Revelation 3:10

The Coming Hour of Temptation

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Introduction: A Time of Trouble Coming

That there is a time of trouble, a special season of tribulation for the world, revealed in several important and plain passages of the word of God, no thoughtful Christian can for a moment question. All may not be clear as to those whose lot will be cast in those days, but that such a season is to befall the world is not to be doubted. That it is also to be a day through which some of God's own people are to pass is equally certain. We shall now enquire what it is that God's word affirms as to both those who shall be there and those who shall be in the grace of God exempted from it.

At the same time a wider question arises than the hour of tribulation. We must not confound scriptures that differ, even if the difference be comparatively slight in appearance. "The hour of temptation" does not appear to me to be exactly the same as that of the great tribulation. Temptation may take the form of severe affliction, but it is not limited to such a type of things. Temptation may assume the character of seduction, as well as of trial in the shape of tribulation. I shall show that there is a well-defined period as to which scripture leaves no just ground of hesitation; that there are preliminary judgments on one side, and on the other snares of all kinds, as well as a storm of trouble that will fall on those who have slighted the grace of God, and cast away His truth.

I shall show further that it is by no means true that none of His people are to be exempted from that "hour of temptation." The verse that I have read proves the contrary. We have the Holy Ghost here addressing to this effect the assembly of God in Philadelphia -- the Christian assembly there. More strictly speaking, the angel of the church is before us -- who was, it seems, a kind of ideal representative of the assembly -- and the promise runs in the most distinct terms:

> *Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them*

that dwell upon the earth {Rev. 3:10}.

It is evident that the import of this is not merely that the faithful are to be preserved. I shall prove that for others preservation is assured; but there is a special exemption promised here. We can all conceive how, supposing the fearful time of trial came, some might go, however secured, through that hour, and others might be kept out of it altogether. The question is, whether the scripture is clear that both of these methods are to be made good -that some are to be exempted from the hour of trial that is coming upon the habitable world, but that others are to be kept, not out of it, but through it. I have not a doubt that these two schemes are true, and that God's word explicitly teaches both.

Further, the analogy of the dealings of God in past times leads to the same conclusion. If we look back to the earliest times, when God dealt with the world as a whole, undoubtedly in the case of the flood, God exempted Noah and his family. They were not preserved through the deluge, but kept out of it altogether. There is another case: the case of Lot. He was preserved through the destruction of Sodom, but kept out of the full judgment that fell on the guilty cities of the plain. Both principles are thus illustrated in the Old Testament.

The Philadelphia Promise: Kept Out of the Hour

The promise to Philadelphia is specifically that of being kept "from" -- not "through" -- the hour of temptation. This distinction is of the greatest importance. "I will keep thee from the hour of temptation" is the promise; and the meaning of "from" (ek in the Greek) is clearly "out of," not "through." This means an exemption from the hour itself, not merely preservation during it. The faithful church of Philadelphia is to be removed from the scene before the hour of temptation arrives.

This hour is described as one "which shall come upon all the world" -- the habitable earth, the world of settled civilisation and government -- "to try them

that dwell upon the earth." The "earth-dwellers" is a technical phrase in the Revelation for those whose portion is here below, who have their portion in this world, as distinguished from those whose citizenship is in heaven. The hour of temptation will test and try these earth-dwellers to the uttermost.

But the faithful -- those who have kept the word of Christ's patience -- are not earth-dwellers. Their hope is heavenly; their citizenship is in heaven. They are not of this world, as Christ is not of this world. And therefore, when the hour of temptation comes upon the world, they will have been removed from it. The promise of Christ is explicit and sure.

The churches then disappear from the prophetic scene of the Revelation after chapter 3. In chapters 4 and 5 we see the glorified saints in heaven. The church as such is never mentioned again as on earth in the whole of the rest of the book. This is the most powerful confirmation of the truth that the church will be removed before the great tribulation begins.

Two Classes in the Tribulation: Jews and Gentiles

After the church is gone, God will work in Jews and Gentiles on the earth during the tribulation period. The book of Revelation shows us, in its main prophetic portion (chs. 4-20), the dealings of God with the world during this period. There are those of the Jews -the 144,000 sealed ones of the twelve tribes -- who will be preserved through the tribulation as a sealed remnant. There are also Gentiles -- "a great multitude, which no man could number" -- who come out of the great tribulation, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. These are preserved through the tribulation, not removed from it.

But the reason is different. The church's removal is a matter of grace and promise: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation." The preservation of the Jewish remnant and of believing Gentiles through the tribulation is a matter of God's faithfulness to His

covenant with Israel and His sovereign mercy to the nations. They are not exempted from the hour, but preserved through it; and this because the tribulation is specifically a period of God's dealings with Israel and the nations, not with the church.

Accordingly there will be a well-defined period as to which scripture leaves no just ground of hesitation; that there are preliminary judgments on one side, and on the other snares of all kinds, as well as a storm of trouble that will fall on those who have slighted the grace of God, and cast away His truth. May God bless you who believe, and give you hearts truly and humbly to cleave to Him and to the word of His grace, assured that He will exempt, according to His own word, those that keep the word of Christ's patience, and that He will also in the darkest days preserve Jews and Gentiles according to His word through the awful judgments that are coming upon the world.

Practical Exhortation: Cleave to the Word

Why indeed should a Christian be alarmed about anything? He is entitled to look death in the face, and to have boldness in the day of judgment, as John expressly says. And do you think that a man who can honestly and according to the truth and will of God thus contemplate the most solemn certainties of the eternal future should be justly alarmed at anything here below? A Jew or Gentile ought to dread the tribulation if he faces the revelation of God about it ever so briefly; for the tribulation will be a retributive dealing with the unfaithfulness of the world, whether Jews or Gentiles, and especially of those who abuse the name of the Lord. But for this very reason it does not apply to the Christian at all. This is the moral truth of the case, and therefore I may well press it on all who have not duly weighed scripture as to it.

I entreat you to cleave to the Lord's name and to His word. Value every help, and seek the best you can. If danger menaced your body, I daresay you would

have recourse to those who, as you believe, could do you most good: I do not think you ought to do less, if the question is of your soul and God's own truth and glory. May God bless you who believe, and give you hearts truly and humbly to cleave to Him and to the word of His grace, assured that He will exempt, according to His own word, those that keep the word of Christ's patience, and that He will also in the darkest days preserve Jews and Gentiles according to His word through the awful judgments that are coming upon the world.

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