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Kept From the Hour

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KEPT FROM THE HOUR
Tom's Perspectives
by Thomas Ice

*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.*
—Revelation 3:10

Critics of the pretrib rapture position often say that we cannot produce one single passage that teaches our position. I believe that Revelation 3:10 is a verse which answers their challenge. Of course they neglect the fact that they cannot produce one single passage teaching their view either. I believe that Revelation 3:10 is a verse teaching that the church is promised exemption from the seven-year tribulation period, thus supporting the pretrib rapture. In addition, posttribers cannot produce one verse supporting their assumption that the church will enter and pass through the tribulation. We all agree that believers will be numerous throughout this seven-year period of God's wrath, but pretribers believe that they will not be the church. Therefore, the posttrib position is just as much, even more so, a position based upon theological assumptions and arguments as they charge pretribers of being.

KEEP OUT

The Greek phrase *tereo ek* (keep out) appears to be used as a play on "kept My word" in 3:8 and "kept the word" earlier in 3:10. That is to say, because you have "kept" or "obeyed" my words during the present church age, I will "keep" you from the time of another testing (the tribulation). The current time of testing (church age) is a time in which the church is being tested through trials to verify her metal and determine one's place of rule in the coming kingdom (cf. Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21). This accounts for the reason why our Lord uses the phrase *tereo ek*; it is a play on words where the deed is rewarded in kind. "Because you . . ., then I will . . ."

When we consider possible options that could have been used we see that *tereo ek* is the best possible option if our Lord wanted to make a statement that would exclude the church from the tribulation. Only the phrase *tereo ek* would convey the absolute protection of the church from the hour of testing by keeping them "out from" this time. Charles Ryrie notes, "the promise of Revelation 3:10 not only guarantees being kept from Tribulation trials but from the Tribulation period itself. The promise is not, 'I will keep you from the trials.' It is, 'I will keep you from the *hour* of the trials.'"¹

The verb *tereo* (keep) has the basic meaning of keeping something as it is. It is found 70 times in the Greek New Testament and 36 of those are in the writings of John. He used the word 11 times in Revelation,² which indicates that it is a term he favors when compared to other New Testament writers. This is clear when we look at the leading Greek lexicon that breaks New Testament usage into the following three nuances: 1) "to retain in custody, keep watch over, guard;" 2) "to cause a state, condition, or activity to continue, keep, hold, reserve, preserve;" and 3) "to persist in obedience, keep, observe, fulfill, pay attention to."³ The lexicon cites Revelation 3:10 as falling under the second definition. Thus, it conveys the notion of keeping or preserving one from entering into something else. In the context it is "the hour of testing."

The preposition teaming up with *tereo* is *ek* (out of), which produces the composite thought, "keep out." John uses *ek* significantly more than does any other New

Testament writer.⁴ John Townsend, after an extensive study of the use of *ek* in Greek including the New Testament concludes the following:

This study of *ek* throughout its linguistic history, and especially its usage in the New Testament, has shown that the preposition may sometimes indicate "outside position" (whereas at other times it means removal "out from within"). In relation to the interpretation of *tereo ek* in Revelation 3:10, this finding establishes the pretribulational position as a bona fide grammatical possibility. To understand *tereo ek* as indicating preservation in an outside position is well within the bounds of the linguistic history and usage of *ek*.⁵

The phrase *tereo ek* is used one other place in John's New Testament writings, which is John 17:15: "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to *keep them from* the evil one." Even though the first half of the verse says that Christ will not take believers out of the world, the second half says that they will be totally protected from the evil one (Satan). The meaning of *tereo ek* is that "Christ is praying that His disciples would be kept *away from* and *out of* the power of the evil one and it is *not* implying that 'the evil one had power over them' (which is a self-evident truth),"⁶ notes John Sproule. Such a statement by our Lord is in concert with what John says in Revelation 3:10.

THE HOUR OF TESTING

Now that we see that Believers will be kept from something, we need to know what it is that we will be preserved from. The text says, "the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth." The "hour" or "time" of testing is what we will be kept from. Further, the hour of testing is said to be something that will in the future come upon the whole earth. Thus, it is clear that it is not something that happened in the days of the early church, since no one knows of a global testing that came upon the whole earth in the first century. To cut to the chase, what John speaks of in this passage is the tribulation period, which is clearly a time in which the Lord will test the earth dwellers (always persistent unbelievers throughout Revelation) and not church age believers.

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

THE PHILADELPHIAN PROMISE

The promise in Revelation 3:10 is a universal promise that is applicable to all the churches, which says in 3:13: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (see also 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 22). While our Lord's promise in 3:10 is to the Philadelphia church, it is also a promise to the universal church as well. The same is true, for example, in the Book of Colossians when Christ tells them in 3:1 to "keep seeking the things above," or to "set you mind on the things above, not on the things

that are on earth" (3:2). It is true that the Epistle was written historically to the Colossian believers and there are no passages that specially say these are universal passages for all believers, but what Christian does not take them to be universal of all believers throughout the church age?

Is only Philadelphia (and only those alive at the time of writing) to "hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown," since Christ is coming quickly (3:11). Is only Philadelphia to receive the name of God, the name of God's city, and a new name at our Lord's coming (3:11)? Or, will all believers benefit from all the promises made to the seven churches? Certainly these promises made to first-century, Philadelphia believers are universal for the whole church. Therefore, 3:10 is a promise to the universal church. It is rare indeed for a posttribler to try to argue this point. They rather argue against other points, knowing that this issue is clear.

CONCLUSION

What does this mean? John Townsend summarizes as follows:

Revelation 3:10 may then be paraphrased, "Because you have held fast the word which tells of My perseverance, I also will preserve you in a position outside the hour of testing" (NASB). This paraphrase points up an important nuance of meaning that must be recognized. Tired ek in Revelation 3:10 does not describe the rapture as such. Instead, it describes the position and status of the church during the hour of testing. It describes the results of the rapture, not the rapture itself. Revelation 3:10 does not state directly how the church will be preserved outside the hour of testing. However, the remainder of the verse indicates that the proper logical deduction is preservation by means of a pretribulational rapture of the church.⁷

Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Come Quickly, Lord Jesus: What You Need To Know About The Rapture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1996), p. 135.

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

³ Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), electronic edition.

⁴ Based upon information from the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

⁵ Jeffrey L. Townsend, "The Rapture in Revelation 3:10" in Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, editors, *When The Trumpet Sounds: Today's Foremost Authorities Speak Out on End-Time Controversies* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), p. 373.

⁶ (italics original) John A. Sproule, *In Defense of Pre-Tribulationism: A Review of Robert Gundry's "The Church and the Tribulation"* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1980), p. 27.

⁷ Townsend, "The Rapture," p. 375.