior.

A similar passage, which does not use the term "earth dwellers" but almost certainly has in mind the "earth dwellers" by a different name (those who love not the truth), provides further insight into this matter. "And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness" (2 Thess. 2:11–12). This statement reinforces the notion that a purpose for the tribulation includes a testing and judgment of the "earth dwellers." Here God is seen as the One who enables the man of lawlessness to produce false signs and wonders because the do not love the truth.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the Bible views earth dwellers, in its eschatological use as those persistent unbelievers during the tribulation who, come hell or high water, will not place their faith in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God no matter how clearly God's plan of salvation is presented. In fact, the more the earth dwellers resist the greater the hardship they endure as the wrath of God is poured out upon them in ever increasing degrees. Rather than looking to God, Who dwells in heaven and

runs the universe from above, their focus is upon the Beast or Antichrist who arises from the sea. A whole theology of the earth dwellers illustrates God's purpose for the tribulation and the fact that God, along with a few other things, is demonstrating in history that no matter what can be done to display the veracity of the gospel, many will turn away from the truth and not only follow a lie, but delight in it.

We are still living in the age of Grace or the Church when the gospel is being preached to all the nations and many are trusting Christ as their Savior. Yet, we also see anti-Christianity on display as never before, going from bad to worse with each passing year. It is not hard to envision, where society now is, how quickly conditions will degenerate into the scenario outlined in the Bible's prophetic literature. Thus, it is important in our own age to see how obstinate and persistent unbelief can be. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES